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On the purpose(s) of elementary general music education: an exploration of subject-ness among children engaged in a world-centered curriculum project

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ON THE PURPOSE(S) OF ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC EDUCATION: AN EXPLORATION OF SUBJECT-NESS AMONG CHILDREN ENGAGED IN A WORLD-CENTERED CURRICULUM PROJECT

by

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What I propose, therefore, is very simple:

it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.

(Arendt, 2018, p. 5)

DEDICATION

To the children and students entrusted to my care—then, now, and tomorrow.

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ON THE PURPOSE(S) OF ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC EDUCATION: AN EXPLORATION OF SUBJECT-NESS AMONG CHILDREN ENGAGED IN A WORLD-CENTERED CURRICULUM PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the emergence of subject-ness among children in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class. I addressed this purpose through the creation and implementation of a curriculum project in which young children engaged in lullaby songwriting. In so doing, I sought to explore curricular and pedagogical alternatives: namely, curricular purposes beyond functional literacy and pedagogical approaches with relational potential. This curriculum project was enacted alongside children (ages 5–6) participating in three classes of kindergarten general music in the elementary school at which I taught at the time.

I framed this study using Biesta's (2021b) *domains of educational purpose* and, in particular, the notion that teaching has the potential to encourage children to be(come) *subjects* in their own lives, rather than objects in the lives of others. Furthermore, I relied upon *world-centered education* (Biesta, 2021b) in this study as a means of addressing a "grown-up" (p. 51) orientation to subject-ness in which the subject is "*in* the world and *with* the world, and not just with themselves" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 37, emphasis in original). To realize this framework, I invoked three supporting concepts: *project-based teaching*

(Dillon, 2023a), *dialogic pedagogy* (White, 2016a, 2021), and *compassionate care* (Hendricks, 2023).

For this study, I assembled a critical educational action research design drawing upon Somekh's (2006) principles of action research. The progressively iterative nature of this three-phase project was initially influenced by the *self-reflective action research spiral* (Kemmis et al., 2014), which I later adapted into the *action research trellis*—a visual framing in which inquiry is illustrated as potentially growing in divergent and unpredictable ways. Data collected as part of this action research study included video observations of our enactment of the curriculum project, focus group interviews with children, an individual interview with a kindergarten teacher, my research journal entries, and various artifacts, such as lesson plans.

I conducted a thematic analysis of the data (Glesne, 2016) which yielded three overarching themes: snapshots of emergent subject-ness in childhood focused on care, resistance, and dissent; pointing as an invitation to explore subject-ness, including the myriad ways in which this pointing manifested and facets of the curriculum project which contributed to this pointing; and the reflexive gifts of teaching, including "philosophical play" and teacher-student "connections" (Research Journal Entries). I situated the implications of these findings in terms of both curricular and pedagogical reimaginings.

Keywords: music education; elementary general music; subject-ness; domains of educational purpose; world-centered education; songwriting; project-based teaching

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Elementary general music teachers guide children as they develop musical skills, learn musical concepts, and acquire musical dispositions. In the United States, these aims are often addressed through curricula and pedagogies emphasizing content knowledge, a form of *functional literacy*. Broadly speaking, teaching for functional literacy is a way "to provide people with basic skills to exist in the world" (Benedict, 2012b, p. 294). Specifically regarding music education, Gould (2009) defined functional literacy as those "basic skills necessary to function in traditional general, instrumental, and choral school music programs" (p. 47). Public school music teachers operate within neoliberalized public education systems in which career-based functional literacies are emphasized (see Bates, 2021; Goble, 2021; Mullen, 2019; Powell, 2021; Woodford, 2014) and accountability measures are optimized toward those ends (see Benedict, 2009, 2012a; Powell, 2023). When taken for granted as "an end-point in the formal process of schooling" (Benedict, 2012a, p. 152), however, such functional ends and the pursuit thereof can obscure the very possibility of alternative visions of educational purpose.

While curriculum-centered means of music teaching may efficiently address functional aims, they can do so in ways that complicate the roles and relationships of those involved. Consider, for example, Gould's (2009) critique that "music educators focus on the content of teaching (music) to the virtual exclusion of the subjects (students) of the teaching—and not incidentally the exclusion of our selves in teaching" (p. 42). In other words, the content-based efficiency of music educators requires that they manage bodies and discipline desires (see also Good-Perkins, 2021). As argued by Stavrou and

O'Connell (2022): "The problem with limiting 'curriculum' to what is prescribed in a document"—or, I would add, implied by prescriptive interpretations of Kodály and other common approaches for teaching elementary music—"is that it tends to engender a role for the teacher as the 'deliverer' of the curriculum" (p. 167), rather than a competent, agentic co-creator of the curriculum.

In this study, I explore curricular purposes beyond functional literacy and, thus, alternative pedagogical means of tending to the relationships among those involved in an elementary general music class. Namely, I aim to explore the possibilities inherent in a world-centered general music education—one in which children are treated as subjects, not objects, and are encouraged as they negotiate this emerging subject-ness vis-à-vis those around them by pointing their attention outward to the natural, physical, and social world (Biesta, 2021b). To that end, I engaged in acts of critical curriculum design, creating a series of project-based lessons aimed at enacting such a world-centered music education. I then taught this curriculum project, which featured dialogic engagements with collective lullaby songwriting, to children in three classes of kindergarten general music at the elementary school in which I worked in a small town in Alaska.

In this chapter, I begin by offering three personal narratives of my own experiences as an elementary general music teacher, unpacking the ways in which those experiences each informed my understanding of the curricular and pedagogical issues addressed herein. I then offer an introduction to the domains of educational purpose and world-centered education, which framed this study. I articulate the problem addressed by this inquiry and the purpose of the study, followed by a statement of the research

questions that guided the process. I provide an overview of the research design and key methodological decisions which shaped the project. Lastly, I summarize this first chapter and preview the chapters that follow. By exploring subject-ness among children in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class, I hope to explore meaningful, relational alternatives to both functionally-oriented curricula and objectifying pedagogies.

Personal Narratives

Like many before me, I tripped somewhat accidentally into the world of elementary general music education. While pursuing an undergraduate degree and a teaching certification, I studied to become a high school choral conductor. Many of my first professional experiences took place in high school choral contexts, and yet it was the principal of an elementary school in search of a general music teacher who offered me my first permanent position. I accepted the offer, convincing myself that I could act as an elementary music teacher for 1 year while applying for other jobs. But during outdoor recess on the first day of school, a 5-year-old child and I had a conversation that convinced me otherwise. While the content of that discussion is immaterial, I was moved by what I perceived to be the nonsensical nature of the communication—or, rather, the ways in which this communication made a sort of playful sense to which I was entirely unaccustomed.

Over the decade that followed, I had many more professionally formative experiences with young children and developed connections with the teachers, staff, families, and administrators who supported them. Put simply: I grew to love elementary

general music education, our school community, and, most importantly, the children entrusted to my care. As I slowly learned to take up the mantle of my chosen profession, however, I experienced a number of curricular and pedagogical frustrations relating to the purpose of my work that caused me to question the primacy of functional literacy in music education. These same frustrations with functional literacy may have occurred to me had I continued on the path to becoming a choir teacher. And yet, I suspect that these frustrations were specific to my journey as someone who was educated to become an ensemble conductor, someone who believed that "repertoire is the curriculum" (Reynolds, 2000, p. 31), before exploring the potentially "rudderless" (Reimer, 2022, p. 325) territory of general music education. When taken together, these crises of purpose—and especially the ways in which they complicated the roles and relationships of those involved—inspired this study.

Method-as-Purpose

In many ways, I describe my elementary general music teaching as Kodály-inspired. I was fortunate to study Kodály with mentors who modeled thoughtful ways of interpreting and applying Kodály-inspired pedagogy. And yet, I sensed a disconnect between the thoughtful ways in which these mentors modeled Kodály-inspired teaching for me and the prescriptive ways in which it has sometimes been interpreted by myself and others. For example, I was taught that the ways in which the teaching of various concepts ought to be sequenced is contextual, based largely on folk repertoire believed to be meaningful to the community or communities involved in that context—and yet in practice, the sequence of musical elements is often treated as both fixed and sacrosanct.

As such a teaching approach is continually leaned upon for "safety and certainty" (Benedict, 2012a, p. 156) by educators, its value is taken for granted (Regelski, 2006) and its means become fixed, ossifying the approach into what Regelski (2002) described as a "technicist method" (p. 111). When interpreted prescriptively as method, such teaching approaches leave little room for the people involved, both child and teacher—treating individuals, in fact, as interchangeable (see Bylica & Dillon, 2024) and thereby complicating the roles and relationships of those involved.

Management-as-Purpose

When the curriculum—or, as noted above, a prescriptive interpretation of a teaching approach—is conceived of as the guiding purpose for educational endeavors, the efficiency of those endeavors then emerges as a secondary purpose. This might explain why some general music teachers rank classroom management relatively highly when listing their preferred professional development topics (Bush, 2007) or why, when confronted with their own tendency to talk for much of the class period, some general music teachers point to classroom management as the cause (Salvador et al., 2022). In my experience, this emphasis on control and compliance in general music education further complicates the relationships between those involved.

Early in my career as an elementary general music teacher, I distinctly recall my uneasiness with an effort to adopt a school-wide system for classroom management. At the time, I perceived the emphasis on rewards within the program to be a form of manipulation, rather than a source of motivation (see Beyl, 2020). By contrast, I have also witnessed what is possible when—and been a part of—a school community that

came together to fashion a bespoke, school-wide system meant to address a specific, contextually-relevant purpose. Namely, we sought to teach the children to resolve interpersonal conflicts. But therein lies the distinction: In that example, classroom management itself was not the purpose—this collective effort was about mutual care, not top-down control. As Casey et al. (2013) pointedly asked regarding classroom management, "from where does the need to *manage* students arise?" (p. 37, emphasis in original). This sort of "total control" is problematic in that it "turns students into objects and leaves no place for their own capacity to act, that is, for their own freedom" (Biesta, 2020a, p. 9). Within the present study, I hope to explore a relational alternative to such management- and control-oriented teaching within elementary general music education.

Future-as-Purpose

When directed toward functional literacy, the curriculum comes to represent a body of knowledge and skills believed by teachers to be needed by children in the future. Consider the richness of Bruner's (1977) thinking on the ways in which children discover ideas for themselves, "intellectually honest" (p. 33) means of addressing concepts with young children, and the role of action in early childhood education. Consider, also, the myriad ways in which these same ideas are sometimes overlooked or oversimplified when Bruner is invoked as a sort of progenitor of curricular scaffolding. In my own practice as an elementary music teacher, I encountered and actively participated in this future-oriented scaffolding as I made curricular decisions. I have written elsewhere, for example, about the pressure to conceive of general music curricula as means of short-term preparation for concert performances, long-term preparation for future participation

in ensemble-based music education, or both (Dillon, 2023b). Benedict (2012a) described this future orientation as "a blind kind of hopeful-hope, in which the present is sacrificed for a future that desires to protect the past" (p. 157). By focusing on the future to the exclusion of the present, I acknowledge that I sometimes fell for a limiting conceptualization of childhood described by Dansereau (2023): that children are merely "lesser musical adults" and that, by emphasizing "step-by-step skill development," I might "move children closer and closer to an image of musicianship that has been observed in adults across time" (p. 58). The children I worked with, however, were not lesser musical adults. They were children—whole people with their own personally-meaningful conceptions of music-making. This project, then, is a means of exploring general music education as "a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (Dewey, 1897, p. 78).

Toward Subject-ness as Educational Purpose: A Theoretical Framework

I framed this study using Biesta's (2021b) *domains of educational purpose* as a means of exploring purposes beyond functional literacy within elementary general music education. Biesta (2021b) acknowledged the importance of functional literacy as educational purpose while simultaneously critiquing the ways in which this "domain of knowledge and skills" (p. 44) is often overemphasized in school settings. Rather than using the term functional literacy, however, Biesta (2021b) referred to this domain as *qualification*, through which students[1] acquire "knowledge, skills, and understanding" (p.

[1] While education can be directed toward subject-ness, subject-ness itself is not limited to or even about the role of the child as a student or as a learner. In other words, subject-ness is not about our existence within schools specifically, but rather about "our existence

44). In music education contexts in the United States, this often equates to "reading and writing—that is, notating as opposed to composing—music, using so-called standard (Western) music notation" (Gould, 2009, p. 43; see also Benedict, 2012b, 2016).

If students acquire knowledge and skills needed to function in a complex world through qualification, then it is through a second purpose, *socialization*, that they acquire "meaningful orientation and a sense of direction" in relation to that world (Biesta, 2020c, p. 34). More specifically, through socialization, students "are welcomed into social groups and encounter groups with which they are unfamiliar" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 4) and are invited to "'locate' themselves in some way in such cultures, traditions, and practices" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 52). McCarthy (2009), for example, noted that the traditions associated with classical music and aesthetics are often centered by teachers within Western models of music education. McCarthy then argued that such teachers ought to broaden their scope, embracing and introducing students to "multiple musical worlds" (p. 33). Socialization manifests in a variety of ways in elementary general music contexts, ranging from efforts to introduce students to musical traditions with which they are unfamiliar (see Roberts & Beagle, 2018) to the teaching of social skills as a means of achieving compliance and control (see Richerme, 2022; Varner, 2023).

While qualification and socialization are both vital educational purposes, Biesta (2021b) argued that they ought to be directed toward a third purpose: the emergence of

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in the world and *with* the world" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 101, emphasis in original). Throughout this manuscript, then, I generally use the term *children* to describe the participants of the present study. When referring to Biesta's work and the work of others writing about school-based settings, however, I use the term *students* in an effort to remain consistent with their chosen terminology and the implications thereof.

the student as a *subject* in their own life, as opposed to an object of "the teacher's interventions" (Biesta, 2017a, p. 43). Biesta (2010) described this purpose as the opposite of socialization: "it is precisely *not* about the insertion of 'newcomers' into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders" (p. 21, emphasis in original). In particular, Biesta (2021b) argued that teachers ought to support students in claiming this subject-ness "in a grown-up way" (p. 51)—that is, in ways that understand subject-ness not as a limitless freedom, but rather as the limited freedom of being a subject "*in* the world and *with* the world, and not just with themselves" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 37, emphasis in original). While there are studies in which music education is leveraged toward subject-ness (e.g., Bandlien, 2020; Kallio, 2022; Narita & Azevedo, 2016; Velosa & Mota 2021), Dyndahl (2021) noted that there are few "down-to-earth, and tangible" (p. 173) illustrations understood as such. This was, in fact, Biesta's (2021c) intention in articulating subject-ness as a domain of educational purpose: to "give words" (54:22) for the existential dimension of education, which Biesta cautioned was "missing in contemporary educational discourse and practice" (Biesta, 2021b, p. vi).

In the context of this study, subject-ness was addressed through world-centered education. While this framework is addressed at length in Chapter 2, I offer in the following section both an overview of world-centered education and an introduction to three supporting concepts: project-based teaching (Dillon, 2023a), dialogic pedagogy (White, 2016a, 2021), and compassionate care (Hendricks, 2023).

Creating a World-Centered Education

World-centered education (Biesta, 2021b) is a rhetorical and theoretical alternative to the oft-debated pendulum imagined to be swinging between progressive and traditional formulations of education (see Pogrow, 2006)—or, as Biesta (2021b) described them, "(proponents of) child- or student-centred education on the one hand and (proponents of) curriculum-centred education on the other" (p. 90; see also Biesta, 2023b). Based on the notion that teaching is "fundamentally a triadic act in which there is *someone* showing *something* to *someone* else" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 95, emphasis in original), Biesta (2021b) argued that teachers might *point* (see also Prange, 2012) the attention of students outward, and so encourage them to encounter the world, needs beyond their own, and—both reflexively and critically—their own wants. This process, essentially, makes the wants of the student tangible and invites them to consider those wants in relation to the needs of the natural, physical, and social world. Put another way: By pointing students to the world through a world-centered education, opportunities are created by which those students might explore, negotiate, and claim "grown-up" (p. 51) orientations to subject-ness which understand the self as being in relation to others.

Biesta (2021b) described three qualities and/or means of world-centered education. First, experiences within a world-centered education serve as *interruptions*, often encountered as *resistance*. As described above, this is a process by which a child is interrupted from their own wants and into an experience of the needs of others, and so becomes aware of and can critically reflect upon those wants. Additionally, this work requires *suspension*:

> of slowing down, of giving time, of providing forms where children and young people can meet themselves and the world, and engage with the question of the desired and the desirable, that is, of practising grown-up, non-egological ways of being with. (Biesta, 2017b, p. 432)

Lastly, children engaged in this sort of work require *sustenance*—"support and nourishment" by which this work is made "possible, bearable" (Biesta, 2019b, p. 16). This sustenance may manifest in a variety of forms, from the support offered by a teacher (see Biesta, 2021b) to experiences with art itself (see Biesta, 2019b).

In the context of this study, three supporting concepts were marshaled as means of enacting the qualities of world-centered education. First, within this study, world-centered education was actualized as *project-based teaching* (Dillon, 2023a), a teaching approach conducive of the interruption, suspension, and sustenance described by Biesta (2021b). Second, *dialogic pedagogy* (White, 2016a, 2021) was invoked as a means of making subject-ness tangible through dialogue. Lastly, subject-ness was operationalized as a form of *compassionate care* (Hendricks, 2023).

Problem Statement

When used as a lens by which to examine the practice of elementary general music education, Biesta's (2021b) theory of multiple domains of educational purpose makes visible a contradiction. As previously stated, children are qualified through general music education in that they develop musical skills, learn musical concepts, and acquire musical dispositions. Children also experience socialization in these contexts in that they are welcomed into social groups, cultural practices, and traditions. They are not

necessarily encouraged to claim their subject-ness, however, but are rather encouraged to become objects of control under the authority of others—children educated for compliance, both within and beyond music education settings. If elementary general music educators aim to support children as they negotiate their emerging subject-ness, then teachers ought to reimagine both curriculum and pedagogy in these contexts. Within such reimaginings, music educators might emphasize opportunities for children to experience, negotiate, and play with their own emerging subject-ness in relation to others within general music curricula. Perhaps more fundamentally, pedagogical reimaginings might enable teachers and children to recast their relationships in ways that position children as subjects, not objects, within educative processes—an asymptote that general music educators will never fully reach within the power-laden contexts in which they operate. Even so, elementary music teachers who earnestly strive in that direction can help keep "the door to the question of the student's subject-ness open" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 101)—not necessarily enabling subject-ness, but rather extending an invitation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the emergence of subject-ness among children in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class. I addressed this purpose through the creation and implementation of a curriculum project in which young children engaged in lullaby songwriting. I further aimed to examine the ways in which these experiences may have changed the participants involved, including both the children as co-participants and myself as co-participant, teacher, and researcher.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher perceive the enactment of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?
2. In what ways, if any, do world-centered experiences in elementary general music education support the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?
    a. What role, if any, does the teacher-researcher have in supporting or hindering the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?
    b. What role, if any, does dialogue play in the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?
3. In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher change through critical participation in this study?

Overview of the Research Design

In designing this study, I drew upon the critical qualitative research paradigm. Researchers engaged in such inquiry "are no longer called to just *interpret* the world" but "to *change* the world and to change it in ways that resist injustice" (Denzin, 2016, p. 9, emphasis in original). Critical scholarship, then, is directed at critiquing the status quo while also envisioning and exploring alternatives. To that end, I assembled a critical educational action research design drawing especially upon Somekh's (2006) principles of action research and the self-reflective action research spiral (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Somekh (2006) described eight principles of action research, three of which especially influenced the design of the present study. First, action research "*is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants and researchers*" (p. 7, emphasis in original). In this study, being in partnership with the children meant making space for them "to make appropriate contributions given existing restraints" (p. 7). In this context, I define an appropriate contribution as one which enables a child to meaningfully influence the course of the curriculum project, rather than the research design. The children were not meaningfully involved in the development of research questions, for example, but they were meaningfully involved in the emergent, responsive unfolding of the curriculum project, as when their in-the-moment musical suggestions influenced the design of subsequent lessons. Second, action research "*involves a high level of reflexivity*" (p. 7, emphasis in original). In this study, I sought to understand my own involvement as teacher, researcher, and co-participant—both how my involvement influenced those around me and the course of the study, but also how I was changed in the process. Third, action research "*locates the inquiry in an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts*" (p. 8, emphasis in original). My approach to action research, then, was bifocal in that it was rooted in a localized teaching context while simultaneously enabling me to focus on broader ideological contexts.

The *self-reflective action research spiral* is a visual framing meant to represent action research as a cyclical process of inquiry with multiple steps: First, *plan* a change; then *act* on that change and *observe* the outcome; *reflect*; spiral back to the *(re)planning* phase; and so on (Kemmis et al., 2014). Gall et al. (2007) further explained the role of

reflection in these cycles as a means for the teacher-researcher to "step back from the fast-paced and problematic world of practice to ponder and share ideas about the meaning, value, and impact of their practice" (p. 604). Kemmis et al. (2014) noted that researchers engaged in such scholarship sometimes overemphasize adherence to the individual steps outlined above and thus oversimplify the process. With that in mind, my own implementation emphasized the progressively iterative nature of the cycles themselves—which I instead refer to as project phases—rather than strict linear adherence to the plan-act-observe-reflect steps within each cycle or project phase. As such, I modified the self-reflective action research spiral into the *action research trellis*, which I describe further in Chapter 3. In the present study, I engaged in three such progressively iterative phases of inquiry, each of which mapped loosely to an instructional phase within the curriculum project.

The purpose of this curriculum project was to create possible conditions and opportunities in which "grown-up" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51) subject-ness might emerge and be negotiated through engagements with lullaby songwriting. I intentionally situated this project in an early childhood context alongside children (ages 5–6) in three kindergarten classes within a public elementary school. While it may be that such children have been made into objects within and by institutional power structures, I chose to work with this particular population in this project because I believed that they were less likely to have previously experienced such objectification within school-based settings specifically or to the same extent as older children. Thus, I suspected that these young children might be relatively willing and able to play—in a very literal sense—with themes of subject-ness,

world-centeredness, and interdependence through dialogue and songwriting. I describe the curriculum project in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The Institutional Review Board at Boston University cleared the procedures for this study. Data collected as part of this action research study included video observations of our enactment of the curriculum project, focus group interviews with children, an individual interview with a kindergarten teacher, my research journal entries, and various artifacts. I conducted a thematic analysis of the data (Glesne, 2016), relying first upon *initial coding* and then *focused coding* (Saldaña, 2021).

Drawing upon the five validity criteria posed by Anderson et al. (2007) regarding educational action research, Newton and Burgess (2008) identified *catalytic* and *democratic validity* as the primary criteria for critical and emancipatory action research. Catalytic validity refers to the ways in which critical action research "reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (Lather, 1986b, p. 272). In this study, I sought to address catalytic validity by focusing on the changes observed in and demonstrated by the children participating. Furthermore, I focused reflexively on changes in my own teaching and in changes to the relationships I experienced with the children participating in the project. The extent to which all stakeholders are involved in a study or, if not conducted collaboratively, the extent to which multiple perspectives are taken into account constitutes democratic validity (Anderson et al., 2007). In this study, I sought to address democratic validity by meaningfully involving the children as co-participants and responsively enabling their "appropriate contributions" (Somekh, 2006, p. 7) to influence the course of the

curriculum project as it unfolded in the classroom.

Summary

In the United States, elementary general music education is often directed toward musical qualification and, to a lesser extent, socialization. By drawing children's attention to the natural, physical, and social world through musical engagements, by which children encounter needs beyond their own and encounter themselves in relation to those needs, educators further encourage the emergence of children as subjects in their own lives (Biesta, 2021b; Dillon, 2023a). Referring to the potential of arts education toward subject-ness, Biesta (2020b) wrote, "I leave it to the readers to make their own 'translations' of the ideas presented in this book for the theory and practice of art education" (p. 39). Action research is one avenue—one theoretical playground—by which music educators might explore such translations and their possible meanings for the many stakeholders involved.

In documenting this study, I organized the manuscript into the following sections. In Chapter 1, I provided an overview of various features of the present study. In Chapter 2, I frame the study by drawing from literature on subject-ness, world-centered education, and three supporting concepts—project-based teaching, dialogic pedagogy, and compassionate care. In Chapter 3, I describe the research design employed in this study. In Chapter 4, I illustrate the curriculum project by interweaving a presentation of the data with a description of the curriculum project as enacted. In Chapter 5, I then interpret the data collected as part of this study. In Chapter 6, I offer conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the emergence of subject-ness among children in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class. I pursued this purpose through acts of critical curriculum design and teaching conceptualized as opportunities to play with alternatives to the curriculum- and content-centered status quo in elementary general music education. Simultaneously, I sought to problematize the myriad ways in which that status quo can compromise the roles and relationships of those involved.

In this chapter, I review literature pertaining to various features of this project that contributed to the theoretical framework employed herein. First, I describe Biesta's (2021b) notion of subject-ness as an educational purpose, tracing literature within political theory that influenced the development of this concept as well as music education literature that has since drawn upon this idea. Second, I detail Biesta's (2021b) world-centered education, an existential orientation to teaching directed at the emergence of student subject-ness. Lastly, I draw upon three supporting concepts which contributed to the actualization of world-centered education in the context of this study: project-based teaching (Dillon, 2023a), an approach that I argue is consonant with Biesta's (2021b) qualities of world-centered education and through which children might "encounter the world directly and, reflexively, themselves" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 8); dialogic pedagogy (White, 2016a, 2021), through which the possibility of subject-ness was made tangible in dialogue; and compassionate care in music education (Hendricks, 2023), which served as a means of operationalizing subject-ness.

When analyzing the data collected as part of this study, I reflected upon my engagements with this framework as a form of play (see Rowland, 1997). As such, I offer in Figure 2.1 a playful metaphor for—and visualization of—this framework: subject-ness, the central purpose of the educational encounters described in this project, is a tree; world-centered education, illustrated as a branch on this tree, is one possible avenue for exploring the emergence of subject-ness; the curriculum project, the point of contact between theory and practice by which the children and I played with notions of subject-ness, is represented as the seat of a swing; and two ropes, dialogue and care, hold the seat aloft and tether it to the branch—anchoring the curriculum project to world-centered education and, by extension, subject-ness.

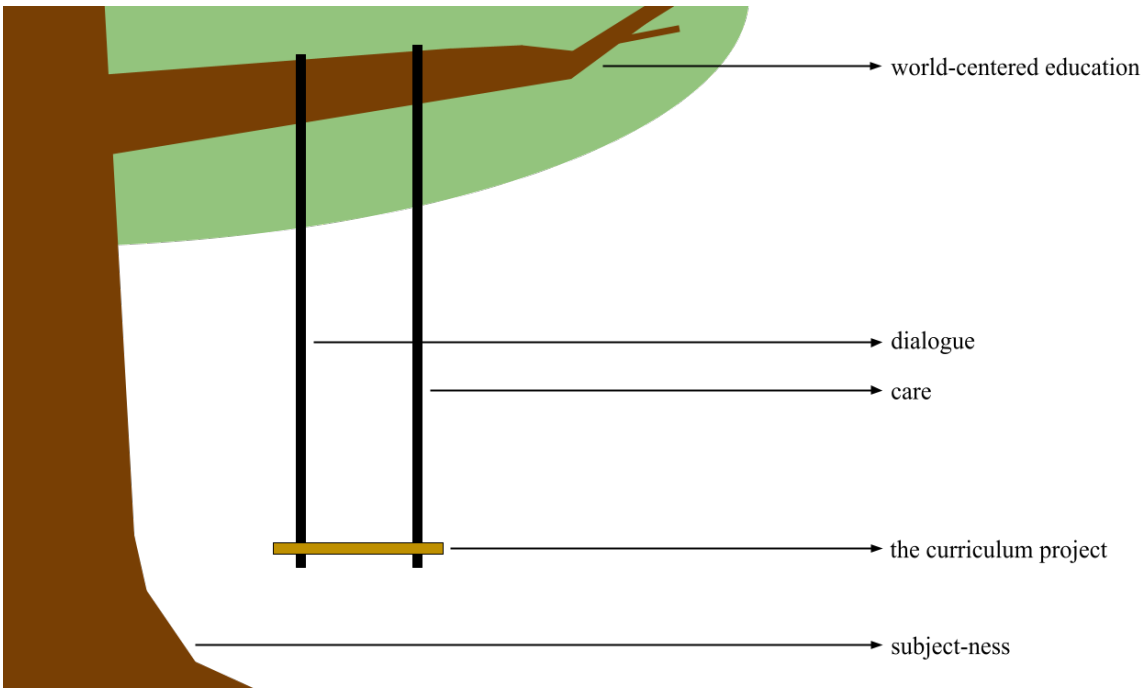

Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework Visualized as Philosophical Play

Subject-ness as Educational Purpose

I framed my efforts within this study using Biesta's (2021b; see also 2010) *domains of educational purpose*, a theory directed not at the "effectiveness" of education but rather "what education should be effective *for*" (Biesta, 2020a, p. 12, emphasis in original). Namely, Biesta (2020a) critiqued "one-sided conceptions of education" and offered instead a "threefold 'prism'" (p. 12) of educational purposes: *qualification*, "the work education does in relation to knowledge and skills" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 40); *socialization*, "the work it does in relation to values, cultures, and traditions" (p. 40); and *subjectification*, "the work it does in relation to the formation of the student as person" (p. 40). This last purpose refers to the emergence of the student as subject, not object, and the ways in which teaching might "'remind' our students of this possibility to be(come) a subject of their own life, and… provide them with many opportunities to encounter and practice with the complexities of what this means" (Biesta, 2023a, p. 265). Freire (1970/2018), in exploring the ways in which teachers and students relate to one another in the context of anti-oppression education, articulated the distinction between subjects and objects in this way: "The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject, who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. Instead, there are Subjects who meet to *name* the world in order to transform it" (p. 167, emphasis in original). To make it clear that a teacher cannot forcibly make a child into a subject—a contradiction in terms—I will henceforth describe this process as the encouragement, exploration, emergence, and negotiation of *subject-ness* rather than subjectification.

Whether or not educational stakeholders employ the same language or intent as Biesta (2021b), these domains can be found in examples of practice and policy. Consider the ways in which the three domains of educational purpose are or are not made manifest in, for example, the National Core Arts Standards (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014) as they ostensibly influence music curriculum development and revision in many school districts in the United States. One excerpt relating to 5th grade music reads: "When analyzing selected music, read and perform using standard notation" (p. 4). Children engaging in such a music education are musically *qualified* in that they acquire knowledge and develop skills relating to the use of such notation. Children are also *socialized* in that they are welcomed into social-cultural bodies associated with "standard notation" (p. 4)—at the micro-level of participation in general music classes and/or ensembles, at the macro-level of participation in Western art traditions more broadly, and at varying levels between the two. The National Core Arts Standards, however, do little to address the question of "what each of us will *do* with what we have learned" (Biesta 2021b, p. 75, emphasis in original)—with questions of subject-ness.

While the distinction between subject and object is a key feature of Biesta's (2021b) domains of educational purpose, so, too, is the distinction between subject-ness and "grown-up" (p. 51) subject-ness. While subject-ness might well be understood as ego (see Biesta, 2021a), a mature orientation to subject-ness is a particular kind of "'good' egoism" (p. 124)—an egoism which "doesn't take place with oneself but takes place 'outside' of oneself, in and with the world" (Biesta, 2020a, p. 16). Put another way: "grown-up" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51) subject-ness is not about age or development, but

rather entails an existential sort of freedom—not the absolute freedom to do what one pleases, but the bounded, interdependent freedom of a subject who understands and acts upon their own desires in relation to the needs of others encountered in the natural, physical, and social world.

This notion that "grown-up" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51) subject-ness is interdependent, however, does not imply that a mature subject is subjugated by or into a given social order. To Biesta (2020a), doing so would imply a one-sided education focused on socialization—and, in particular, a problematic form referred to as "strong" (p. 12) socialization. Rather, the negotiation of subject-ness "is precisely *not* about the insertion of 'newcomers' into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders" (Biesta, 2010, p. 21, emphasis in original). In fact, while this sort of mature subject-ness is negotiated gradually and in a "back-and-forth" (Biesta, 2021a, p. 116) manner, it also sometimes emerges and is made manifest in acts of dissent:

> This can be an articulate and precise 'no,' but also a more diffuse gesture of resistance, of not going with the course of events and the flow of action. This refusal, this no-saying, is a moment, and perhaps *the* moment, in which the 'I' comes into play. It is the moment where I begin to realise that I do not coincide with the course of events. (p. 117, emphasis in original)

While Biesta (2021b; see also 2020a) argued that educators ought to address all three domains of educational purpose, he claimed that the encouragement of this mature orientation toward subject-ness is fundamental and that efforts relating to qualification and socialization ought to meaningfully address the emergence of subject-ness.

While the influences on Biesta's (2021b) domains of educational purpose are myriad, I will linger here on one which particularly shaped my own understanding of mature subject-ness: the works of political theorist Hannah Arendt.[2] In an interview, Biesta acknowledged this influence directly:

> But for a voice to be a voice it needs to be heard as well, so we might say. Pure voice—voice that just emerges—is not voice at all; voice needs to "arrive" in the world. Here, and I this see this [sic] as the profound insight I took from the work of Hannah Arendt, it will meet other voices who are not just there to listen, but who want to speak as well. And precisely this, so we might say, is the predicament of our human existence: that we are not alone in this world, and that the encounter with others, but also the encounter with the materiality of the planet, puts limits and limitations on us. The idea of pure voice, of 100% uninterrupted expression, so to speak, is therefore a rather dangerous myth. (Biesta & Skregelid, 2022, p. 29)

Arendt herself drew upon many influences when thinking about this sort of plurality, one of which was ancient Greece and the lives of those who were able to participate in early Athenian democracy. As summarized by Stonebridge (2024): "Enmeshed in the *polis* and yet distinct, equal yet different, collective yet singular, one of us and yet unique: in a word, plurality" (p. 194, emphasis in original; see also Arendt, 2018).

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[2]An exploration of additional influences on this theory is beyond the scope of the present study. For a brief history of *bildung* and an unpacking of the ways in which bildung influenced this theory, for example, see Biesta (2016b, 2019a); for a critical examination of the same, see Rømer (2021).

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt, 1963/2006), Biesta (2021b) found a counterexample of mature subject-ness: Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi bureaucrat who made himself into an object by arranging the deportation of Jews while refusing to accept responsibility for their destruction because, he claimed, he was simply obeying orders. As Arendt (1963/2006) wrote of her experience documenting Eichmann's trial, "The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected to his inability to think, namely to think from the standpoint of somebody else" (p. 49).[3] Biesta (2021b) contrasted Eichmann's thoughtless complicity with the dissent of Rosa Parks who, in 1955, chose not to obey the orders of a bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama. In drawing this comparison, Biesta (2021b) highlighted a paradox: Eichmann might be viewed as an educational "success" in that he "learned to listen well" and there was a "perfect match between what was expected from him and his own actions"; and although Parks' "functional literacy was in order, as was her ability to understand laws, rules, and regulations," she might be viewed as an educational "failure" in that she chose

[3] Arendt's (1963/2006) report on Eichmann's trial would later inspire an oft-cited quotation: "Nobody has the right to obey." In Bolzano, Italy, for example, artists Arnold Holzknecht and Michele Bernardi used LED lighting to superimpose this quotation in Italian, German, and Latin upon a monument to Benito Mussolini's fascist regime—an invitation to "reflect on the town's complex history in a way that is neither celebratory nor in denial, but rather contextualized" (Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017, para. 9). The origin of Arendt's quotation is a 1964 interview in which Joachim Fest asked Arendt about Eichmann's tendency to invoke Kant while on trial (Arendt, 2018). Arendt responded: "Kant's whole ethics amounts to the idea that every person, in every action, must reflect on whether the maxim of his action can become a general law. In other words… It really is the complete opposite, so to speak, of obedience! Every person is a lawgiver. In Kant, nobody has the right to obey" (p. 279). This quotation directly relates to Biesta's (2021b) distinction between socialization and subject-ness—perhaps even more so when read in context. For this interview and quotation in the original German, see Arendt (2007, p. 7).

not to "act upon this understanding" (p. 28). This paradox, then, demonstrates the limitations of such functional understandings of educational purpose. The ethical and existential nature of these deliberations, rather, point toward an understanding of educational purpose which reaches beyond what a student learns and toward what a student chooses to do with what is learned—and especially toward what a student chooses to do in relation to others.

Subject-ness in Music Education

In recent years, the domains of educational purpose and subject-ness in particular have been increasingly invoked within music education scholarship. In most of these cases, the domains of educational purpose were brought to bear on higher education contexts, including music teacher education (see Christophersen, 2021; Jordan, 2022; Narita & Azevedo, 2016; Rinholm et al., 2023; Tucker & Powell, 2021; Westerlund et al., 2022) and higher electronic music education (see Sørbø, 2020; Sørbø & Røshol, 2020). Still other authors have drawn upon the domains of educational purpose in policy, position, and philosophical papers on, for example, the marginal status of music education within schools in England (Bath et al., 2020), the role of the child as stakeholder in their own music education (Tuovinen, 2024), and the critical possibilities of music education when directed toward substantive democracy (Bylica, in press). While not specific to music education, multiple scholars have drawn upon musical metaphors—jazz, improvisation, and indeterminacy—for pedagogical practices directed toward subject-ness in education more broadly (see Lines, 2017; Santi, 2017; Wilson, 2023). Many of these contexts and applications, however, are beyond the scope of this study.

In the following sections, I review literature in which Biesta's (2021b) ideas specifically "give words" (Biesta, 2021c, 54:22) to teaching practices involving young music-makers or to my own understanding of such educational encounters. I first explore four such empirical studies involving subject-ness, school-aged children, and music education contexts before unpacking an essay critical of Biesta's (2021b) framing of subject-ness and thus music education scholarship in which this framing is invoked.

Empirical Studies Involving Subject-ness, Young People, and Music Education. In a microethnographic study conducted in the context of a technology-based music composition unit enacted with 8th grade students, Bandlien (2020) collected and analyzed field notes, student interviews, and student-created compositions as a means of exploring *middle ground education*. One iteration of Biesta's (2018) notion of educating toward subject-ness, middle ground education is, in this context, "an art education that promotes the responsibility of the subject by asking it to seek a middle ground between its own desires and its responsibilities to the world" (Bandlien, 2020, p. 235). Bandlien's study is replete with illustrations of "stop moments," "moments that call for attention—the participant's attention as well as the researcher's attention" (p. 237; see also Appelbaum, 1995; Fels & Belliveau, 2008). Each of these moments functioned as an "in-between space, a turning point, a strange event or a discovery" (Bandlien, 2020, p. 238) which was, in the context of the study, "key to grasping the students' negotiation of their own desires and responsibilities to the world" (pp. 233–234). One student, for example, experienced three such stop moments: a complex discrepancy between his musical desires (alongside his partner's musical desires) and his understanding of the social and

cultural conventions of the musical tradition within which he composed; a burst of creative activity in which his "musical desires [were] evident," but to the point that he was possibly "pushing so hard that he tend[ed] to destroy something in the musical world he encounter[ed]" (p. 243); and a near-total withdrawal from one phase of the project, which Bandlien interpreted as "the destruction of [the student's]… existence as a subject in the world" (p. 244). The stark language employed by Bandlien (2020) in those last two examples was a direct reference to Biesta's (2018) framing of subject-ness and middle ground education as lying between two extremes: world-destruction, in which individuals encounter the world but "push too hard" with "too little consideration for the integrity of what [they] encounter," and self-destruction, in which an encounter with the world leads individuals to withdraw and thus "literally disappear from the world" (p. 16). Implications of this study abound for the design of curriculum projects directed toward subject-ness: Bandlien (2020) argued that compositional tasks ought to be "formulated as invitations without any prescriptions" (p. 253), "signal an openness towards the risk that the students may want to follow paths that the teacher could not foresee" (pp. 252–253), and enable "the students to engage in the composing process with their desires in meaningful ways connected to the material and socially-constructed world of their interest" (p. 253). These curriculum design implications, together with the concrete illustrations of the negotiation of subject-ness offered by Bandlien, have bearing on the design of the curriculum project within the present study.

Velosa and Mota (2021) conducted a multi-year participatory action research study in which they collected and analyzed field notes, focus group interviews, and a

range of child-created artifacts as part of an arts integration workshop at a public school in Portugal. In this context, the term workshop refers to the program of instruction—rooted in informal learning opportunities (see Green, 2002/2017)—but also to the physical space within which this project took place. Building upon an argument advanced by Wright (2014), Velosa and Mota (2021) explored possible intersections between an informal approach to music education and a *pedagogy of interruption*—another formulation of Biesta's (2010) notion of educating toward subject-ness. Drawing upon the perceptions and perspectives of the student-participants, Velosa and Mota (2021) articulated themes pertaining to the interruptive and disruptive qualities of the workshop—meaning, in this context, "moments when pupils have the opportunity to speak with their own singular voices and not as representatives of the larger group to which they belong" (p. 419). While this framing is not entirely consonant with that employed in the present study, the ways in which Velosa and Mota (2021) sought to explore "in-progress transformations" (p. 426) using Biesta's (2010) work align with my own interest in subject-ness as something negotiated, rather than a binary shift to be achieved.

Similarly, Narita and Azevedo (2016) drew connections between non-formal teaching (Gohn, 2001) and Biesta's (2015a, 2015b) thinking—in this case, framed as the domains of educational purpose. They wed these concepts, however, in an effort to explore Freire's (1970/2018) anti-oppression education as a critique of neoliberalism and specifically within the context of the Instituto Batucar, a community music and social organization in Brazil. Within this organization, body percussion performance and

community-oriented social values were blended in the education of young people toward becoming community leaders and music educators, "multiplier agents" with the "potential to replicate those practices in their own contexts" (Narita & Azevedo, 2016, p. 158). The authors specifically noted that, within this project, subject-ness was "reached by nurturing participants' ideas, creativities and self-esteem" (p. 159). In their analysis, Narita and Azevedo furthered their critique of neoliberal values—"individualism, selfishness and competitiveness" (p. 162)—and the ways in which an education emphasizing qualification alone might contribute to those issues. Narita and Azevedo's (2016) interest in addressing this critique through a framing of subject-ness in relation to community-oriented values aligns with my own interest in exploring this form of interdependent, "grown-up" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51) subject-ness as a purpose within general music education.

Drawing upon the domains of educational purpose, Kallio (2022) conducted a qualitative metasynthesis of research involving music education within juvenile justice settings. More specifically, Kallio explored the ways in which such efforts might be understood as "processes of *socialisation* into the *police order*, delineating and enforcing a predetermined, majoritarian vision of the 'reformed offender'" (p. 414, emphasis in original). By contrast, Kallio noted that such efforts might instead be structured "as a stage for subjectification, where young people can explore and express their own complex personhood and becomings in relation to one another, the juvenile justice system, and broader society" (p. 414). In my reading of Biesta's (2021b) work, I emphasize possible connections between qualification and functional literacy. In Kallio's

(2022) emphasis on the distinctions between socialization and subjectification, however, I find a model for the ways in which "strong" (Biesta, 2020a, p. 12) socialization might operate within music education settings, complicating both the ways in which participants understand themselves and relate to one another. In the same way that this form of socialization delimited "a narrow selection of identifications available to them as both offender and rehabilitated citizen" (Kallio, 2022, p. 414) within juvenile justice settings, "strong" (Biesta, 2020a, p. 12) socialization may delimit what is possible within school-based music education settings, too. Examples of this include part-work when understood only as a stepping stone to choral singing (see Dillon, 2023b) and the *bel canto* tradition when advanced as or assumed to be the only appropriate means of singing (see Good-Perkins, 2021).

Critiquing Music Education Toward Subject-ness. Various aspects of subject-ness have been critiqued by education scholars. Christodoulou (2020) and Miller (2022), for example, each raised concerns with Biesta's (2013, 2021b) existential take on freedom and emancipation associated with the idea of subject-ness. In this section, however, I highlight an essay critical of subject-ness rooted specifically within music education. In the essay, Dyndahl (2021) cautioned that music education scholars generally do not engage with Biesta's (2010) ideas at any substantive depth, but rather as "affirmations and incantations or aphorisms and maxims" (Dyndahl, 2021, p. 172). Referring to the domains of educational purpose, Dyndahl claimed: "although the multidimensional concept of education may seem promising for music education, its potential has not yet been fulfilled" (p. 174). Toward the fulfillment of that promise,

Dyndahl described the domains of educational purpose, dissected various examples of the ways in which those ideas have been invoked within music education, brought a critical lens to the philosophical foundations upon which the theory is built, and closed by discussing possible changes to the theory that might "serve as points of departure" (p. 169) with specific regard to the sociology of music education. For example, Dyndahl encouraged further development of the theory "in new historical, social, and cultural contexts" (p. 179) and in combination with other theories. Dyndahl (2021) then invoked musical gentrification (see Dyndahl et al., 2014) as a possible demonstration of the domains of educational purpose as "a promising starting point for a sociological discussion of music education" (Dyndahl, 2021, p. 179).

While Dyndahl (2021) offered multiple critiques and "points of departure" (p. 169) within the essay, I focus here on a linchpin argument—one that recurs throughout the essay and upon which several subsequent arguments rest. This critique relates to a central concern of Biesta's (2021b): "Right now, qualification seems to occupy the centre of the educational universe" (p. 8). That is to say, the three domains of educational purpose are out of balance in favor of qualification and, to a lesser extent, socialization. The issue then raised by Dyndahl (2021) is that Biesta's (2010) response to a one-dimensional approach to education is to offer yet another one-dimensional approach—that is, to decenter qualification in favor of subject-ness. As noted by Dyndahl (2021): "The preliminary conclusion must therefore be that it is largely Biesta himself… who leads his followers into the imbalance between the various domains of education that he simultaneously warns against" (p. 176). Throughout the essay, this critique snowballs

into others, as in the following:

> Thus, the question of which students would best be able to detect and exploit the benefits of a music education that appears to be informal and based on the student's prerequisites while actually concealing what knowledge and skills are really appreciated and rewarded in an educational situation that is nonetheless institutionalised and formalised also needs to be asked. Is it the students who come from homes with bookshelves and a piano or those who do not? The latter group may, at worst, risk losing out on the basic knowledge provided by musical qualification. They may also be deprived of socialisation into the specific educational culture that music in school as well as in schools of music and performing arts and private music tuition represent. (p. 175)

Therefore, one complication of such an education directed toward subject-ness—one directed exclusively toward subject-ness—is that it might exacerbate inequalities.

I agree with Dyndahl (2021) that a one-dimensional education directed toward subject-ness would be problematic. I suspect that Dyndahl's critique is in some ways an artifact of the ongoing development of the domains of educational purpose as theory. In this project, however, I rely primarily upon a recent articulation of the theory in which Biesta (2021b) stated clearly the relative prominence of the domains:

> I am, therefore, not advocating that we *replace* qualification and socialisation with subjectification, but am suggesting that we should consider *changing our educational priorities*… My suggestion would be to put this curricular hierarchy on its head… by acknowledging that the question of the subject-ness of the

> student is the real "basic" of education. Of course, this subject-ness does not exist in a vacuum but always "in" and "with" the world, which means that education needs to provide the student-subject with orientation and needs to equip the student-subject with knowledge and skills, so that the student-subject can find its way in the world and can act in the world. (p. 8, emphasis in original)

In other words: both socialization, the orientation referred to above, and qualification, the knowledge and skills referred to above, are necessary. They ought to be directed, however, toward subject-ness.

In the present study, I tended to the tension between embracing subject-ness as one possible educational purpose and positioning subject-ness as the only possible educational purpose through acts of curriculum design. This ethical deliberation manifested in, for example, the ways in which the teaching of performance skills—a form of qualification—was threaded throughout the curriculum project. Rather than predetermining the musical concepts and skills to be taught, I focused on creating musical opportunities through which the children and I might "*practice* grown-up ways of being in and with the world" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 89, emphasis in original). I then responsively taught musical concepts and skills that emerged organically, those that I suspected might contribute to the ability of the children to engage with the world through songwriting, as when observations shared by children in one class about the use of white noise generation as a sleep aid led to a lesson involving rainstick performance. I further explore the role of qualification in relation to subject-ness in Chapter 5.

World-Centered Education Toward Subject-ness

Over the last few decades, Biesta posed various means of framing and envisioning education directed toward subject-ness: as *coming into presence* (see Biesta, 2016a), as a pedagogy of interruption (see Biesta, 2016a, 2010), and as middle ground education (see Biesta, 2012, 2018), to name a few. The curriculum project in the present study is framed using a more recent articulation: *world-centered education* (Biesta, 2021b; see also 2017b). On the surface, this term could be understood as a rhetorical intervention meant to "bring a new concept into circulation in order to break through the ongoing 'back-and-forth' between child-centered and curriculum-centred arguments and approaches" (Biesta, 2023b, p. 150). More fundamentally, however, world-centered education is an effort to "give words" (Biesta, 2021c, 54:22) to teachers and scholars interested in engaging with the existential nature of education, in teaching toward "grown-up" subject-ness (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51). Within the visualization of the framework employed in this study (see Figure 2.1), I depicted world-centered education as a branch on the tree of subject-ness—as one possible means of approaching, addressing, and exploring subject-ness within education.

Drawing upon Prange's (2012) notion of teaching as an act of *pointing*,[4] of "*someone* showing *something* to *someone* else" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 95, emphasis in

[4] Biesta (2021b) described this process in a variety of ways: as pointing (see also Prange, 2012), as *showing* (see also Biesta, 2020b; Prange, 2012), as *turning* (see also Biesta, 2022; Plato, 1941), and as *(re)directing* attention (see also Rytzler, 2017). The term *redirect* is sometimes used by elementary general music teachers with regard to classroom management, as when Martinenza (2018) wrote: "Knowing how children develop cognitively, you can create appropriate strategies to shape and redirect their behavior for successful learning in music class" (p. 257). In an effort to avoid confusion

original), Biesta (2021b) argued that teachers might point the attention of students outward to the natural, physical, and social world. In so doing, students may become aware of needs and wants beyond their own and may thus experience their own wants and needs in relation to those encountered beyond the self. Such an education, in other words, "allows for a 'reality check' of our initiatives, ambitions, and desires" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 50). Qualification and socialization are not absent from this educational formulation, but rather reprioritized: A world-centered education is one in which

> the work of qualification and the work of socialisation are always done with an eye on the question how, in this particular subject-area, with regard to this particular topic, for this particular task, in this particular curricular area, students can encounter the world, can encounter themselves in relation to the world, and can explore what it means to exist in and with the world in a grown-up way. (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51)

The purpose of these encounters, therefore, is to invite and encourage students to develop an "appetite" (p. 50) for living both with and within the world.

In my view, world-centered education brings Biesta's (2021b) thinking on subject-ness full-circle in that his prior explorations and iterations regularly dealt with what he perceived to be "a responsibility for the *worldliness* of the world" (Biesta, 2016a, p. 148, emphasis in original; see also Arendt, 2018). Biesta (2020a) explained the

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regarding the multiple meanings of the term (re)direct, I instead rely on the term pointing (Biesta, 2021b; see also Prange, 2012) in this manuscript when referring to this process of "*someone* showing *something* to *someone* else" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 95, emphasis in original).

connection between the subject and the world in this way:

> Put briefly, it is about the distinction between an "I" who raises questions and an "I" who is "in question." The first option… is the one who asks questions and who tries to make sense of the (social and natural) world "outside" of itself. We could call this "I" a learner, that is, someone who is trying to learn about the world… As learners, as the ones who ask questions and seek answers, we are, in a sense, before the world—temporally and spatially—which means that the world, in this set up, appears as an object of my attempts at understanding and comprehension… this is not the only way in which we can conceive of ourselves "in the world"; it is not the only way in which we can think about our existence. In addition to, or next to, us being an "I" who asks questions and seeks answers, there is another "I" or another subject position, that doesn't originate from me, but where the "I" is the one who is addressed, who is put in question… This is not, then, the moment where the individual asserts itself into the world as meaning-maker or learner. It rather is the moment where the "I" as subject is called into the world, called into existence in the world. (Biesta, 2020a, p. 16)

As the term suggests, then, existence in and with the world lies at the heart of a world-centered education directed toward subject-ness.

Three Qualities of a World-Centered Education

While Biesta (2021b) noted that he "must disappoint those readers who are looking for concrete suggestions" (p. vii) relating to world-centered education, he did describe "three important and in a sense very concrete aspects of what is required from

education if it takes subjectification seriously" (p. 51). First, an encounter with the world often manifests as an *interruption* in that, as the teacher points the students' attention outward, the students might be interrupted from their own desires. Similarly, Biesta (2020b) noted that this interruption can be experienced as a form of *resistance*—as something "'in the way' of the students' trajectory" (p. 87). Second, because encountering "the real, and meeting one's desires in relation to what is real, is not a 'quick fix' but actually requires time" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 50), *suspension* is a quality of a world-centered education. Lastly, students interrupted by and suspended within this sort of work may need ongoing support—that is, *sustenance.* In recent years, several music education scholars have made use of Biesta's (2021b) framing of such an education as world-centered (e.g., Laes, 2023; Nielsen et al., 2023; Rinholm et al., 2023; Sørbø, 2023; Stakelum, 2022; Tullberg & Sæther, 2022). While some researchers have referred specifically to the interruptive quality of an education directed toward student subject-ness (e.g., Velosa & Mota, 2021), few have explicitly addressed interruption, suspension, and sustenance as qualities of a world-centered education either within or beyond music education.

In a work of theoretical research, Campbell (2023) drew upon personal experience and a variety of practice-oriented publications to offer a critique of qualification-heavy approaches in environmental education. Campbell (2023) starkly articulated the consequences of such an approach, described as a form of data dump upon the students (see Morton, 2018): that environmental education discourse "*fails to contribute to students' agency and empowerment* in the face of ecological issues, by consistently

reducing complex ecological phenomena… to a set of problems, mainly economic/technological, to be fixed by *technocracy*" (Campbell, 2023, p. 3, emphasis in original). In response to these concerns and influenced by Biesta's (2021b) world-centered education, Campbell (2023) posed a contemplative-existential perspective on environmental education—one that I argue illustrated interruption, suspension, and sustenance and so informed the present study.

The personal experiences around which Campbell (2023) framed the essay pertained to Campbell's time as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate course on educational philosophy. Campbell (2023) described the textbook for this course, *Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (Barrow & Woods, 2006), as reinforcing an Enlightenment narrative:

> that we humans were unique and distinct from the brute animals, precisely because of our capacity for rational thought and, perhaps chiefly, for human language, and that furthermore it was these unique capacities that made us able to undergo and reflect upon teaching and learning through educative processes. (Campbell, 2023, p. 4)

Campbell was surprised to find that the students were regularly "disturbed and preoccupied" by the "story of human exceptionalism" (p. 4) promoted within the book. In response to the prompt, "what does *being* human have to do with education?" (p. 5, emphasis in original), one student expressed not that humans and animals are distinct but that they are "rather continuous and in (ecological) relation" (p. 5). Essentially, Campbell noted that many of the students evinced "a different (ecological) sensibility… that

explicitly rubbed up against this book" (p. 5). Put another way: Although unintentionally and perhaps even indirectly, the text served as an interruption to the students through which they came into dialogue with the world in a process Campbell described as "*dialoguing through the Anthropocene*" (p. 3, emphasis in original).

Once interrupted, students require time and space to "'work through' all this" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 50). Noticing common threads between the various class sessions he facilitated, Campbell (2023) decided to convene a series of "climate change discussion groups" (p. 2) for those students interested in continuing the dialogue beyond the class. Within these settings and through what Campbell (2023) described as "Why me?" questioning (p. 12), the students engaged with their own grief relating to the Anthropocene, which then enabled collective understandings of such:

> The pedagogical approach of turning towards uncertainty and embracing and confronting deep-rooted anxieties around our own highly uncertain futures offers possibilities to tune in to a more collective vision of the future—not my future but *our* future, not myself but *ourselves*. (p. 14, emphasis in original)

Engagement in and with these discussion groups was, essentially, an act of suspension—a means of "providing forms where children and young people can meet themselves and the world, and engage with the question of the desired and the desirable, that is, of practising grown-up, non-egological ways of being with" (Biesta, 2017b, p. 432).

The impact of Campbell's (2023) role as a teaching assistant within the course and these discussion groups became evident through "What now?" questioning (p. 14). As part of the formal course curriculum, Campbell taught the students about virtue ethics

and eudaimonia in relation to education. Alongside Campbell, the students repurposed these ideas within the discussion groups in terms of ecological virtues and found them "to be useful in exploring this line of existential questioning further" (p. 15). That is to say, Campbell offered the students support—sustenance—as they processed these encounters with the world.

In an essay on subject-ness and emancipation in the Anthropocene, Campbell (2024) wrote: "this kind of freedom, to be and exist as a subject, only emerges in certain moments and situations—and, importantly for educators, through certain practices—in which our limits and limitations are made apparent and understandable" (p. 109). Campbell's (2023) depiction of a contemplative-existential approach to environmental education is, to borrow a phrase from Dyndahl (2021), "a much-needed, down-to-earth, and tangible description" (p. 173) of what such an education toward subject-ness might look like. More specifically, the possible illustrations of interruption, suspension, and sustenance within Campbell's (2023) work have bearing on the design of the curriculum project within the present study.

Supporting Concepts

Biesta (2021b) posed world-centered education as a means of addressing subject-ness within education and further articulated interruption, suspension, and sustenance as qualities of such an education. And yet, Biesta chose not to share "concrete suggestions for how this should be done," convinced that "the point of educational scholarship is not to tell educators what they should do, but to provide them with resources that may

inform… their own educational judgement and inventiveness" (pp. vii–viii).[5] How, then, might a world-centered education be realized within the context of elementary general music education?

In the following sections, I draw together three supporting concepts: project-based teaching (Dillon, 2023a), situated within literature on critical songwriting; dialogic pedagogy (White, 2016a, 2021), situated within literature on early childhood education; and compassionate care (Hendricks, 2023), situated within literature on relational music teaching practices. These supporting concepts are represented in the visualization of the theoretical framework employed within this study (see Figure 2.1) as a swing: project-based teaching, through which the children and I engaged with the curriculum project, is the seat of the swing; whereas dialogue and care, means by which the project was implemented, are the ropes tethering the seat to the branch of world-centered education and the tree of subject-ness. I offer my explorations of these supporting concepts in the same spirit that Biesta (2021b, 2021c) posed world-centered education: not as a program for classroom implementation, but as a way to "give words" (Biesta, 2021c, 54:22), to enable explorations and understandings of something missing or marginalized within educational discourse.

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[5] While Biesta (2021b) did not offer "concrete suggestions" (p. vii) within the book *World-Centred Education*, Biesta (2021c) did respond to a related question while presenting a lecture on the topic. Those responses—Steiner Education and gardening (52:50)—are revealing in that they point not to transferable teaching strategies that might be implemented across contexts, but to the "encounter with something that asks something from [the child]" (55:28).

Project-Based Teaching

When designing the curriculum project within the present study, I relied upon *project-based teaching* (Dillon, 2023a). Tobias et al. (2015) described such projects within music education in this way: "We conceptualize projects as carefully planned sets of interrelated learning experiences built on substantive disciplinary ideas that involve inquiry and musical engagement" (p. 40). While the term *project-based learning* is more commonly used than project-based teaching and refers to "a model that organizes learning around projects" (Thomas, 2000, p. 1), I chose in the present study to emphasize the role of teaching rather than learning in an effort to more closely align my use of projects with my chosen theoretical framework. In that regard, Biesta (2016a) argued that recent discourse on learning essentializes educational experiences as merely economic transactions in which "the learner has certain needs and it is the business of the educator to meet those needs" (p. 21). This "logic of learning" (Biesta, 2017b) is problematic in that it limits the child to a subject position in which they are "before the world" (p. 427), attempting to make sense of and comprehend the world as an object and from the outside. This position necessarily forecloses upon alternatives—upon "the subject position of being taught, of encountering (a) teaching, that is, an address that comes to us from the outside (and radically from the outside, so I wish to add, not as something constructed by us)" (pp. 427–428). Put another way: Biesta (2021b) argued that "the basic educational 'gesture' is that of *teaching*" (p. 75, emphasis in original), not learning.

While interpretations of project-based learning and teaching vary widely (see Laur, 2021; Thomas, 2000), one feature that is relatively consistent across these

variations is the role of the project itself—the creation of a "concrete artefact" (Helle et al., 2006, p. 295) by a student or group of students. Other features, however, are not universal or are less consistent, such as the notion that projects ought to "embody characteristics that give them a feeling of authenticity to students" (Thomas, 2000, p. 4). More specifically, Thomas (2000) offered topics, tasks, roles, contexts, collaborators, products, audiences, and assessment criteria as characteristics which might feasibly enable project-based experiences that are "realistic, not school-like" (p. 4). Like Hanney (2018), however, I question the notion that this orientation toward the real world ought to be directed at "*the real world of work*" (p. 770, emphasis in original). Hanney (2018) argued that this "realistic" (Thomas, 2000, p. 4) quality, in other words, ought not be framed as "an instrumental framework for organising activity" (Hanney, 2018, p. 771), but rather as a "*pedagogy of becoming*" (p. 780, emphasis in original). In the context of the present study, this means designing the curriculum project in ways that invite the children to engage in and with the natural, physical, and social world.

I have written elsewhere about the potential of project-based teaching toward the enactment of a world-centered music education (Dillon, 2023a). Synthesizing the qualities of world-centered education described by Biesta (2021b) with the features of project-based learning articulated by Helle et al. (2006), I offered practitioner recommendations framed around the following concepts: *interruption and resistance*; *suspension and sustenance*; and *the concrete artefact*. First, I drew upon an action research study involving soundscape composition (Bylica, 2020) to illustrate ways in which the prompts initiating such a project and the manner in which such a project is

structured might pose "interruption[s] by which resistance [is] introduced and [has] to be worked through by students" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 9). Second, I explored multiple examples to illustrate the ways in which suspension and sustenance might manifest within project-based teaching and learning, such as Odena's (2014) action research study involving clarinet performance majors and *The Magic Flute*. More specifically, Odena (2014) discussed the need to "allow for an *extended time* period" for project-based learning and to "flexibly adapt expectations as the project progresses" (p. 134, emphasis in original)—suspension—and the ways in which a "safety net" of "critical friends" (p. 133) supported the clarinet students—sustenance. Lastly, I invoked a project-based unit which took place within a college-level course on Music, Culture, and Politics in West Africa (Hunter, 2019) in an effort to frame a critical potential of the concrete artefact. In particular, I argued that music teachers ought to use open-ended conceptions of the concrete artefact as possible means of pointing students to the world without "defining prescriptive, convergent project outcomes" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 10) which might close what Biesta (2021b) described as "the door to the question of the student's subject-ness" (p. 101).

Next, I aim to situate my use of project-based teaching within the present study by exploring the possibility-oriented nature of critical songwriting directed toward the enactment of a world-centered education. Composition pedagogies differ from both performance-based conceptions of general music (see Smith, 2017) and skills-based approaches in that the "end product is not known when the lesson begins" (Kaschub & Smith, 2022, p. 33). Allsup (2013) described a compositional "turn" from "an education in closed forms" toward "teaching and learning through open texts" (p. 58) and so offered

a vision of a music education in which teachers center composition pedagogies. There are, however, many ways of framing and constituting creation, improvisation, composition, songwriting, and notation with regard to young children (see Burton & Wadler, 2024; Stauffer, 2013; Upitis, 2019; Young, 2020). In the present study, I chose to use the term *songwriting* to collectively describe the various processes of musical creation that the children and I engaged in together.

Many scholars have explored songwriting in relation to the self—in terms of student agency (see Albert, 2024), student voice and choice (see Bucura, 2024), and student self-confidence (see Dweck, 2024), for example. Songwriting may lend itself to this sort of exploration in that, through such activities, students "have the ability to create music that is uniquely their own" (Kaschub & Smith, 2022, p. 15). And yet, songwriting seems to have outward-facing critical potential, as well, as has been explored by a number of scholars (Bylica, 2024; Kaschub, 2009; Tobias et al., 2023). Kratus (2016), for example, quoted a number of adolescent students in a practitioner article on songwriting in secondary music education. Some of these students focused on the self in their responses about songwriting, as in the following: "I write songs to help me find out who I am" (p. 65). Other students tended to the other in their responses, as in the following: "I want to write songs that inspire and motivate people. I want to be the voice for those who can't be heard and I want to expose the injustices in the world" (p. 65). While school-based songwriting experiences might benefit children in relation to their understandings of self, those same experiences might also serve as opportunities for children "to respond to and engage with the world" (Bylica, 2024, p. 584).

My use and understanding of songwriting pedagogies within the present study was largely influenced by Hickey (2012), whose work on the topic aligns with my practitioner recommendations for a project-based, world-centered education (Dillon, 2023a). Hickey (2012) encouraged music educators to offer meaningful songwriting prompts, such as "other art works, a story, a quote—anything *real* to work with" (p. 63, emphasis in original)—rather than "fall into the trap of giving assignments to meet objectives or standards without necessarily considering the potential for authentic inspiration for these assignments" (p. 63). This orientation toward "Letting go and allowing students to connect to real-life events and music in their lives" (p. 71) through songwriting prompts is illustrative of the sort of pointing that Biesta (2021b) argued could turn a student's attention outward, serve as an interruption, and lead to an experience of resistance. Hickey (2012) further argued that creative engagements with songwriting take time (p. 19) and that an "important part of the equation is the teacher, who must have the disposition to teach in an evolving and organic manner" (p. 156), indicative of the qualities of suspension and sustenance. The composition itself—the concrete artefact (Dillon, 2023a; see also Helle et al., 2006)—is another key consideration in Hickey's (2012) work. Consider, for example, the ways in which Hickey encouraged music educators to "strike a balance between allowing students to simply find and follow their muse and providing rules for structure" (p. 70)—an idea which I refer to in the present study as *guardrails* and will return to in Chapter 5.

In a critical ethnography involving a youth community music program in Detroit, Hess (2018) relied upon songwriting pedagogies as a means of exploring a critical

theoretical framework: counterstorytelling (Delgado, 2000), a facet of critical race theory through which marginalized people might "speak back to dominant narratives" (Hess, 2018, p. 11). Three aspects of this work are especially relevant to the present study. First, the teaching artists working in this community program used writing prompts as means of pointing the students to Detroit, musicians, and other topics, and then encouraged the students to use these writing samples as foundations for songwriting experiences. This is an illustration of both Hickey's (2012) encouragement that teachers use meaningful prompts as inspiration for songwriting and Biesta's (2021b) suggestion that teachers point students outward to the world, a process through which they might experience interruption and resistance. Second, opportunities for qualification are threaded throughout the songwriting program described by Hess (2018), but the skills and understandings developed through qualification are directed toward critical aims. Hess (2018) discussed, for example, the development of relevant technology skills and popular song analysis of "the effectiveness of lyrics, melodic writing, and accompanying music videos" (p. 15), but regularly framed these skills in relation to the ways in which they might help the students "tell their stories of Detroit" (p. 23). Bylica (2024) noted that composition projects which blend musical craftsmanship—qualification—and such critical aims can be "opportunities for students to build musical skills while challenging narratives, considering multiple perspectives, and exploring their conceptions and understandings of themselves and others" (p. 582). Lastly, the principal finding of Hess' (2018) study was "the idea that a facilitated critical strengths-based songwriting program may enable youth to counter discourses that negatively frame their lives" (p. 25). More

generally, Hess demonstrated that project-based songwriting can be meaningfully leveraged toward critical aims—a finding which influenced my own decision to engage in project-based songwriting with children as a means of exploring the emergence, exploration, and negotiation of subject-ness.

Dialogic Pedagogy

While planning the present study, I suspected that dialogue might be one way in which subject-ness could be explored together with the participants. At first, I thought that this might mean we would engage in dialogue about subject-ness directly, but as the early stages of the study unfolded, I turned my attention to the ways in which subject-ness might instead be enacted, demonstrated, or perceived through dialogue.[6] To that end, I drew upon White's (2016a, 2021) conception of *dialogic pedagogy* within early childhood education as influenced by *dialogism* (Bakhtin, 1984, 1993; see also Matusov, 2009).

Within White's (2016a) framing of dialogic pedagogy, dialogue is not limited to one-sided interpretations of words, texts, and language. Dialogic pedagogy, rather, is a means of "understanding and appreciating the potential of meaning-making encounters between subjectivities" (p. 1)—encounters which, to return to Biesta (2004), are "radically placed *inside* the process of communication" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Such dialogic encounters may be rooted in words but, especially within early childhood contexts, may also be embodied (White, 2016a). With regard to young children in music

[6] See Chapter 5 for a detailed explanation of this shift in relation to the research questions explored in the present study.

education contexts specifically, Harris (2023) described such embodiment in this way:

> Another key principle for authentic dialogic encounters… [is] deep, visible listening. This means tuning into children with all our senses in terms of (1) what children say and how they say it; (2) engaging with their silences—what's not said; and (3) engaging not only with what children are saying but how else they may be expressing themselves through intonation, facial expression, gestures, body language and gaze. (p. 32)

To this list, I would add that music-making, too, can be engaged with as a form of social interaction among young children (see Pitt & Welch, 2023; Reynolds et al., 2014)—as a form of embodied dialogue. Dialogic approaches in which such communicative understandings of "the concrete form of the act" (White, 2021, p. 1278) are paired with social understandings of the dialogic subjects involved in the interaction "clearly exceed the limits of what is typically 'known' or know-able about young children while simultaneously offering some potential routes as an effort of trying" (p. 1283). In other words, this approach eschews psychological and developmental understandings of the child as an "object for adult scrutiny" in favor of understandings of the child as "subjective dialogue partner" (p. 1283)—a framing consonant with the exploration of subject-ness through dialogue in the present study. To illustrate two further ways in which this framing informed my efforts, I turn next to a study conducted within an early childhood setting (de Vocht, 2015a, 2015b) and offer an analysis of that study in relation to White's (2016a, 2021) dialogic pedagogy.

Within two childcare centers in New Zealand, de Vocht (2015a) studied teacher-child interactions among early childhood educators and young children. Data collected and analyzed as part of the study included recorded observations within the childcare centers, group interviews of children facilitated by the early childhood educators, and one-on-one and group interviews between the early childhood educators and the researcher. The ways in which de Vocht considered this data as a means of understanding teacher-child interactions as relatively monologic or dialogic particularly influenced my efforts in the present study. When asked, "What do you think a teacher does?," for example, one child remarked: "Uhm, tells you what to do" (p. 224)—a monologic experience of the teacher expounded upon by several of the children. As de Vocht noted of these interactions: "Their view is that the teachers are authoritative: the teacher is the knower and children are passive and obliging" (p. 225).

de Vocht (2015a) analyzed pedagogical interactions, too, including complex instances of *polyphony*, a term drawn from Bakhtin's (1981) analysis of literary works in which multiple (and sometimes oppositional) speech genres are enacted among dialogic subjects and sometimes even within the same dialogic subject. In one such example, a teacher attempted to engage a group of children in dialogue about ways in which they might celebrate a holiday. The teacher attempted to monologically lead one specific child into what the teacher believed to be the "right way of knowing and doing" (p. 233) with regard to the holiday, but the child "defiantly" (p. 232) refused to be led in that particular direction. In the moment, the teacher became frustrated—but in reflection and during the analysis, this insistence on the part of the child to engage in dialogue as co-author

contributed to that teacher's understanding of the child "as an active agent, resisting this discourse" (p. 233). de Vocht (2015a) drew upon dialogue not simply as a source of data nor as "superficial and tokenistic engagement" (de Vocht, 2011), but rather as a contested space in which children's utterances might be understood as complex forms of co-authorship. This framing influenced the ways in which dialogue served as a means of engaging with self and other in the present study.

de Vocht (2015b) later drew upon data from two of the early childhood educators and approximately 40 of the children (ages 3.5–5) within one of the childcare centers to examine the specific ways in which dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984) between the teachers and researcher contributed to the research method in novel ways. The data analyzed within this follow-up publication included dialogic reflection meetings between the two early childhood educators and the researcher, during which they each shared a video recording of teacher-child interactions documented in the previous week "that we were interested in, that delighted us or that we were intrigued by" (de Vocht, 2015b, p. 323). In the article, de Vocht described three such reflective dialogues. First, the author explored a discussion within one of the reflection meetings regarding the ways in which the early childhood educators restricted the children's access to water as an outdoor play activity and, in response to their own reflective dialogues, substantively changed their practices, instead offering the children a hose and "free rein in water activities" (p. 325) when the weather was hot. Second, during an activity in which the class collectively created a story, one of the teachers encouraged the other teacher to reconsider the practice of censoring student expressions of violence in favor of better understanding the meanings

behind those expressions. Lastly, the teachers engaged in dialogue together about the ways in which their practices had changed through their participation in the study, both in terms of how they thought about the children and in substantive, material ways.

Bakhtin's (1993) notion of *moral answerability* served as a foundation for exploring the role of dialogue in the teacher-researcher reflection meetings conducted by de Vocht (2015b). In this context, moral answerability accounts for the fact that teachers "cannot hide behind a universal theory" (p. 321) and must instead tend to the moral and ethical reality of relating with and to children as subjects. This implies that teachers bear a responsibility to engage with children in open-ended ways and that, in doing so, they ought to "continually reflect how they can and should respond beyond the immediate experience, for example by evaluating on routines and practices and making changes, where required" (p. 321). This moral answerability is evident in, for example, the teachers' decision to make the hose available to the children, reconsidering the ways in which they were limiting playful engagements.

White (2016a) wrote of the same moral answerability—the ethical responsibility of teachers engaging in dialogic pedagogy with young children—as, essentially, *love*. Therein lies one facet of the power of this framing for the present study:

> Central to this notion is the tenet that one should not attempt to mould the other into an image of the self or a desirable outcome, yet neither should one adopt an impartial 'acceptance' stance that professes to have no evaluative opinion (the unknowable other). Instead aesthetic love recognises the objective role of the author in appreciating the "unique answerable consciousness" of the other based

> on their "unique place in the given context of the ongoing event" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 30) while simultaneously recognising the impact of one's own standpoint on any evaluation. (White, 2016a, p. 77)

Children are constantly engaged in intersubjective meaning-making. By drawing upon such an approach to meaning-making—both as a frame of analysis and as a means of practice by which the children and I engaged with one another as dialogic partners and as subjects, not objects—I sought to prop "the door to the question of the student's subject-ness open" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 101) and render that subject-ness tangible in this study. Furthermore, my ethical obligation to critically reflect upon and reconsider my own teaching in response to these interactions is implicated in this particular framing of moral answerability among dialogic partners.

Compassionate Care

I drew *compassionate care* (Hendricks, 2023) into the present study during the data collection and analysis phases as a means of operationalizing and understanding subject-ness enacted in context. Within school-based settings and as posed by Noddings (2013), *care* is an approach to ethics rooted in relational understandings. Particularly salient to the present study is Noddings' (2013) insistence that this ethic of care be extended beyond human life to encompass animals, plants, and ideas—which, in part, constitute the natural, physical, and social world to which Biesta (2021b) argued that teachers ought to point in their teaching. Notable, too, is the notion that educators interested in caring about the students with whom they work often teach to student needs inferred or assumed by the educator (Noddings, 2005). But instead of encouraging

teachers to supplant this focus on inferred needs with a focus on needs directly expressed by the students themselves, Noddings (2005) encouraged educators to balance the two and to do so in a way that acknowledges that teachers "*do* sometimes know what is best" (p. 157, emphasis in original): "caring teachers show that they are willing to rethink inferred needs, and students should be encouraged to criticize and re-evaluate their own interests, wants, and purposes" (p. 157). This re-evaluation of personal interests is akin to Biesta's (2017b) notion that teaching has the potential to "interrupt where children and young people are in order to turn them and their attention towards the world and the possibility for existing as subject in and with the world" (p. 432). The enactment of such interdependent understandings of subject-ness through care, however, requires a multi-directional understanding of care.

Drawing together compassionate music teaching (Hendricks, 2018) and care ethics (Noddings, 2013), Hendricks (2023) offered *compassionate care* as a means of exploring and understanding the ways in which caring relationships might be co-created in music education contexts, as opposed to one-directional configurations in which the teacher cares about the student. Hendricks (2021, 2023) sidestepped *caring about* and even *caring for* as potentially limiting rhetorical formulations and instead articulated *caring with*, a form of care in which "the discussion of relationship is one of spiritual communion rather than roles to be performed, and where neither I nor You need be superior nor inferior" (Hendricks, 2021, p. 246). This idea is particularly important in early childhood music education contexts, wherein deficit conceptualizations of children as "lesser musical adults" (Dansereau, 2023, p. 58) can impede efforts at care and

compassion. Keeping in mind Noddings' (2013) inclusion of animals, plants, and ideas within care ethics, the notion of caring with draws music into the relationship, as well: "the distinction between care for the music and care for the student and [the student's] learning evaporates, as in this moment of 'caring with,' musical action *itself* molds relationships to the self, to the other and to music in a unified manner" (Kanellopoulos, 2023, p. 2, emphasis in original). Genuine efforts at caring with might also be viewed as forms of anti-hegemonic caring in that teachers engaged in such work "remain fiercely demanding of the things that truly matter to our students and within our shared musical communities" (Hendricks, 2023, p. 17; see also Schmidt, 2023; Smith et al., 2023). These aspects of compassionate care—the co-creation of relationships, the extension of care beyond human subjects, and the critical potential of caring with—were pivotal in operationalizing subject-ness in the present study.

Care has been utilized by music education researchers in a variety of ways—as a framework for analysis (Bylica & Dillon, 2024), for example, or as a means of understanding the ways in which love might be modeled within music education settings and "manifested in reciprocal acts of love" (Lee & Smith, 2023, p. 110). I wish to linger here, however, on a study in which care was invoked as a means of approaching another theoretical framing. In an autoethnography, Lee (2023) drew upon care as a means of actualizing Gay's (2018) notion of *culturally responsive teaching*. As a high school choir teacher, Lee (2023) described several curricular changes pursued through care and toward cultural responsiveness, such as the adoption of songwriting opportunities and the involvement of students in ensemble repertoire selection. The more Lee explored such

curricular expansions, “the more those students demonstrated creative ownership and vulnerability, making it easier for [Lee] to identify and be more receptive and responsive to their needs and desires” (p. 196). My use of care in the present study was influenced by Lee’s autoethnography in that Lee relied on care as a relational and pedagogical means of addressing a chosen theoretical framework and, more specifically, as a means of exploring alternatives to the status quo within music education.

Summary

By reviewing literature pertaining to the theoretical concepts which framed this study, the purpose of this chapter was to illustrate ways in which those concepts might meaningfully contribute to an exploration of purpose within elementary general music education. In the first section, I described the domains of educational purpose and, in particular, subject-ness (Biesta, 2021b). In the section that followed, I unpacked world-centered education (Biesta, 2021b), a teaching approach focused on the emergence of student subject-ness. Lastly, I drew together three supporting concepts used within this study to realize world-centered education: project-based teaching (Dillon, 2023a), dialogic pedagogy (White, 2016a, 2021), and compassionate care (Hendricks, 2023). In enacting this study, I intended to contribute to the body of literature reviewed in this chapter—to explore what it might mean to engage in a music education directed at the emergence and exploration of subject-ness alongside children in an elementary general music context.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

> 'We' are not outside observers of the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part *of* the world in its ongoing intra-activity… We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. (Barad, 2003, p. 828–829, emphasis in original)

The purpose of this study was to explore the emergence of subject-ness in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class. While crafting a research design to address this purpose, I was galvanized by a contradiction. Namely, I sought to investigate the very possibility of subject-ness using methods of educational inquiry—methods which, in their traditional and normative formulations, have the potential to make "things from relations, extracted objects cut off from meaning" (Kuntz, 2016, p. 65). While the paradoxical extraction of subject-as-object within educational research is problematic, it also hints at a nascent possibility explored later in this dissertation: If acts of educational inquiry can contribute to the objectification of children, then it may be that acts of educational inquiry can meaningfully contribute to the emergence of subject-ness, too.

Drawing the strands of my chosen theoretical framework together with my responsibility to critique, desire to imagine alternatives, and willingness to creatively engage in methodological work toward those ends, I chose to ground this study in the critical qualitative paradigm. Researchers engaged in critical inquiry "call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice" (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). That is to say, to critique the status quo is not sufficient; critical inquiry further entails the possibility-oriented work of action—of imagining and realizing alternatives. Methodological activism, according to Kuntz (2016), takes this work a step further: that it

is possible to "construct methodologies that themselves work for change" (p. 29; see also Kallio, 2024). To that end, I assembled a critical educational action research design drawing upon Somekh's (2006) principles of action research and the self-reflective action research spiral (Kemmis et al., 2014).

In this chapter, I provide an account of the path by which I arrived at key methodological decisions and offer a detailed explanation of my chosen research design. I then describe the participants, research site, curriculum project, data collection procedures, and processes of analysis employed herein. Small (1977/1996) wrote, "There are just two possible motivations for the pursuit of knowledge: love and the quest for power" (p. 71). What follows is an unfolding and explication of the research design employed in my own pursuit of knowledge, animated by love for the children in my care.

Crafting a Research Design

The shaping of this study began with theory. I was first introduced to the works of Gert Biesta and, consequently, Hannah Arendt in 2021 on the recommendation of a mentor. As a lens, I found many of their ideas to be generative when brought to bear on problems of practice I experienced as an elementary general music teacher. The idea that this inquiry might involve project-based teaching did not emerge until June 2022, when an encounter with a lesson plan in Benedict's (2021) *Music and Social Justice* caused me to think about the potential of project-based lullaby songwriting toward Biesta's (2021b) world-centered education. I spent that summer immersed in literature pertaining to project-based teaching toward critical ends and then wrote a position paper (Dillon, 2023a) about the possible enactment of world-centered education through critical project-

based teaching.

In August 2022, I discussed the project with several "critical friends" (Schuck & Russell, 2005). Multiple visions of the project began to take shape in these discussions: as critical participatory action research (CPAR), engaged in alongside the children as co-researchers, "breaking from conventional approaches in which academics research and write 'about' or 'on' communities as objects of study" (Fine & Torre, 2021, p. 3); or as critical educational action research (CEAR), engaged in alongside the children as co-participants, by which "research can become a systematic intervention, going beyond describing, analysing and theorizing social practices to working in partnership with participants to reconstruct and transform those practices" (Somekh, 2006, p. 27). At first glance, this question—to position children as co-researchers, as in CPAR, or as co-participants, as in CEAR—might seem like a simple binary decision: Which choice will I order from the "theory menu" (Peim, 2009)? But, as noted by Kuntz (2016), this procedurization of methods masks the ethical complexities inherent in such deliberations. I thought long on the distinctions between CPAR and CEAR, and I am still convinced that either approach could address the project at hand in generative—if differing—ways.

Ultimately, my path led me to CEAR because of the ways in which this approach aligns with, informs, and is informed by my chosen theoretical framework. Pivotal to the potential of Biesta's (2021b) world-centered education toward subject-ness is the role of the teacher: Teachers *point*, drawing the attention of students beyond themselves—a process by which students encounter needs beyond their own and their own freedom to act on those needs. Put simply: Within the ways in which world-centered education is

framed in this study, claiming subject-ness can be the province of students—but the enactment of such a pedagogy is primarily the work of teachers. Adopting CEAR, in which I would work in partnership with the children (as co-participants, but not as co-researchers), then, was a conscious act of aligning my conception of action research with my chosen theoretical framework. This decision is further unpacked later in this chapter.

Critical Educational Action Research

Action research is "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162). Critical and emancipatory models of educational action research derive in part from Freire's (1970/2018) anti-oppression education in which dialogic teaching approaches are leveraged toward *conscientização*, or consciousness-raising, and liberation (see Feldman, 2017). Such critical models are, essentially, means of discovering, telling, and exploring "unwelcome truths" (Kemmis, 2006, p. 474). While many action research projects in educational settings share similar or related features, it is important to note that there is no universally-accepted definition of action research (see Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006). Altrichter et al. (1991), in fact, argued that such a definition would be necessarily confining of the possibilities inherent in action research. The construction of such a possibility-oriented approach to qualitative research can be conceived of as an act of "bricolage"—of crafting "research methods from the tools at hand rather than passively receiving the 'correct,' universally applicable methodologies" (Kincheloe et al., 2017, p. 245). In the following paragraphs, I offer an

exploration of the tools at hand which specifically influenced the design of the present study.

Principles of Action Research

Drawing from Somekh's (2006) experiences conducting action research projects within educational settings, the author articulated eight methodological principles of action research:

> *Action research integrates research and action* in a series of flexible cycles… *is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants and researchers… involves the development of knowledge and understanding of a unique kind… starts from a vision of social transformation and aspirations for greater social justice for all… involves a high level of reflexivity… involves exploratory engagement with a wide range of existing knowledge… engenders powerful learning for participants…* [and] *locates the inquiry in an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts*. (pp. 6–8, emphasis in original)

In planning this action research project, I was especially influenced by three of Somekh's principles.

First, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the framing of my efforts as being in partnership with the children was central to the alignment of my chosen theoretical framework with an action research methodology. Furthermore, Somekh's (2006) conceptualization addresses power differentials between stakeholders and the "aspiration to establish an equality of esteem" among them while simultaneously "allowing

individuals to make appropriate contributions given existing restraints" (p. 7). This approach contrasts with models of action research which claim to more fully flatten the power dynamic between researcher and participant—the possibility of which has been contested with regard to teacher-child relationships in school settings (e.g., Billies, 2010; see also Waller & Bitou, 2011). As Herr and Anderson (2015) noted of action research, "power relations in a setting operate even when insiders think they are being collaborative" (p. 45).

In the context of this study, I interpreted Somekh's (2006) notion of "appropriate contributions" (p. 7) to mean those contributions by which the children meaningfully influenced the direction of the curriculum project, but not necessarily the research design itself. As co-participants, the children were involved in determining which instruments would accompany their lullaby compositions and were thus studied within the curriculum project, for example, and the ways in which the children would share their final lullabies with the people for whom they were composed. The children were not, by contrast, involved in the development of research questions. Rather than supposedly flattening our power differential, this framing enabled us to recast our power differential—to invite the possibility that we might be "relationally bound" (Kuntz, 2016, p. 17) and *caring with* one another (Hendricks, 2021, 2023) through the enactment of curriculum.

Second, I sought to consciously and reflexively situate myself within the project as a teacher-researcher (Somekh, 2006). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) described the efforts of teacher-researchers as "working the dialectic," as acts of exploring and theorizing the "reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationships of research and

practice" not as theorizers or practitioners, but in an "intentionally blurred" role (p. 43; see also Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006). Theory is generated, acted upon, and made visible by teacher-researchers engaged in self-study, and the visibility of such enacted theory then makes possible the continual re-examination of what is generated in an ongoing act of self-disruption, in a "process of *becoming*" (Pinnegar et al., 2020, p. 127, emphasis in original). In a review of qualitative studies in general music education, Stanley (2014) encountered many authors who grappled with the ways in which their involvement as researchers potentially influenced the course of their inquiry. But in the present study, I sought to lean into my own involvement in the project—to generate "knowledge and theory that comes into play *in the doing* of education, not from the sidelines but from the field of play, from the players whose life and work *is* educational praxis" (Kemmis, 2010, p. 25, emphasis in original). This is, essentially, an admission that "we can never *not* impact that which we study" (Kuntz, 2016, p. 65, emphasis in original) and that, as I turn to next, to impact that which we study is rather the point of critical scholarship.

Third, while this project was rooted in a localized teaching context, I sought a bifocal approach—one which enabled me to maintain focus on the broader ideological contexts within which my localized teaching was situated (Somekh, 2006). Similarly, Kemmis (2006) argued that educational action research ought to "cross the boundaries between the school and the world beyond it to explore themes and issues of interest both inside and outside the school" (p. 471). Alongside Somekh's (2006) encouragement that action research ought to be directed at social change and transformation, this principle

serves as a foundation for criticality in such an inquiry. Referring to Carr and Kemmis' (1986) vision of action research as a critical educational science, Hiim (2015) wrote: "They emphasise the necessity of criticising the social conditions of education, teaching and learning because there is a tendency to see established educational traditions and systems as given" (p. 152). This is especially true in music education as a profession, within which action research might challenge, among other givens, the recipe- and method-oriented teaching approaches that constitute an unquestioned status quo among some practitioners (Regelski, 1995). Dansereau and Wyman (2020), for example, challenged the dominance of Montessori shelf works emphasizing visual sense development by conducting a critical participatory action research project in which they introduced sound-oriented shelf works to children in a Montessori school. In a precedent study to the present inquiry, Bylica (2020) leveraged project-based soundscape composition in middle-level general music classes to explore and actualize Giroux's (2005) concept of border crossing, through which assumptions are challenged in favor of alternatives. In an example of CEAR as self-study, as is the case in the present inquiry, Buchan (2016) explored children's agency in the context of the researcher's own primary school music teaching. Taken together, these principles of action research influenced and constituted my own approach to CEAR in the present study.

The Iterative Nature of Action Research

Action research is often framed as a cyclically iterative process of inquiry. While there have been many versions of this cyclical framing within the history of practitioner research in education (see Feldman, 2017), in the context of this study, I drew initially

upon the *self-reflective action research spiral* as formulated by Kemmis et al. (2014): First, *plan* a change; then *act* on that change and *observe* the outcome; *reflect*; loop back to the *(re)planning* phase; and so on. In the present study, I initially planned to engage in three cycles of inquiry, each of which mapped loosely to an instructional phase within the curriculum project. By using multiple cycles, I aimed to achieve the depth of inquiry Cain (2008) described as resulting from "sustained reflection over time" (p. 308), as opposed to the superficiality of music education studies limited to a single turn of the self-reflective action research spiral.

There is a tension, however, in the specific framing of action research as a spiral: that "action research is rarely as neat as this spiral… suggests" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 18). The various phases within each cycle—plan, act/observe, reflect, and (re)plan—need not be strictly delineated, for example, as analysis within action research ought to be ongoing and recurrent throughout each cycle (Elliott, 1991). Situated in context, such phases and the cycles they constitute unfold in "fluid, open and responsive" ways (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 18) and through the constant "overlapping of action and reflection" (Robbins, 2014, p. 190). While not directly addressing the action research spiral itself, Bradbury et al. (2019) conveyed a similar message when they invited educational action researchers to "unlearn" various strictures of conventional research methods: "Perhaps the biggest requirement for appreciating the action research approach is to bracket, or give up, what you think research processes should be" (p. 16). Reflecting on this tension and my own experiences collecting data for this study, I decided later in the process to modify Kemmis et al.'s (2014) cyclical framing of action

research. Eschewing the false linearity and false fixity of the plan-act-observe-reflect cyclical steps implied by the visual framing of action research as a spiral, I offer instead the *action research trellis* as a visual framing in which inquiry grows in divergent and unpredictable ways (Figure 3.1). The three instructional phases which constituted the curriculum project, for example, are represented in the trellis not as individual cycles, but rather as open spaces delineated by supportive crossbeams—spaces in which a single line/vine of inquiry might progressively spiral upward, but could just as likely wilt, branch off in a new direction, flower, or even bear fruit. Rather than representing reflection as one step within a larger cycle, analysis and self-reflection are illustrated as constant, ongoing processes—as vertical support beams, fanning upward and outward.

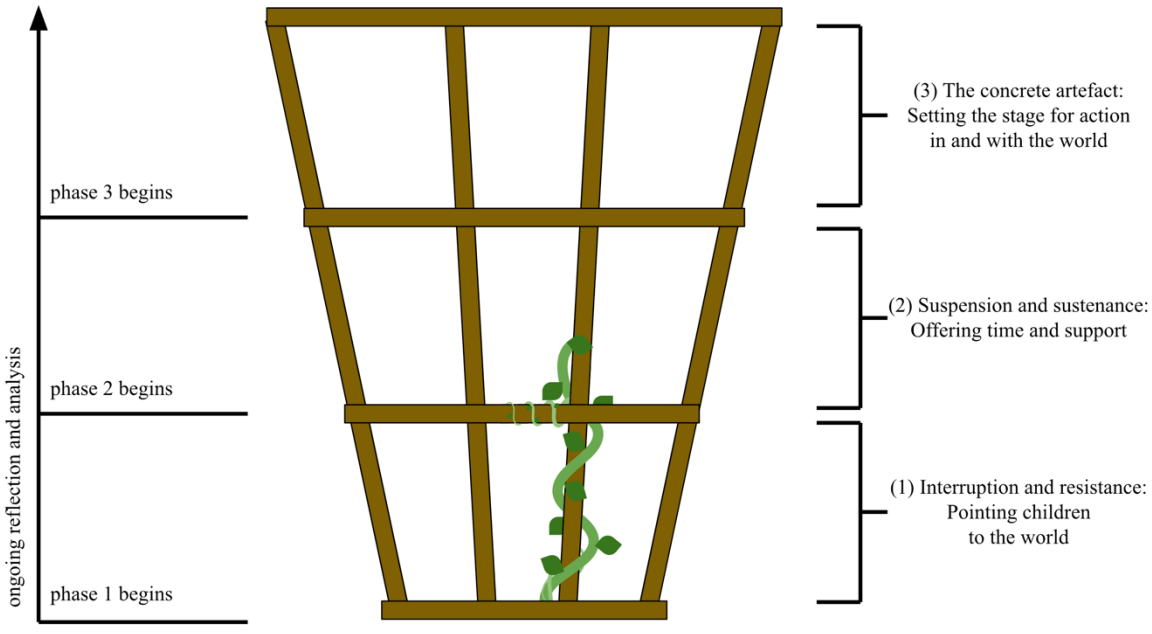

Figure 3.1: Action Research Trellis (adapted from Kemmis et al., 2014)

This framing of action research as a trellis has the potential to realize what Jackson and Mazzei (2017) described as a "process methodology"—a "dynamic becoming" which "gives up static properties of linear method and even cyclical, iterative stages and procedures of conventional qualitative data and analysis" (p. 719). If action researchers are to "challenge the given, to recognise the nearly known and to support the creation of trustworthy, transformational knowing" (Cook, 2009, p. 289)—knowing that leads to transformation in practice—then exploring and embracing these "messy areas" (p. 281) made possible by action research are vitally important research processes. By making visible these "messy areas," I hope that the action research trellis might help to make such inquiry possible.

Limitations of the Research Design

Before proceeding, I want to address twin critiques regularly leveled at action research writ large and one additional limitation specific to the design of the present study. First, I explore the critique that, as inquiry enacted by practitioners, action research lacks rigor (see Rowell, 2019). I then discuss the critique that action research has relatively little impact (see Rideout & Feldman, 2002). Lastly, I examine a possible limitation regarding the ways in which I positioned the children as participants within the present study.

Action Research and Rigor. Educational action research is sometimes dismissed as lacking rigor, the "quality of being extremely thorough and careful in conducting research" (Rowell, 2019, p. 117). This question of rigor in action research may derive from the fact that, in the context of K–12 teacher self-study, teacher-researchers are often

professional educators first and foremost. As such, educational action research bears a number of similarities to the act of teaching itself—both are "intuitive process[es] carried out idiosyncratically by… teachers" (Mills, 2007, p. 14). These idiosyncrasies inherent in both teaching and educational action research, however, do not necessarily indicate a lack of rigor. The issue, rather, may be "a lack of accounting of research rigor within action research projects" (Newton & Burgess, 2008, p. 27). Rigor, then, further means that the teacher-researcher is thorough in the ways that they document and report on action research. In this manuscript, I aimed to demonstrate the rigor with which this inquiry was undertaken by thoroughly articulating the processes and procedures employed throughout the present study, openly acknowledging, for example, the points at which my implementation of those procedures changed.

Beyond traditional notions of scholarly rigor, there are alternative framings of rigor within qualitative research, critical inquiry, educational research, and action research, in particular. Levin (2012), for example, noted that rigor and relevance are viewed as opposites within many forms of research, with rigor typically framed as "fundamental" and relevance understood as merely "nice to have" (p. 134)—but in action research, for which the inquiry is intentionally situated within a specific lived context, rigor and relevance ought to be viewed separately as two independent criteria. Another conception of rigor within educational action research is "the rigor associated with the larger context of opposition and resistance within which most educational action research exists today" (Rowell, 2019, p. 124). That is to say: In the context of the present study, rigor might mean being thorough, but it might equally mean engaging in critical dialogue

at the intersections of the situated context and broader professional issues.

Action Research and Impact. Despite the rich body of literature pointing to the potential of action research in educational contexts, Rideout and Feldman (2002) noted: "action research has had little impact on research in music education and music student teaching" (p. 882). Similarly, Cain (2008) noted of action research studies within music education:

> it would be misleading to argue that these reports are strongly influenced by historical, political and ideological contexts, or that action researchers in music education are generally concerned with changing such contexts; such change as occurs is usually conceptualised as having a local effect, rather than being allied to wider political movements. (p. 309)

To have only a localized effect is not the same as having no effect at all. In a separate review of educational action research in music education contexts, the same author noted that practitioner research "often has profound benefits for the teacher-researchers who undertake them, and for their students" (Cain, 2014, p. 96) and that, unlike other forms of research, these changes are often realized in the moment and within the embedded teaching context. While such changes within educational action research manifest at the level of the personal and the local, critical and relational scholarship invites "the possibility for methodological strategies that link more macro-level discursive patternings… with more micro-level and localized practices" (Kuntz, 2016, p. 75). These micro- and macro-contexts—the individual classroom and the broader social contexts within which the classroom operates—"perpetually (re)create one another anew" (p. 75)

and thus hold the potential to influence one another. Marking a similar distinction within music education, Small (1977/1996) noted that "art, education and society move in a kind of loosely lockstepped three-legged race… society as a whole exerts the most leverage but since it is ideas that shape society none is completely without influence" (p. 206). The ideas explored through and generated within the context of action research matter in that they can create meaningful, material change in localized contexts while simultaneously engaging with "*broader historical, political and ideological contexts*" (Somekh, 2006, p. 8, emphasis in original).

Positioning of Participants within the Study. Lastly, I would like to further explore a possible critique specific to the design of this particular study. Upon a cursory glance, there appears to be a tension between the emancipatory roots of such an inquiry, as Freire (1970/2018) argued that critical pedagogies "must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed… in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 48, emphasis in original; see also Kincheloe et al. 2017), and the ways in which I situated the children as participants within the present study. I emphasized the subject-ness of children when describing the aims of this study, and yet I crafted a research design in which I situated myself as a co-participant alongside the children (CEAR) rather than situating the children as co-researchers alongside myself (CPAR). As previously noted, this decision was made as a means of consciously aligning my assembled research design with the focus on teacher actions toward the subject-ness of children inherent in my chosen theoretical framework. In this context, participation does not necessarily mean that the children were deeply involved in the planning of the study itself, but that their

"appropriate contributions" (Somekh, 2006, p. 7) within the classroom responsively influenced the ways in which the curriculum project unfolded. Rather than ignore or conceal the power differential which existed between myself and the children, then, I sought to consciously make this power differential visible through in situ classroom decision-making guided by care, "constantly attending to the relationship and considering whether actions are creating inequitable or ethically ambiguous conditions" (Cuenca & Park Rogers, 2019, p. 56). This way of framing research participation was particularly important in the present study in that "ethical orientations to children [as research participants]… take shape within the local contexts of difference instantiated by ongoing research relationships" (Raffety, 2015, p. 416). Counter to the perceived tension between my critical hopes for this study and my teacher-centered theoretical framework, the positioning of various stakeholders within this study made visible the circulation of power within the research setting and enabled, however imperfectly, the ongoing negotiation thereof.

The Project Site and Participants

The purpose of this study was to explore the emergence of subject-ness among children in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class. In an effort to engage in this work "*from within*" (Kemmis, 2010, p. 25, emphasis in original) such a context, I chose to conduct this study at Oceanfront Elementary School,[7] a public school in a small town in Alaska. In January, February, and March 2023, at which time this

[7] To protect the privacy of participants, all school and participant names are pseudonyms throughout this report. I chose the pseudonyms for the school, children, and classroom visitors while the classroom teachers chose their own pseudonyms.

study took place, I was in my eleventh year as music teacher at the school. Music, library, and physical education classes took place at the school in 35-minute periods and were taught by specialists to each K–5th grade class on a three-day rotation.

During the 2022–2023 school year, approximately 400 children were enrolled in PreK–5th grade (ages 4–11) at Oceanfront Elementary School. Of those children, approximately 58% identified as White, 26% as two or more races, 9% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 6% as Hispanic/Latino, and 1% as Asian or Pacific Islander. A Title 1 school, approximately 51% of the children at Oceanfront Elementary School qualified as low-income during that school year. As the only public, non-charter elementary school in the community, approximately 29% of the children received services under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the school housed multiple classrooms, programs, and supports for children who experienced special needs.[8]

An issue raised in many studies involving critical paradigms in music education is the need to begin critical work earlier in the child's life. Similar claims have been made by Kaufman (2020) and Grissom-Broughton (2020) in the context of higher education, Bylica (2020) in the context of middle school general music education, and Schoppe (2022) in the context of 5th grade general music education. Grissom-Broughton (2020) described the issue in this way: "Because of the many years of indoctrination into an educational system that promotes systematic forms of oppression and traditional roles of teaching (i.e., teacher as authority, learner as subordinate), most students are not

[8] I drew this demographic information from multiple publicly available sources. To protect the privacy of participants, I have rounded these demographic figures and chosen not to provide citations.

receptive to diverse approaches to teaching…" (p. 170).

In the present study, I aimed to address this issue in two ways. First, I sought to recruit participants from a school-based early childhood context—a context in which children were still coming to know institutional power structures. While Oceanfront Elementary School did offer a pre-kindergarten class, enrollment was limited. As such, kindergarten was the first school-based experience for most children in the community—children for whom the aforementioned "indoctrination" (Grissom-Broughton, 2020, p. 170) had only just begun, at least within K–12 settings. As such, I suspected that these young children might be relatively willing and able to play—in a very literal sense—with themes of subject-ness, world-centeredness, and interdependence. Second, I sought to recruit participants whose classroom teachers' approaches I thought might be consonant with an exploration of subject-ness among children. In particular, I thought of Ms. Bailey, a kindergarten teacher especially interested in relational teaching and in social-emotional growth among children.

With those two purposes in mind, I engaged in purposive sampling (Bernard, 2013) and selected three groups of children from which I recruited participants for this study: Ms. Spin's kindergarten class, of which 16 out of 17 children participated; Ms. Hemsworth's kindergarten class, of which 15 out of 17 children participated; and Ms. Bailey's class, of which all 19 children participated (including one additional child who regularly joined Ms. Bailey's group for music, library, and physical education classes and spent much of the rest of the day in a class for children who experienced emotional disturbance). In the initial stages of the study, the participants consisted of these three

intact groups of children and myself. Several additions were made as the study progressed: The members of three kindergarten families, one for each class, participated by visiting, listening to the children perform the lullaby they created, and engaging in dialogue with the children; and Ms. Bailey herself emerged along the way as an additional co-participant and "critical friend" (Schuck & Russell, 2005).

Overview of the Curriculum Project

The purpose of this curriculum project was to create possible conditions and opportunities in which "grown-up" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51) subject-ness might emerge and be negotiated. This purpose was addressed primarily through engagements with lullaby songwriting. The project unfolded in three smaller instructional phases, each of which corresponded to a consideration for practice detailed in a position paper on the use of project-based teaching toward world-centered education (Dillon, 2023a):

(1) Interruption and Resistance: Pointing Children to the World (three lessons). In this phase, the children engaged in a series of musical activities in which they explored the nature of lullabies. Children shared and demonstrated the ways in which they already understood and experienced lullabies, learned to sing "Hush, Little Baby," performed the song for a baby doll, rearranged "Hush, Little Baby" to be about their own personal interests, and were introduced to the project as a whole. The purposes of this phase were to honor the ways in which the children already understood and experienced lullabies, to frame lullabies as a musical means of caring for one another, and to engage in lullaby songwriting focused on the self.

(2) Suspension and Sustenance: Offering Time and Support (four lessons). In this phase, each group of children was tasked with collectively composing a new lullaby for Sam, the baby doll. The children engaged in dialogue, using what they knew about Sam and about lullabies to make compositional decisions relating to lyrics, melodic contour, instrumentation, and other musical features. During this phase, the children developed the musical skills that they needed to enact those musical decisions, such as ukulele performance skills. This phase culminated in a class performance of the lullaby for Sam. The purpose of this phase was to engage in lullaby songwriting focused on an imagined other while developing the musical skills necessary to enact such a lullaby.

(3) The Concrete Artefact: Setting the Stage for Action in and with the World (four lessons). In this phase, the children were introduced to a real baby, infant, or toddler in the school community and were tasked with re-imagining their class lullaby for this new, real-world audience. This phase included musical revisions determined by the children and, more importantly, dialogue about why such revisions might be necessary when considering the needs of their new audience. The purposes of this phase were to point the children outward toward the world by engaging collectively in lullaby songwriting focused on an actual person beyond themselves, to offer the lullaby to that person as an act of caring, and to engage in critical dialogue and reflection.

As previously stated, many of the children's "appropriate contributions" (Somekh, 2006, p. 7) guided key aspects of this project, such as the selection of instruments that might

accompany a lullaby composition (and, thus, particular instrumental skills to be taught later in the curriculum unit) or the means of sharing the lullaby with the intended audience. As such, the structure posed above was used with each of the three groups of children, but the specific activities that took place with each class and within each lesson differed. See Appendix D for an outline of the curriculum project. In Chapter 4, I offer a detailed exploration of the curriculum project both as planned and as enacted.

Data Collection

Multiple forms of data were collected as part of this study, including 33 recorded observations of class periods in which the curriculum project was enacted, 15 focus group interviews with children participating in the study, one individual interview with a kindergarten teacher, 54 research journal entries, and various artifacts. Patton (2015) described this use of multiple sources of evidence within qualitative research as a form of triangulation. Drawing upon White's (2016a) work involving dialogic pedagogy in early childhood settings, I recorded each class session and focus group interview in split-screen through a "polyphonic approach to video data generation" (White, 2016b, p. 6), enabling me to analyze the data from multiple perspectives and in ways which accounted for non-verbal engagements, too (see also Bell, 2010).

Study procedures were cleared through Boston University's Institutional Review Board. Further approval to pursue this study was provided both by the principal of the site at which the study took place and the superintendent of the school district to which the site belonged. Written consent was collected from the guardians of each of the children, from a paraeducator who worked in the music class in a supportive capacity,

from student family members visiting our class, and from a classroom teacher who became a co-participant later in the study (see Appendices A–C). Considering the young age of the children, assent was addressed in two stages: First, the three classroom teachers provided an explanation of the study to the children at the outset of the project; and second, assent was conceived of as an ongoing process—as offered (and revoked) by children in the moment through their active participation in the curriculum project. For example, a child might physically withdraw from an individual activity or verbally decline participation in a focus group interview, thus removing themselves from that instance of data collection. Each of the children and their guardians were assured that participation in the study would not impact their music class grade or their access to any other opportunities. Similarly, children who did not participate in the study (or whose guardians declined to give their consent) were still able to fully participate in the music class without any impact on their music class grade or access to any other opportunities. To ensure that these commitments were met, a school administrator served as a third-party records custodian during the data collection process so that I was unaware of which children were participating until after data collection had concluded. At that time, data pertaining to any children not participating in the study were discarded.

In the following sections, I offer an overview and rationale for each of the means of data collection employed in the present study.

Observations

As previously stated, each class session within this study was recorded in split-screen using a "polyphonic approach to video data generation" (White, 2016b, p. 6; see

also 2016a). This process enabled me to remain focused on the children during class sessions and provided me with opportunities to later observe each lesson from multiple simultaneous perspectives (White, 2016a) while documenting field notes (Schmidt, 2014). Along the participant-observer continuum, this arrangement is described as complete participant-observation (Spradley, 1980; see also Schmidt, 2014). As noted by Patton (2015), the primary purpose of such observation is "to *describe in depth and detail* the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed" (p. 332, emphasis in original). Within this specific context, observations were also an opportunity to collect "music-in-the-moment data" (Pellegrino, 2014, p. 307) as the children engaged in songwriting and performance-based activities. Significantly, the data collected through these video observations were analyzed visually and holistically, rather than just textually through the use of transcripts. As Kuntz (2016) noted: "we might strive to understand voice before its easy extraction; indeed, voice embedded within material context—rather than extracted and interpreted from without—may not be voice at all: new possibilities emerge in such lines of flight" (p. 58). That is to say, my use of polyphonic video as a means of observation was an effort toward meaning-making within context, rather than without.

Interviews

While planning this study, I decided to center dialogue within the curriculum project as a means of unpacking and exploring moments in which the emergence and negotiation of subject-ness might be perceived. As such, interviews constituted a key

source of data within this study. At the conclusion of each of the three curricular units, I conducted focus group interviews with children during class time using a station rotation model. Facilitating these initial focus group interviews within the context of our music class time was a means of addressing a common critique of focus group interviews: that they often take place outside of the natural setting for such social interactions (Madriz, 2000, p. 836). One strength of the focus group model employed in this study is that, unlike in individual interviews, focus group participants "get to hear each other's responses and… make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say" (Patton, 2015, p. 475). That is to say, their responses are inherently social in the same way that their understandings may be social. I offer a more detailed illustration of these focus group interviews in Chapter 4. In Appendix E, I share the protocol I used to guide these focus group interviews.

After a preliminary analysis of the data collected as part of Focus Group Interview 2, I invited a smaller group of children within each class to participate in a follow-up focus group interview—a process I then repeated after Focus Group Interview 3. This use of follow-up focus group interviews somewhat ameliorated the limited response time available to individuals within focus group interviews (see Patton, 2015). With this in mind, I selected children to participate in these follow-up focus group interviews for a variety of reasons, including: to follow-up on a discussion that took place during a prior focus group interview; to follow-up on a particular moment that took place during a prior class period; and/or to provide additional response time for children who were interested in the topic of discussion in a prior focus group interview, but who said

they wanted more time to think before responding, who experienced speech-related difficulties, and/or who had a difficult time getting a word in edgewise with their peers. Additionally, these follow-up focus group interviews provided me with opportunities to ask the children about project photographs and videos documented throughout the process—enabling me to "cross-check [my] interpretations with children" (Harris, 2023, p. 36).

I conducted an individual interview with Ms. Bailey at the conclusion of the curriculum project (Appendix F). As I communicated with Ms. Bailey as a "critical friend" (Schuck & Russell, 2005) throughout the implementation of the curriculum project and because Ms. Bailey participated in the final lullaby sharing lesson alongside the children, interviewing Ms. Bailey helped me to check my own interpretation of the data with another educator who was physically present and had a relationship with the same children.

All interviews conducted within this project were semi-structured, featuring a series of generative, open-ended questions while providing me with opportunities "to pursue further detail concerning topics that arise in discussions" (Roulston, 2014, p. 251) with participants. Within this semi-structured format, I employed reflective language to make it clear "to children our desire to engage with their thoughts, feelings and ideas" (Harris, 2023, p. 34) and to avoid assuming the meanings of their utterances.

Research Journal

Throughout the course of this study, I maintained a research journal documenting and reflecting upon the entire process. The act of journal writing "allows one to reflect, to

dig deeper if you will, into the heart of the words, beliefs, and behaviors we describe in our journals" (Janesick, 1999, p. 513). Within qualitative research, such journal entries can serve as a means of triangulating other forms of data collected. Most of my journal entries were recorded as voice memos—in dialogue with myself—before being transcribed into textual form. Journaling in this way served as a means of collecting data while simultaneously providing me with the opportunity to process research interactions and reflect upon research experiences throughout the inquiry. As noted by Feldman et al. (2018): "Keeping such a research journal ensures that data collection is not artificially separated from reflection and analysis, nor from your actions as a practitioner" (p. 20).

Artifacts

Various material and digital artifacts were collected throughout the course of the study, including graphic notation of lullaby compositions, lesson plans, emails with a kindergarten teacher, and photographs and videos of classroom activities. Such "shards" of "embodied knowledge" (Allender and Manke, 2002, p. 15) were drawn as a means of holistically situating the inquiry within its material contexts (Kuntz, 2016), broadening the body of data collected "to provide a different perspective on a particular phenomenon" (Wildemuth, 2009, p. 164), and, in some instances, to share with the children. Photographs and videos of in-class interactions and music-making that took place earlier in the project, for example, were incorporated into later lessons and focus group interviews to foster moments of dialogue in "a flowing series of reflections and refractions joining our art with more words" (Allender & Manke, 2002, p. 18).

The lesson plans and graphic notation of lullaby compositions were both collected as dynamic forms of evidence subject to what Webb et al. (2000) described as accretion and erosion. Originally referring to the ways in which physical evidence accumulates deposits of additional material and/or naturally deteriorates over time—and the ways in which such changes might be telling within a research context—I draw upon the concepts of accretion and erosion with regard to digital artifacts, too. The lesson plans, for example, were documented using a computer-based writing application which logged a history of revisions, enabling me to look back and—in concert with other forms of data, such as research journal entries—explore the ways in which ideas were accreted into or eroded from the lesson plans over time. Similarly, the children and I collectively revised our lullaby compositions and accompanying graphic notation several times throughout the course of the project. The collection of such process-oriented artifacts in the present study enabled "the possibility of returning to a fork in one's developmental road and deciding to try a different path in one's practice" (Allender & Manke, 2004, p. 20) through a process of ongoing analysis, which I will describe in the next section.

Data Analysis

In the present study, data analysis was an ongoing process I engaged in alongside data collection. Feldman et al. (2018) described a four-part cycle for ongoing analysis within teacher self-study: (a) *reading data*, in which the data collected are reviewed; (b) *selecting data*, in which relevant and important details are separated, sorted, and grouped; (c) *presenting data*, in which the selected data are presented in an easily understandable format; and (d) *interpreting data and drawing conclusions*, in which connections are

explored. These recurrent cycles of analysis thus drive future data collection, as when observations and journal entries about one group of children led me to then pursue an individual interview with their classroom teacher.

Coding

As part of this study, I conducted a thematic analysis of the data so as to "arrive at a more nuanced understanding of some social phenomenon through understanding the processes that tend to involve that phenomenon as well as the perceptions, values, and beliefs of people toward it" (Glesne, 2016, p. 184). As noted previously, I engaged in coding and analysis throughout the process of data collection. After data collection was complete, however, I engaged more formally in a cycle of *initial coding* and then in a cycle of *focused coding* (Saldaña, 2021). While examining the data, I generated codes for individual quotes and observations. I then categorized the codes and searched them for patterns relevant to the research questions I sought to address in the present study. Throughout this process, I iteratively revisited the data—re-reading, re-watching, and re-listening—and organized the data in various ways. This process, especially when those categories were organized according to an emphasis on the role of the children or my own role as teacher-researcher, yielded several main themes. Though I determined these themes inductively, each theme unexpectedly corresponded to one of the research questions. Ms. Bailey conducted a member check of her interview transcript and a research mentor conducted a peer review of my coding and analysis.

Validity and Credibility

According to Patton (2015), there are four inquiry elements that determine the credibility of qualitative scholarship: (a) "systematic, in-depth fieldwork;" (b) "systematic and conscientious analysis of data;" (c) "credibility of the inquirer;" and (d) "readers' and users' philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry" (p. 653). In the previous sections, I have demonstrated the thoroughness of my data collection, analysis, and reporting procedures in the present study. I have also established my own credibility as a general music educator and as a member of the school community. That said, alternative framings of validity and credibility within critical qualitative research abound.

Kemmis (2006) argued that "the quality of practitioner research is not just a matter of the technical excellence of practitioner research as 'research'; it is a matter of addressing important problems in thought and action… This is what it means to be 'critical'" (p. 471). One way of evaluating the means by which practitioner research addresses important problems is *catalytic validity*, a consideration of the ways in which such research enacts consciousness-raising and self-understanding (Lather, 1986a, 1986b)—the ways in which individual participants change through their participation in the study. Regarding action research in early childhood contexts, Mac Naughton and Hughes (2009) described such changes in this way: "The changes may be material and/or they may concern how you think and act, so that… you can never revert to how you thought and acted at the start of your project" (p. 215). In addition to focusing on the need for systematic and thorough implementation of my chosen research design, I aimed

to center catalytic validity and the ways in which participants—myself included—may have changed through their participation in the study.

In the context of critical and emancipatory action research, Newton and Burgess (2008) identified two primary forms of validity—forms of validity which "answer the question, 'To what extent has the primary goal of the action research mode been achieved?'" (p. 26). These two primary validities are catalytic validity, as previously discussed, and *democratic validity*. Democratic validity refers to the ways in which all stakeholders were involved in the study or, if not conducted collaboratively, the ways in which multiple perspectives were taken into account (Anderson et al., 2007). As discussed previously in this chapter, the children were meaningfully involved in the present study as co-participants and their "appropriate contributions" (Somekh, 2006, p. 7) influenced the course of the curriculum project. Additionally, the perspectives of the children, their classroom teachers, and some of their family members were actively sought and taken into account at various points in the project.

While primary forms of validity are used to evaluate the emancipatory nature of critical action research, secondary forms of validity are used to ensure that a research project is, indeed, action research (Newton & Burgess, 2008). Such secondary forms of validity include *process validity* and *outcome validity*, both of which are underscored by *dialogic validity*. Process validity, the extent to which research methods attend to and align with the phenomenon of interest (Anderson et al., 2007), was addressed in the present study through triangulation (Patton, 2015) by drawing from multiple sources of data. Outcome validity, the extent to which the problem was solved or more deeply

understood as a result of the action research project, was addressed in the present study through ongoing reflection on the data and the ways in which the data addressed the research questions. Dialogic validity, the extent to which a project has been reviewed by peers, was addressed in the present study through the involvement of several "critical friends" (Schuck & Russell, 2005)—research mentors, classroom teachers, and fellow music educators—who provided feedback throughout the course of the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an account of the research design used in this study and several key decisions which contributed to that design. I then described the participants, research site, curriculum project, data collection procedures, and processes of analysis employed herein. In the next chapter, I present data that illustrate the curriculum project—both the project as I planned it and as enacted with the children. In the subsequent chapter, I analyze the data collected in this study. In the final chapter, I offer a summary of the findings, discuss key implications of this work, and articulate possible areas of future study.

CHAPTER 4: THE CURRICULUM PROJECT

In this action research study, I sought to explore the emergence of subject-ness within a world-centered music class by developing and implementing a curriculum project involving lullaby songwriting. I enacted the curriculum project alongside children in three kindergarten general music classes, threading the project across 11 class periods per group over 8 weeks in January through March 2023. The curriculum project unfolded in three phases, each of which was informed by Biesta's (2021b) means of world-centered education as situated with regard to project-based teaching in music education (Dillon, 2023a). A day-by-day outline of the three phases and each of the lessons therein can be found in Appendix D.

Organized by phase, I offer in each of the following sections: an explanation of the theoretical underpinning of that project phase; a description of the lessons planned for that project phase; and a narrative account of a representative lesson within that phase as enacted alongside a group of children, relying primarily upon data drawn from observations and focus group interviews. In doing so, I aim to provide detailed illustrations of both the design of the curriculum project and the ways in which the project was enacted—both the "'curriculum-as-planned' and 'curriculum-as-lived'" (Stavrou & O'Connell, 2022, p. 168).

Phase 1: Interruption and Resistance, Pointing Children to the World

Drawing upon the work of Prange (2012), Biesta (2021b) argued that teaching is an act of *pointing*. As such, Biesta (2018, 2021b) suggested that teachers ought to point outward in their teaching to the natural, physical, and social world so that students might

encounter the world—and the limitations imposed by the world—directly. Through this process of pointing, "the student might encounter that which the world is asking of the student and, reflexively, the student's own freedom to act in response to that call" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 7; see also Biesta, 2021b). By pointing students toward the world, the teacher poses an *interruption* to the wants of the student, often experienced as *resistance*—as something "'in the way' of the student's trajectory" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 87). One aspect of the critical potential of this process lies in that resistance, as resistance can make something tangible of the student's desires, inviting them to consider those desires consciously and in relation to the limits of the natural, physical, and social world.

The first phase of the curriculum project, implemented across three class periods per group in January 2023, was designed to build toward an interruption. Namely, the activities in the first project phase each involved possible tensions between the personal wants of the children and the framing of lullabies as something we sing not for the self, but for others. The collaborative nature of activities included in this phase invited possibilities for further, emergent opportunities for children to experience this sort of resistance through their enactment of social skills with peers as they navigated and negotiated both consensus and dissensus in group work. Taken together, these experiences with and of resistance were designed to lay the groundwork for a macro-interruption—the challenge to musically care for Sam, the baby doll—that they would then act upon in the next phase of the project. As Bylica (2024) noted of critical composition practices within music education, "moments of uncertainty and disruption caused by such critical musical endeavors can create opportunities for students to

musically grapple with the complex worlds in which they live" (p. 587). While the purpose of this phase was to introduce resistance and to prepare and pose an interruption, ancillary aims included honoring the ways in which the children already understood and experienced lullabies, framing lullabies as a musical means of caring for one another, and engaging in lullaby songwriting focused on the self.

Descriptions of the Phase 1 Lesson Plans

When teaching young children, I typically include a variety of short musical lessons and activities within a single period. With that in mind, I designed the following general format for lesson plans within the curriculum project, each of which lasted approximately 35 minutes.

1. Each class period began with a play-based musical activity not necessarily related to the curriculum project—often a singing game involving movement.
2. As a transition, we all then sat and engaged in a breathing routine together. I encouraged the children to first breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth slowly, then to breathe again but to do so more quietly, and lastly to breathe again with a smile on, if they were willing to do so. While such practices are sometimes framed as a form of social-emotional learning in which children are encouraged to self-regulate, these practices can be implemented by teachers without care and have been critiqued as potentially controlling (see Richerme, 2022; Stearns, 2016). In this case, however, I chose to engage in this routine with the children not as self-surveillance, but as an opportunity for me and the children

to prepare ourselves to meaningfully listen to and engage with one another—not to control the self, but to hold space for the other.

3. After the third breath, we began our project-related task(s) for that class period, sometimes interleaved with additional, unrelated lesson segments.

In the following paragraphs, I draw upon lesson plan data (Artifacts) to describe each of the three class periods within the first phase of the curriculum project.

We began Lesson 1 by playing a known singing game. The children then sat, completed their breathing routine together, and began an activity related to the curriculum project: They listened to me sing "Starlight, Starbright," a lullaby we had not sung in class before. I sang the short melody seven times, pairing each repetition with a different photograph projected on the board—the first two were photographs of my dogs sleeping, the third was a photograph of my ducks sleeping, the fourth photograph showed a moose sleeping, and the fifth, sixth, and seventh photographs featured various babies sleeping. At the end of the song, the children engaged in dialogue based on the prompt, "This is a lullaby… What do lullabies sound like?" On the board, I charted their dialogue while attempting to document the ideas and experiences shared by the children. My intent in doing so was to create space for and to highlight generative, divergent possibilities—rather than reinforcing a uniform understanding of what lullabies might sound like or what it might mean to sing one. We then stood, I taught them to sing "Starlight, Starbright" by rote, and we collectively sang the lullaby for a baby doll. With our remaining class time, we danced and continued an unrelated lesson about guitars and other string instruments.

I began Lesson 2 by introducing the children to a new singing game. We then sat at our assigned seats, completed our breathing routine together, and started the next task in the curriculum project: I sang "Hush, Little Baby," another lullaby we had not previously sung in class, while projecting images from *Hush, Little Baby: A Folk Song with Pictures* (Frazee, 2007). We then engaged in small-group discussions in which we responded to the prompt, "If the teacher were to sing a lullaby for you, what would [the teacher] sing about?" As groups of children shared their ideas with the whole class, I charted their ideas using images projected on the board, an example of which is included in the next section. We then took a break to play another singing game before returning to our seats, at which time I performed for the children our new version of "Hush, Little Baby," highlighting the lyrical contributions of each group. As we prepared to line-up, we reviewed the lullaby definition(s) that they themselves created in the previous class period, and then engaged in dialogue based on the prompt, "How else do you care for others?"

Lesson 3 also began with a singing game. We then sat, completed our breathing routine together, and started the next task in the curriculum project: I sang a version of "Hush, Little Baby" that I created about my own interests, similar to what the children had created using their own interests in the previous lesson. I shared photographs with the students that corresponded to this version of the lullaby and started to explain my lyrical choices to them. During this brief activity, I was interrupted—both literally and theoretically (see Biesta, 2021b; Dillon, 2023a)—twice by an alarm I had hidden near the baby doll and which sounded like a baby crying. The first time this happened, I stopped

what I was doing, picked up the baby doll, and sang “Starlight, Starbright” before putting the baby back into its rocker. The second time, the children joined me in singing the baby doll back to sleep. I then said, “Today, I told you what I want. Last time, you told me what you want. But a lullaby isn’t about me or you—it is about someone else who needs something from us.” While the children had seen the baby doll previously, I then formally introduced them to Sam. We then imagined together a few details about Sam based on the clothes the doll was wearing and the rocker the doll was sitting in. We briefly reviewed their lullaby definition(s) and I told the children that, over the next few weeks, our project would be to create a new lullaby specifically for Sam. We spent the rest of the class period engaging in dialogue about which instruments we might want to use in our lullaby for Sam, brainstorming based on what we knew about lullabies in general and—relying on the details imagined earlier in the class period—what we knew about Sam in particular.

Enacting Phase 1

In the following section, I draw upon polyphonic video observations (White, 2016a, 2016b) to provide a third-person narrative in which I describe the enactment of Lesson 2 with the children in Ms. Spin’s class. This particular lesson implemented with this particular group of children is representative of Phase 1 in that, within this dataset: I balanced open-ended, divergent opportunities for the children to imagine their own versions of a lullaby with closed, convergent questions intended to point the children to specific lullaby features relating to interdependence (see Allsup & Baxter, 2004; Bylica, 2023); the possibility of resistance and micro-interruption emerged in dialogic encounters

involving consensus and dissensus during a collaborative small-group activity; and the lesson itself unfolded in ways that built toward a macro-interruption—a songwriting prompt through which the children would be tasked with using their musical skills not as a form of self-expression but as a means of caring for the other.

A Lesson with Ms. Spin's Class: Emergent and Planned Interruption. While 13 pajama-clad children shuffle into the classroom making train noises and laughing as their line forms into a circle, Kendra cheerfully cries out, "Hello, Mr. Dillon!" The teacher introduces a singing game with which the children are not familiar. The children sing, chase, and play for about 10 minutes before the teacher directs them to return to their assigned seats, which are organized in small groups and designated by color-coded dots on the floor.

Once the children settle onto their dots, the teacher leads them calmly and quietly through a breathing routine that they do every class session when they are about to begin their tasks related to the curriculum project: "In your nose, out your mouth. Can you do the second one even quieter? In your nose, out your mouth. And the last one with a smile on, in your nose and out your mouth." The next part of the curriculum project begins immediately after the third breath.

Mr. Dillon: I have a different lullaby to share with you… This is another lullaby, kind of like last time. *Hush, little baby, don't say a word, Mama's gonna show you a hummingbird.*[9] Do you see it? [Gestures to the book.] *If that*

[9] Throughout the data presented in this manuscript, singing is represented with italicized text.

hummingbird should fly, Mama's gonna show you the evening sky...

The teacher continues singing through the 11 verses of the lullaby as depicted in *Hush, Little Baby: A Folk Song with Pictures* (Frazee, 2007). The children continue to look at the illustrations and listen to the song while fidgeting in their seats. Beginning with the second verse and continuing throughout, the children sing the last word of each verse with the teacher, perhaps making assumptions about the lyrics based on the pictures in the book and the rhyming pattern. By the tenth verse—*If that banjo's out of tune, mama's gonna show you the harvest moon*—their collective singing at the end of the phrase is largely in-tune with the teacher.

Upon singing the last phrase of the lullaby, the teacher directs their attention to a key feature in the book, preparing them for a group activity that they will begin shortly.

Mr. Dillon: *As that moon drifts through the sky, mama's gonna sing you a lullaby*. A lullaby… So, the last time I saw you, you sang a lullaby for the baby doll. Today, though, I'm gonna sing a lullaby for you.

Daisy: [Gasps and looks at the children sitting near her.]

Mr. Dillon: Think about this book. The things that the mama was doing, were they random silly crazy things, or were they things that the kid really likes?

Abigail: Things the kids really like. [Several other children offer similar, overlapping responses.]

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, she was thinking about her baby who likes bugs.

Ember: What!? That's a firefly.

Mr. Dillon: She was thinking about her baby who likes being tucked in… She was

> thinking of her baby who really likes to read [about five or six children finish this sentence with the teacher] books. So, if I'm gonna sing a lullaby for you, that means I need to know what you really like.

Partnering with a child named Jordyn, the teacher then demonstrates the next activity for the class: Working together in small groups (based on the color of their assigned seat dot), children try to settle on an answer together to the prompt, "If someone sang a lullaby for you, what would you like [the lullaby to be about]?" Several children start to share their ideas while Mr. Dillon and Jordyn are still demonstrating, so the teacher says, "Oh, Ember, John, Kendra, it looks like you're ready to try it, is that what was going on?" When Kendra nods her assent, the teacher dismisses the class to begin their group task. A few children get up to go find a group and Mr. Dillon reminds them that they were already sitting in their groups. Those children sit down again and begin to discuss the prompt.

The rest of Jordyn's group is absent today, so the teacher and Jordyn continue to work together. As the children share their ideas, snatches of dialogue can be overheard: "water slides… L.O.L. Surprise… dolls… unicorns… Minnie Mouse… sprinkle doughnuts… Barbie truck… spaghetti…" Mr. Dillon notices that Clarence and Penny no longer appear to be talking with one another—Clarence's arms are folded and he has a scowl on his face. Mr. Dillon joins them and learns that Clarence wants the group to pick his idea, while Penny wants the group to pick her idea. First resisting his impulse to resolve the situation for them and then leaning into an opportunity for the children to experience resistance, Mr. Dillon says calmly, "How are you gonna—? You think about

it and the rest of the class will help you when we get to your group."

When it is time to share, Mr. Dillon sits at the computer, pulling up a projection of six color-coded rectangles, one for each group. As the children in each group share their ideas with the class, Mr. Dillon charts their dialogue by embedding images overlapping each of the color-coded rectangles. In the previous class period, the children and Mr. Dillon engaged in a text-based version of this sort of charted dialogue (Benedict, 2021)—after which Mr. Dillon responsively revised this procedure to be image-based in Lesson 2 and subsequent lessons.

The blue group—Jordyn and Mr. Dillon—choose to make their verse about a doll. In the green group, two children choose spaghetti while another chooses ramen. The teacher adds a picture of noodles because "ramen noodles is like spaghetti" (Mr. Dillon) and then says, "So you think the lullaby for you would talk about noodles." Several children laugh at this and a few say, "yeah." The red group, however, has a steeper challenge ahead of them: reconciling Kendra's interest in L.O.L. Surprise Dolls with John's interest in ice cream.

Mr. Dillon: [Looking first at Kendra and then at John.] Oh, so I hear your idea and your idea. How are we gonna put it together, though? How are we gonna do—

Kendra: … Ice cream L.O.L.!

John: Ice cream in a L.O.L!

Kendra: No, no, no. I know one.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah?

Kendra: Like, a ice cream that looks like a L.O.L.

John: What!?

Dillon: Interesting.

Kendra: No, a L.O.L. that was, like, painted like ice cream.

Before updating the chart and proceeding, the teacher attempts to draw the attention of Kendra, John, and their peers to this act of consensus.

Mr. Dillon: So, some kids, when they, uh, had a disagreement like that, they might argue. They might say, "No! I like my idea, I…" Did [Kendra and John] argue or did they find a way to put it together?

Daisy: They found a way to put it together.

[...]

Mr. Dillon: Yeah. So, I'll put a L.O.L. with the ice cream here.

Several children laugh as the teacher displays an image of a doll alongside an image of an ice cream cone. The teacher then asks the orange group for their contribution.

Ember: Uh, uh, a Barbie doll house.

Abigail: I have that.

Mr. Dillon: Is that what Elijah said, too?

Elijah: I said, I said, Barbie doll truck with a house inside it.

Kendra: Hey, I know those things.

Mr. Dillon: Okay, so you guys[10] did find a way to compromise. So, Elijah, I don't

[10] In my teaching practice, I try not to use gendered terms when referring to groups of children. In this instance and elsewhere in the data, however, I referred to groups of children as "guys." Rather than edit this, I chose to keep this language within the

know if we'll find [a picture] that has the truck. Oh, hey, this one has at least a car at the front of it, so Elijah, this one is gonna fit for both of them.

Elijah: That could be okay.

The yellow group chooses toys, so the teacher adds a picture of a toy store to the chart. The last group includes Penny and Clarence, the two children who seemed to stop working together before the sharing activity began.

Mr. Dillon: Penny and Clarence—let's check-in with them before we get up to play a silly game. Penny and Clarence, did you pick one together?

Penny: Yeah.

Mr. Dillon: What did you pick?

Penny: A big ice cream truck with a girl in it.

Mr. Dillon: Ice cream truck. Clarence, what do you like?

Clarence: I want, I like WALL-E.

Mr. Dillon: Do you mean WALL-E the robot?

Clarence: Mm-hmm.

Kendra: Yeah, he has a stuffy of it and I have a stuffy of Pikachu.

Mr. Dillon: So, how do we find, how do we help them find a way to compromise on their—[Several children verbally respond with overlapping suggestions. A few of those children use their hands to pantomime putting the two ideas

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transcript in an effort to honestly document the ways in which I interacted with the children in the moment. Furthermore, I chose not to edit this quotation as an opportunity for me to reflect on my own word choice and as a reminder to myself that the language I use matters.

together.] Abigail, how could you help them?

Abigail: [In her excitement, Abigail jumps to her feet to offer her response.] Umm, so WALL-E could be the worker in the ice cream shop![11] [Abigail laughs, and so do many of her peers.]

[...]

Mr. Dillon: Here, I'll put WALL-E right here in the driver's seat. [More laughter.] Now, before we get up to play a game, I just wanted to say: Abigail, I noticed that it was really helpful… how you were not thinking about you. You were thinking about all of us. When you found a way to put their ideas together, was Abigail thinking about what she wanted? When Abigail said, "WALL-E in an ice cream truck," is that what Abigail wanted? [Several children share overlapping, mixed responses.] Actually, that isn't. What Abigail wanted was spaghetti. Abigail was thinking with other people. It's hard to do, isn't it, Abigail?

Abigail: Yeah.

The image-based chart of this dialogue is included in Figure 4.1.

The children cheer as Mr. Dillon announces that it is time to play a familiar singing and chasing game. Before the game begins, Mr. Dillon offers an extra safety

[11] I misheard Abigail's comment and thought she suggested that WALL-E could work in an ice cream truck, not an ice cream shop—perhaps because Penny made reference to an ice cream truck earlier in this discussion. I first became aware of this discrepancy between Abigail's suggestion and my understanding of such while reviewing the video observations. In the moment, Abigail and the other children did not raise any concerns about this misunderstanding.

reminder because many of the children are wearing slippers or thick socks for pajama day. Children sing, run, and tag one another while Ember does dances from Fortnite, a video game. When the game is finished, the teacher launches into a performance of their newly-created lullaby, the teacher singing for—and about—the children.

Mr. Dillon: *Hush, little kindergarten, don't say a word, Dillon's gonna buy you an L.O.L. Surprise Doll in ice cream… a Barbie doll house with a truck in it… a zillion toys… a WALL-E driving an ice cream truck… a bunch of dolls… a bunch of noodles…* [Most of the children smile as their attention flicks between the teacher and the dialogue chart. The children laugh multiple times throughout the performance, especially when Mr. Dillon sings about noodles.]

Figure 4.1: Dialogue Chart, Lesson 2, Ms. Spin's Class

After the performance, Mr. Dillon poses one last question for the children. For this conversation, Mr. Dillon sits on the floor and the children scoot up close to him—another responsive revision to the procedures used in the previous class period, which were based on Benedict's (2021) approach to charting dialogue.

Mr. Dillon: Alright, kindergarten. Lullaby. You told me a lot of things about it last time. For example… one of you told us last time that one of the reasons we sing lullabies is to take care of babies. It's like if a baby is having a hard time sleeping or a baby is crying. So lullaby is a special way of taking care of people. What ways do you take care of people? It could be a lullaby, but it doesn't have to be. Daisy, how do you take care of other people?

Daisy: I give my mom a ice pack when her, her, when her knee hurts.

Mr. Dillon: Wow, that's really helpful. Yeah, Kendra?

Kendra: I help them.

Mr. Dillon: Really? Tell me more. How do you help them?

Kendra: Uh, when they fall, I will help them up.

Mr. Dillon: Wow. Yeah, John?

John: Umm, sometimes when my mom is, like, sore, I give her the massager.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, Abigail?

Abigail: Mm, so when people want something for their birthday, I would, I would, I would give it to them.

Mr. Dillon: That's really helpful…

The children form a line for their classroom teacher, and the following dialogue ensues as they walk out into the hallway.

Clarence: Do you know we're gonna have cereal? [This is a pajama day activity.]

Mr. Dillon: Whoa, I'm so jealous! I want cereal.

Elijah: You could come with us.

Mr. Dillon: You know what, I have to teach 2nd grade now. You were thinking about other people, that was nice of you.

Daisy: You can, you can go to your house and have cereal, you know that?

Mr. Dillon: I should. Bye, guys.

Phase 2: Suspension and Sustenance, Offering Time and Support

Encountering the world within a world-centered education is not merely a matter of interruption. Once a child is pointed outward and they are interrupted into an experience of the wants and needs of those around them, they require "time, space, and forms that allow children and students to *practice* grown-up ways of being in and with the world" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 89, emphasis in original). Biesta (2021b) described these needs as *suspension*, time in which children might immerse themselves in and engage with the interruption, and *sustenance*, support as they process such engagements.

I designed the second phase of the curriculum project—in which the children turned their attention outward from revising lullabies to be about the self to creating a new lullaby for Sam—to offer time for the children to generate, play with, and revise their creative decisions. Furthermore, I designed the second phase to offer support to the children as they developed the musical skills needed to enact their lullaby, such as

instrumental performance skills. Having first posed an interruption in the previous phase, the purpose of the second phase was to provide both suspension and sustenance so that the children might be able to act on that interruption. The two ancillary purposes of this phase were to engage the children in lullaby songwriting focused on an imagined other—Sam—while developing the musical skills necessary to enact such a lullaby. This phase lasted four class periods per group and took place in February 2023.

Descriptions of the Phase 2 Lesson Plans

As in the lessons in the previous phase, Lesson 4 began with a singing game and then a breathing routine as the children transitioned into a three-part station rotation. One group of children engaged in a focus group interview with me in which we continued our discussion about musical and non-musical ways of caring for one another (Appendix E), another group explored a few of the instruments we brainstormed in the last class period, and a third group was tasked with caring for Sam. Every 5–8 minutes, the groups rotated until each child had the opportunity to participate in all three activities. After the station rotation, the children and I engaged in a whole-class activity meant to help us refine our instrument selections for Sam's lullaby and to develop performance skills on those instruments. Notably, this instrumental activity differed across each of the three classes because, in the previous lesson, each group brainstormed a different list of instruments that they thought they might want to include in a lullaby for Sam.

After an opening game and breathing routine, Lesson 5 began with a class discussion in which the children brainstormed lyric ideas for Sam's lullaby or—in the case of the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class, who decided to create their lullaby in the

form of a book—ideas for Sam's lullaby book pages. Then, based on their instrument brainstorm and exploratory instrumental station rotation in previous class periods, each class embarked on differing instrumental activities involving string instruments: one class learned to strum a C major chord on the ukulele, another class learned to strum both the C major and a minor chords on the ukulele, and the third class learned to strum the open strings on the guitar and the C major chord on the ukulele. The children attempted to use these instruments alongside egg shakers to accompany a performance of the singing game with which the class period began before reflecting together on the ways in which they may or may not want to use these instruments (and/or chords) in the lullaby they were creating for Sam. Before departing, the children and I reviewed our school song and then notated the melodic contour of the school song on the board—an activity meant to prepare the children for a subsequent lesson in which they would to plan the melodic contour for their own lullaby composition (see Kaschub & Smith, 2009).

During Lesson 6, we began with a singing game, our breathing routine, and an application of the melodic contour notation skills we learned in the previous class period. More specifically, we engaged in dialogue about our chosen lyrics for Sam's lullaby and experimented with various possible melodic contours for those lyrics. We then used clip art, lyrics, and melodic contour markings to collectively notate our draft lullaby for Sam on the board. Before leaving, we attempted our first complete performance of the draft lullaby.

The second phase of the project concluded with Lesson 7, in which we started with a singing game and breathing routine before reviewing the draft lullaby we had

completed in the previous lesson. We then staged a performance of the lullaby for Sam before reflecting on the experience using a station rotation model. One group in the station rotation engaged in a focus group interview with me relating to the lullaby we created and how we might change it further to be about and for people other than Sam (Appendix E); simultaneously, a second group of children watched and listened to a video of me reading *Kat Writes a Song* (Foley, 2018), a children's book in which a cat engages in songwriting to help her friends and neighbors; meanwhile, a third group played with Sam and several puppets. Every 5–8 minutes, the groups rotated until every child had an opportunity to participate in all three activities. After this class period, I reviewed recordings of the in-class focus group interviews and selected a smaller group of participants to engage in a related follow-up focus group interview, which met outside of our music class time.

Enacting Phase 2

In the following section, I illustrate a third-person narrative of data representative of Phase 2. More specifically, I draw upon polyphonic video recordings (White, 2016a, 2016b) of observations and focus group interviews to offer a description of Lesson 4 as enacted with the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class. The children experienced suspension in this lesson through dialogic encounters in which they explored their own wants relative to the needs of others—suspension structured within their first focus group interviews and also emerging spontaneously in a free play activity. The lesson included an opportunity for the children to explore several of the instruments they brainstormed during the previous class period and ended with a reflection activity in which the children

continued to refine their instrument selections for Sam's lullaby—an early example of sustenance which I built upon in the next class period through direct instruction of performance skills using their chosen instruments.

A Lesson with Ms. Hemsworth's Class: Dialogue as Suspension. After playing a singing game, 14 children from Ms. Hemsworth's class sit and breathe together. Mr. Dillon then briefly asks them about their experience with a substitute teacher during the previous class period and reviews the last activity they completed as part of the curriculum project: brainstorming instrument suggestions for Sam's lullaby and, for this specific class, exploring the piano. The music teacher then introduces the next activity, a three-part station rotation. Mr. Dillon notes of the first station, "Your job at Sam's station is to help take care of her"—talking to her, holding her, singing to her, reading a book to her, and so on. Amber demonstrates how to hold Sam while Gabriel suggests one way that the children might ask for a turn to do so. Paraphrasing the instrument brainstorm from the last time the class had worked on the curriculum project, Mr. Dillon introduces the second station in the rotation.

Mr. Dillon: These are some instruments you picked last time. Some of you said, "drums," and some of you went, "no, not drums—it's too loud." So today is your chance. In your group, I want you to try it and see what you think… We'll see what helps Sam. You also said you wanted some shaky things last time, so I put out an egg shaker. And then lastly, your class said, "guitar," and then you went, "wait a minute, that's too loud." And

then you said, [several children complete this sentence with Mr. Dillon] "Ukulele!"

Lastly, Mr. Dillon notes that the third station will be an opportunity to chat with him about the project—their first focus group interview. The two questions asked in this interview are meant to encourage the children to reflect upon Phase 1, which concluded the previous week, while also introducing them to the focus group interview procedures.

The first question is, "What are some ways that people take care of you?" Respondents in the first group describe being taken to the playground (Amber) and receiving food (Alecia) as ways in which they are cared for. In the second group, thinking about acts of care raises an uncomfortable feeling for Logan about his older brother and instances in which that older brother was "mean." In the moment, Mr. Dillon tries to demonstrate his own caring for Logan by acknowledging this feeling and pointing the rest of the group to listen to and support him, but stops when Logan indicates that he does not want to discuss his brother any further. The third group focuses on lullabies and sleep-related ideas in their responses before a minor safety concern draws Mr. Dillon's attention to another group.

Mr. Dillon: So, what are some ways people take care of you? Yeah, go ahead, Mia.

Mia: Umm, my mom used to take care of me and do lullabies.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah?

Mia: And I used to fall back to sleep.

Mr. Dillon: You said she used to. Does she still do that?

Mia: Sometimes.

Mr. Dillon: Sometimes?

Mia: No, she still does it.

[...]

Tom: And sometimes my mom reads me the Bible.

Penelope: Sometimes my mom reads me a story before I go to bed.

Mr. Dillon: [Louder, to the whole class.] We are not done yet, but there are people running at Sam's station and it's making it hard for me to focus on my group. Can you please find a safe way to stand near Sam? Not running around.

Wendy: [Stops running while holding Sam.] This is the first time I hold a baby.

The second question in the focus group interview is, "What are some ways that you help other people with music?" To encourage the first group to think beyond lullabies, Mr. Dillon asks them if singing for someone's birthday might be a way of caring for them with music—but as this is the first time using this station rotation procedure for conducting focus group interviews with this class, he first finds himself supporting a child from another group.

Alecia: Make them a song to make them, to let them go to sleep.

Penelope: [Walks up to Mr. Dillon from Sam's station.] Can you help me figure out which story I should write?

Mr. Dillon: Oh, that's a good question. Right now, I'm helping these kids, so let me just give you an idea. I know that Sam likes animals. [This is a reference to the animals printed on Sam's rocker.]

Penelope: Oh, yeah!

Mr. Dillon: I hope that helps.

[...]

Alecia: When somebody is having a birthday. And my dad did that to me on my birthday when I was 6.

The children in the second group discuss a variety of ways of singing. More specifically, they discuss moments in which they change their singing—and whether they do so for themselves or for their audience.

Gabriel: Oh, I know!

Mr. Dillon: … Yeah, Gabriel?

Gabriel: Um, sing a cute little song.

[...]

Wendy: Singing my favorite song, but very loud.

Mr. Dillon: Now is that for you, or is that for the other person?

Wendy: [Enthusiastically.] My—my brother loves loudness stuff!

Wendy proceeds to share an anecdote about her baby brother sneaking out of his crib, and then she rotates to the last station. Mia starts the third group on a discussion of ukuleles before the children (and teacher) become sidetracked in a discussion of their experiences with “real” babies.

Mr. Dillon: You’ve held a baby two times? Will you tell me about it?

Penelope: A real baby.

Mr. Dillon: A real baby, so not just Sam, but a baby baby?

Penelope: Yes.

Mr. Dillon: Will you tell me about how you were holding the baby?

Penelope: I hold it like, uh, it was one hand at her, at, at her head and I hold one hand at the bottom.

Mr. Dillon: Why did you hold the hand at the head?

Penelope: Makes it softer.

Mr. Dillon: Because it makes it soft, you think?

Penelope. Yeah. Maybe it makes it comfortable.

Mr. Dillon: Maybe it makes it comfortable. Wow. Did you do that because that's where you wanted to put your hand or did someone teach you to put your hand there?

Penelope: My mom teached me.

[...]

David: Umm, I know the right way to hold a baby.

Mr. Dillon: You do?

David: Like this. [Gestures with arms.]

Mr. Dillon: Oh, tell me more: Why is that a great way to hold a baby?

David: Because that helps her to go to sleep.

At Sam's station, which occurs concurrently with the focus group interviews, children interact with and care for the baby doll without the teacher present. As the first group approaches Sam's station, Penelope observes, "She looks so real." Several children in that group take turns holding Sam before turning their attention to some of the nearby

lullaby books. David approaches the baby doll and says to Mia, “Can I please hold her now?” David visibly holds his breath as he lifts Sam from her rocker. The awe on David’s face becomes a smile as he whispers to himself, “She is so cute.” David looks up at Penelope, who is still distracted with some of the materials at the station, and he again whispers about Sam, “She is so cute.” He then looks back to Sam and begins to rock her slowly, saying quietly, “I’ll rock you.” Tom then asks for a turn and David says, “no.” Tom is visibly disappointed and sits down as David offers by way of explanation, “I take long sometimes.” David stops smiling and continues to look at Tom for several more seconds. As another child approaches, David says, “Tom, you can have a turn,” and gently passes Sam to him. As Tom takes Sam, David says, “rock her.” He then points his index finger at Tom and says more firmly, “Rock her to go to sleep, that’s the best way.” Later in the rotation, David creates a story for Sam about going to kindergarten. Near the end of the rotation, Mia puts Sam in the rocker and carefully snaps her in while David improvises a song for Sam about going to the park.

While the children are aware of and accustomed to the devices used to record video observations within this research study, this lesson included their first opportunity to participate in focus group interviews. As they were sometimes distracted by the recording devices during this first focus group interview rotation, Mr. Dillon takes a moment after the station rotation is complete to demonstrate the devices for the children.

Before departing, the children reflect on the instruments they originally brainstormed for their project during a previous class period and those that they encountered during the station rotation today.

Mr. Dillon: Last time, we took piano turns and decided that, yes, piano is gonna be a good fit for Sam. Will you tell me more about the instruments you played today? Yeah, Mia, what do you think?

Mia: Umm, I think the ukulele.

Josiah: Me, too.

Mr. Dillon: … Mia said, "ukulele." Why?

Mia: Because it's nicer than I thought it was gonna be.

Mr. Dillon: It's nicer than you thought it was gonna be. Yeah, Alecia?

[...]

Alecia: The little shaky thing.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, the shaky thing, we call that: egg shaker… What do you think about the egg shaker for Sam?

Alecia: I think it's kind of good.

Mr. Dillon: Kind of good. Why kind of good?

Alecia: Because it's kind of—kind of loud, kind of not.

Notably, none of the children mention the drums at this stage, even though they featured prominently in a previous class period during their original instrument brainstorming session and were included today as an option at the instrument station. The children line-up for their teacher and walk back to their classroom. Mr. Dillon and Wendy sit together in the hallway to briefly unpack her experience at Sam's station, where she was running with the baby and saying things like, "I'm so crazy, I have so much energy!" In reflecting on this experience, she told Mr. Dillon again, "I never holded a baby in my whole life."

She said that she felt scared while holding the baby, and then explained to Mr. Dillon the rules to a game that she, Christopher, and Sam played together at Sam's station.

Phase 3: The Concrete Artefact, Setting the Stage for Action in and with the World

Key to the world-centered potential of project-based teaching in music education is the project itself (Dillon, 2023a)—or, to borrow a term from Helle et al. (2006), the "concrete artefact" (p. 295). As I have written elsewhere about this connection, "it is through the process of engaging with and creating the project itself that students have the potential to *act* in and with the world" and that, if an interruption occurs, the project structure and outcome ought to enable that student to engage further in that subjectifying event in generative, personally meaningful ways" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 10, emphasis in original). Practically, educators can address this suggestion by leaving space for the project to unfold organically and responsively—rather than "defining prescriptive, convergent project outcomes" (p. 10).

The ancillary purposes of the third and final phase of the curriculum project were to point the children outward toward the world by engaging collectively in lullaby songwriting focused on an actual person beyond themselves, to offer the lullaby to that person as an act of caring, and to engage in critical dialogue and reflection. This phase lasted four class periods per group and was enacted in February and March 2023.

Descriptions of the Phase 3 Lesson Plans

In Lesson 8, each class played a singing game and engaged in our breathing routine before being introduced to the person for whom they would soon revise their class lullaby. Using photographs and clip art projected on the board and details shared by the

various families involved, the children in Ms. Spin's class learned about Abigail's little brother, the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class learned about Penelope's little sister, and the children in Ms. Bailey's class learned about Annie's expectant mother and not-yet-born sibling. Using the graphic notation of their lullaby for Sam and their understanding of their new lullaby audience, the children brainstormed together the changes they wanted to explore and then tried some of those changes. After that, we engaged in an unrelated dance activity. Before we got ready to leave, each class discussed ideas for how they might eventually offer their final lullaby to their intended audience.

Lesson 9 began with a singing game and breathing routine before the children played with and finalized their lullaby revisions with their new audience in mind. We also made a decision as to how we would share our lullaby and then performed the lullaby once for ourselves. We then played an unrelated singing game and invited their classroom teacher to join us for the last 5 minutes of class. In those last few minutes, we performed the lullaby again with different children playing the instrument parts and explained to the classroom teacher what exactly we did to make the lullaby special for the intended audience.

As in previous lessons, we started Lesson 10 by playing a singing game and by breathing together. We then prepared the classroom for our visitors: the child for whom we rearranged our class lullaby and that child's family. When they arrived, we performed our lullaby for them and told them about our songwriting process. We then gave them a printed copy of the lullaby graphic notation we had created and engaged in dialogue with the visitors. When the visitors left, we played a movement-based game. As we prepared

to leave, I shared an announcement with the children: that during the next lesson, we would watch a video together featuring several highlights of their engagement in the curriculum project. I asked them, “What do you think you will see when you watch the video?”

Lesson 11 was the last in the curriculum project. As always, we started with a singing game and breathing routine. I then showed the children a supercut video of several key moments of the project specific to their class. We unpacked the video together in a focus group interview (Appendix E), which took place in the context of a station rotation. Simultaneously, children at another station read, sang, and otherwise explored various lullaby picture books. At the third station, children had the opportunity to say goodbye to Sam because, as I explained to them, Sam would soon be moving on to help at another school or with another family. The children rotated through the stations so that each child had the opportunity to engage in all three activities. At their request, I provided several of the children from Ms. Hemsworth’s class each with a blank page from our lullaby book that they could then personalize at home.

Enacting Phase 3

In this section, I describe the enactment of Lesson 10 with Ms. Bailey’s class by illustrating a third-person narrative based on data drawn from polyphonic video observations (White, 2016a, 2016b). In this lesson, the children in Ms. Bailey’s class performed their final lullaby for Annie’s expectant mother and so presented and enacted the “concrete artefact” (Helle et al., 2006, p. 295; see also Dillon, 2023a) central to this curriculum project. In so doing, the children acted upon their burgeoning understandings

of interdependence. As demonstrated in Zane's comments, in particular, some of the children seemed to understand lullaby singing as a means of caring for others and simultaneously acted on that understanding through songwriting, performance, and dialogue with Annie's mother. Put another way, in sharing their lullaby with Annie's mother, the children did "something with these musical skills" (Research Journal).

A Lesson with Ms. Bailey's Class: "Doing Something with these Musical Skills." At the outset of Lesson 10, 19 children from Ms. Bailey's class walk into the music room. As the children move to their seats, many of them smile and laugh while pointing to a cartoon-style picture of their music teacher on the board. Mr. Dillon walks into the room with the end of the line and exclaims, "Ms. Bailey's class! Today is the day, Annie's momma is on the way! She'll be here soon. First, let's play a game." On his way to the piano, Mr. Dillon starts singing the melody to a known singing game while the children sing-along. Today, the teacher adapts the game to give every child the opportunity to run, chase, and sing in a relatively short amount of time—about two and a half minutes for the entire activity. While the children return to their seats laughing and talking amongst themselves, the music teacher takes a moment to greet two new arrivals: Jeremy, a child who frequently joins Ms. Bailey's group for music class; and a paraeducator from one of Oceanfront Elementary School's programs for children who experience special needs.

Anabelle and Brittany help Mr. Dillon move three chairs to the front of the classroom.

Raelynn: Why are we having three chairs?

Mr. Dillon: Good question. Why do you think?

Ryan: Because you're sitting down.

Annie: Because you need to be sitting, and Ms. Bailey, and my mom.

Mr. Dillon: Good guess… So me, yes; your mom, yes; but who's the other person?

Ryan: Annie's dad. [Several children offer overlapping suggestions.]

Mr. Dillon: Actually, it's Annie.

Annie: Me?!

Mr. Dillon: Yeah! I thought maybe you would want to sit with your mom.

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah! [With excitement, Annie gets on her hands and knees before kicking her feet behind her several times.]

Once the chairs are moved, Mr. Dillon calmly explains to the children what will happen when Annie's mom arrives. In anticipation of Annie's mom walking into the room, Zane, Annie, and several other children start to tease about their experiences with babies crying. While this discussion starts with a few children joking that the baby might "cry in your face," the laughter subsides as Annie and Annabelle tell the other children several brief stories involving babies: a baby whose legs wobbled when someone helped him to stand; a toddler who startled the family by walking on his own; an imagined class performance of our lullaby for a real baby while playing ocean sounds in the background; and a baby doll that played recorded music.

Ms. Jamie—Annie's mom—walks into the classroom, sits in one of the three chairs at the front of the room, and embraces her daughter. Ms. Bailey walks in, too, and takes a seat in the back of the classroom. For the first few questions of the ensuing

dialogue, the music teacher guides the children in explaining their songwriting process to Ms. Jamie. The graphic notation the children describe in the following section is included in Figure 4.2.

Mr. Dillon: Thank you for being here, Ms. Jamie! We've been learning about how to take care of people with music and we decided to make a lullaby. I'm gonna point to a couple parts of our lullaby. Could you raise your hand if you could tell Ms. Jamie what it means? Like these arrows, could you raise your hand if you could tell her: Why is *go to sleep* an up arrow? Why is *my* going down? Faye, why are those arrows there?

Faye: It goes up.

Mr. Dillon: What goes up?

Faye: Umm, it goes up to for you to go even higher.

Mr. Dillon: What goes higher? My hand, my voice, my instrument?

Faye: Your voice.

Mr. Dillon: Your voice. Oh, so that's showing us how our singing's gonna go.

[...]

Mr. Dillon: What about these pictures over here? Why popcorn? Why Legos? Why seashells?

Raelynn: Because Annie likes it.

Jeremy: I love Legos.

Mr. Dillon: I hear Jeremy likes it, but is this the Jeremy lullaby? [Several children respond, "no."] Or Raelynn said, because Annie likes it? [Zane raises his

Figure 4.2: Graphic Notation for Ms. Bailey's Class Lullaby During Phase 3[12, 13]

hand.] Zane, did you want to add something about it?

Zane: Yeah.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, what's that, Zane?

Zane: Becau—, because they're like doing that stuff.

Mr. Dillon: Who likes doing that stuff?

Zane: Annie's mom and Annie's dad and Annie.

After explaining the lullaby notation and the various songwriting processes we had previously engaged in, Mr. Dillon invites the children to scoot off of their assigned

[12] To protect the privacy of Annie and her family, I redacted a portion of this graphic notation. In the original, a photograph of Annie was included on the right side of the graphic notation. In the photo, Annie was smiling and holding a printed sonogram of her not-yet-born sibling, for whom we composed this lullaby.

[13] See Appendix G for this same lullaby documented using Western art notation.

seats and move up close to the front of the classroom. The children then perform the lullaby for Ms. Jamie in two different ways: once with all of the children singing while Mr. Dillon accompanies on the piano; and once using their chosen instrumentation—all of the children singing, half of the children playing a C major chord on ukulele, and one child playing a rainstick. While the children prepare for this second performance by getting their instruments, Mr. Dillon reminds Gabrielle how to hold the ukulele. While most of the children smile, sing, play, and make eye contact with Ms. Jamie during these performances, Michael notably stops singing when it is not his turn to play an instrument. The children sing:

Go to sleep, my popcorn, go to sleep, my baby.

Go to sleep, my Legos, go to sleep, my baby.

Go to sleep, my shell, go to sleep, my baby.

Go to sleep, my star, go to sleep, my baby.

Ms. Jamie claps. Mr. Dillon dismisses the children to put their instruments away. While the children do so, Mr. Dillon and Ms. Jamie talk about the use of the rainstick, which was inspired by the way in which this particular group of children often mentioned in earlier lessons that they associated ocean sounds, white noise, and other background sounds with sleep. Ms. Jamie then shares that Annie sometimes listens to white noise played on a meditation mobile app while trying to fall asleep.

Mr. Dillon: Hey, umm, before Ms. Jamie goes, did you want to tell her what is it that we have for her here? [Grace raises her hand.] Grace, did you want to tell her? What do we have for her?

Grace: No, but everyone is so close to me.

Mr. Dillon: Oh, so what are you gonna say to help get space for yourself? [Michael scoots a few inches away from Grace.] Wow, Michael, you can already just tell. The words I would say is, "Jackson, can you please scoot over?" I hope you try that, Grace. I bet if you say it, he'll scoot over. Zane, do you want to tell Ms. Jamie? What do we have for her?

Zane: Pieces of paper that are the same as that. [Zane points to the lullaby notation projected on the board.]

Mr. Dillon: Yes. We've got one for Annie and one for you. So, when Baby comes, you can remember how to sing the lullaby for her.

Ms. Jamie: She's gonna love it, you guys. We're gonna have to sing to her when she's born.

Annie: [Pointing to the printed notation.] Mommy, but, like, the—like, you would have to go, like, the voice would have to go louder and that's what Anabelle's idea was.

Ms. Jamie: That is a great idea. Good job, Anabelle. Where you at, girl?

[...]

Mr. Dillon: Did anyone want to say anything else before we let Ms. Jamie go? Anything else about our project?

[...]

Zane: I was happy that her come.

Mr. Dillon: You're happy that she came?

Ms. Jamie: Oh, I'm happy that I got to come, too.

Mr. Dillon: Sophia, what's up?

Sophia: We made this lullaby, basically all by ourselves, basically.

Ms. Jamie: I know, that's what I heard. I'm so proud of you guys. That is so cool.

Mr. Dillon: Mr. Ryan, what's up?

Ryan: Did you like it?

Ms. Jamie: I loved it. I can't wait to get it printed out and we'll have to sing it to our baby as soon as she's born. It's probably gonna help her sleep through the night, so that's gonna help a lot.

[…]

Ms. Jamie: We could still sing this to her now. [Natalie stares intently at Ms. Jamie.] Yeah, because she can hear us. We could start singing it for her so that when she's born, she'll already know the lullaby—she just won't be able to sing it because she's a baby. [Ms. Jamie and several children laugh.]

After Ms. Jamie and Ms. Bailey leave, Mr. Dillon asks the children if there is anything else they want to say about the project, to which Jeremy says that he wants to play a game. Before playing that game, Annie tells the class that her mom brought treats for them to eat when they get back to their classroom "because we worked pretty hard on making the lullaby." After the game, as the children prepare to leave, Mr. Dillon informs them that they will have the opportunity to say goodbye to Sam during the next class period and offers the following question for them to think about until then.

Mr. Dillon: I'm making a movie of you guys. You see how I have my two cameras that have been there this whole time, right? So, let me tell you. When I watch these videos, I see you learning how to play ukulele. I see you learning how to sing. I see you growing up. I see you learning how to play instruments. I see you learning how to take care of each other. I see you taking care of Annie's family. I see you taking care of Sam. I see you doing so many really lovely things in those videos. What do you think you are gonna see when you watch yourself in the movie next time?

[...]

Faye: I'm happy to see I on the video.

Ms. Bailey returns to the music room to collect the children and they depart together back to their classroom.

Summary

In this chapter, I sought to describe the three phases of the curriculum project and share representative data samples in ways that illustrated the enactment of the project alongside the children. In the following chapter, I analyze the data collected in terms of subject-ness "snapshots" (Research Journal Entry), the role of pointing as an invitation to explore subject-ness, and the ways in which I changed through participation in this study.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In an effort to explore the emergence of subject-ness among children in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class, I conducted a critical educational action research study involving the creation and enactment of a curriculum project. In this chapter, I present and analyze the data in relation to three overarching themes: snapshots of emergent subject-ness in childhood; pointing as an invitation for children to explore subject-ness; and the reflexive gifts of teaching. Each of these themes was identified inductively and yet, in the processes of coding, categorizing, and analyzing, it became clear to me that each loosely corresponded to one of the research questions addressed in this study. While these connections were not intentional or sought out, I lean into them in the sections that follow, framing each overarching theme in relation to one of the three research questions. The research questions are as follows:

1. In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher perceive the enactment of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?
2. In what ways, if any, do world-centered experiences in elementary general music education support the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?
    a. What role, if any, does the teacher-researcher have in supporting or hindering the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?
    b. What role, if any, does dialogue play in the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?

3. In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher change through critical participation in this study?

Snapshots of Emergent Subject-ness in Childhood

Examples of subject-ness—"down-to-earth, and tangible description[s] of what subjectification may be about" (Dyndahl, 2021, p. 173)—are scarce in the research on music education contexts. As an entry point into the present exploration of subject-ness, I initially designed the first research question to focus my attention on the possibility of such examples as they emerged and were actively negotiated in context and in relation to the ways in which children explained their own understandings of subject-ness. As the study evolved, however, my focus shifted from the use of dialogue as a means of addressing subject-ness directly to dialogue as a sort of playground upon which subject-ness was made tangible. As my focus shifted in this regard, so, too, did the research question. One risk of this shift from focusing on a child's understanding of subject-ness to a child's enactment of subject-ness, however, is that the perception of such enactment becomes wholly subject to my interpretation as the teacher-researcher. As such, the final iteration of this research question is as follows: In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher perceive the enactment of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?

In each of the following sections, I first explore a sub-theme related to subject-ness before developing a relevant "snapshot" (Research Journal Entry) of the data. To ameliorate the risk described above—that I alone tell the story of and interpret each snapshot—I draw upon the voices and actions of the children involved to more fully

provide a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 10; see also Ponterotto, 2006) of each interaction.

Operationalizing Mature Subject-ness as Care

In an online lecture for the University of South Australia, Biesta (2021c) offered gardening as a concrete example of world-centeredness in education. While Biesta did not specifically use the term care to describe this interaction between child and plant, I did in a position paper that preceded this study while paraphrasing Biesta's point: "This project is an example of the 'world-centeredness [of] everyday practice' (Biesta, 2021[c], 56:30) in that, much like caring for a plant or an animal, soothing a baby is 'precisely an encounter with something that asks something from you' (55:27)" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 11). As early as the first week of the present study, notions of care began to feature in my research journal as I continued to reflect on Biesta's (2021c) lecture:

> Maybe we push this further beyond into that sort of "taking care of the classroom as an organism" [paraphrased from Biesta (2021c, 56:11)] sort of way of thinking? Of course, it'll be complicated and interesting to see how to manage that musically. Because one of the reasons this baby idea is so interesting to me is because it is an intrinsically musical activity that involves caring for others. (Research Journal Entry)

While acts of care and the enactment of subject-ness are not conceptually interchangeable, in the context of this study, I regularly operationalized subject-ness as care. More specifically, I drew upon Hendricks' (2023) conception of "caring *with*," "a starting point of attentiveness, responsibility, competency, and responsivity to all those

involved in and affected by our musical experiences" (p. 34, emphasis in original), as a means of actualizing what Biesta (2021b) described as "grown-up" (p. 51) forms of subject-ness—subject-ness bounded by and in relation to the world. In relating this to the present study, I refer specifically to the social world and the ways in which subject-ness enacted in relation to the limits imposed by the needs of others (Biesta, 2021b) is implicated in and by acts of compassionate care (Hendricks, 2023).

Before proceeding with examples of the operationalization of subject-ness as care, I would like to highlight a relevant issue regarding the nature of lullabies. As noted previously, I was drawn to the use of lullabies in this project about subject-ness because I believed lullaby singing to be "an intrinsically musical activity that involves caring for others" (Research Journal Entry). It is possible, however, to engage in lullaby songwriting and performance for other purposes. When asked early in the project about what makes a song a lullaby, for example, the following dialogue unfolded in Ms. Spin's class:

Daisy: It needs to sound beautiful.

Ember: And it's a song.

Mr. Dillon: Well, why does it have to sound beautiful?

Jordyn: Because sometimes parents are watching and we want to sounded beautiful.

While Jordyn's explanation about parents watching may be important to her understanding of music-making more broadly, it demonstrates that there are ways of engaging in lullaby performance in which caring for the other is not the primary purpose

of the musical interaction. And yet, even if singing a lullaby does not necessitate the emergence of care or subject-ness, it does create a social space between performer and audience, even an imagined audience, within which care and subject-ness are invited—a space to which teachers can "point" (Biesta, 2021b; see also Prange, 2012).

As teacher-researcher, I regularly connected care and lullaby in our discussions of the project—connections that the children sometimes invoked, as well. Consider, for example, this dialogue in Ms. Hemsworth's class in which we tried to explain our Phase 2 task—creating a lullaby for a baby doll, unlike Phase 1, during which they created lullabies for themselves—to two children who were absent in the previous class period:

Mr. Dillon: Aubrey, what's our project? What are we working on in here, do you know? I'll give you a hint: It has to do with Sam.

Aubrey: We're making a special song for—for Sam.

Mr. Dillon: We're making a special lullaby song for a baby. Is it a real baby, or a pretend baby?

Amber: Pretend. A pretend baby. [Many children offer similar, overlapping responses.]

Mr. Dillon: A pretend baby, her name is Sam. [Riley raises her hand.] Riley, go ahead, Riley.

Riley: Umm, we're taking care of her.

Mr. Dillon: We are learning how to take care of her.

Gabriel: Yeah, and playing music!

This emphasis on care within our dialogue was also evident in Focus Group 1.

When asked, “In what ways do people take care of you?,” the following examples were offered by children in Ms. Bailey’s class: “Give us some hugs and kisses” (Raelynn), “Give us healthy food” (Ryan), and “Umm, they—they—they take care of me and make me safe so I don’t get lost” (Annie). When asked, “In what ways could you use music to care for someone?,” the children across each class generally responded in one of four ways: about performing music, as when Gabriel said, “Oh, I know… Umm, sing a cute little song”; about creating music, as when Anabelle said, “Make them a song to make them, to let them go to sleep”; about the social negotiation of sound and volume, as when Emma said, “And—and—and we don’t scream in their ears really loud,” or when Daisy said, “And also, you have to use the guitar slow and quiet”; and when a child personalized their response to a specific person with whom they might engage in musical care. While this last category of thinking was intentionally encouraged in Focus Group 2, it only emerged in Focus Group 1 in a single notable instance:

Wendy: Singing my favorite song but very loud.

Mr. Dillon: Now, is that for you, or is that for the other person?

Wendy: [Enthusiastically.] My—my brother loves loudness stuff!

Later in this chapter, I describe world-centered education as constituting a broad continuum of thinking and action about the self to thinking and action with the other. It is unclear from Wendy’s response if she was thinking of her brother from the outset of our exchange or simply using her brother to rationalize[14] her interest in using her favorite

[14] When used in this manuscript, the terms *rationalize* and *rationalization* derive from an individual interview with Ms. Bailey. At the time, I had conducted a preliminary analysis of the data and introduced the term to Ms. Bailey as a way of describing this sort of

song and loud sounds. Regardless, Wendy's response evinced an ability to think about the connection between her own actions and the perceived wants and needs of others. Wendy was, essentially, flexing her ability to move about that continuum.

In addition to words, care-as-subject-ness emerged and was enacted in unstructured play activities with Sam that took place during station rotation activities and without my direct supervision or mediation. In the previous chapter, for example, I described in detail David's actions at Sam's station, which ranged from gently rocking and whispering about Sam, to telling Tom that he could not have a turn with Sam, to—importantly—lingering on Tom's disappointment with a blank expression for several seconds before relenting. David enacted care in his interactions with Sam, but his lingering when faced with the interests of his peer might be interpreted as an experience of resistance between his own want to continue holding Sam and the needs of those around him. Moving through this discomfort, this micro-interruption, David chose to care—to hand Sam to Tom and then teach Tom one possible way of rocking Sam.

Love and care also emerged as lyrical themes within the songs created by the children. Daisy set the tone for Ms. Spin's class lullaby when, during a lyrics brainstorm, this dialogue occurred:

Mr. Dillon: What else could be in our words for Sam's lullaby?

Daisy: *Nature, nature, sing of love.*

Mr. Dillon: Nature, nature. Sing of what?

---

behavior in which a child might still be focused on their own personal interests, but describe those interests in terms of the imagined or perceived interests of the other.

Daisy: Love.

Subsequent contributions also reflected lyrical themes of love and care, as in the following: “I love babies in my heart” (John), “I love you, little baby” (Kendra), and, comically, “Come out of a portal and give you a kiss!” (Abigail). See Figure 5.1 for an in-progress draft of the Phase 2 lullaby for Sam collectively composed by the children in Ms. Spin’s class, including lyrics color-coded to the pseudonym of the child who contributed that particular text.

While I intentionally operationalized mature subject-ness as care at various points in the project and understandings of lullaby as a form of care emerged in and through the

Figure 5.1: Graphic Notation for Ms. Spin’s Class Lullaby During Phase 2[15]

[15] See Appendix H for this same lullaby documented using Western art notation.

children's dialogue and actions, each of the examples posed thus far have featured opportunities for care and subject-ness intentionally embedded in the curriculum project. These are, essentially, planned opportunities for the children "to *practice* grown-up ways of being in and with the world" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 89, emphasis in original). In the "snapshot" (Research Journal Entry) that follows, I draw upon split-screen, polyphonic videos (White, 2016a, 2016b) recorded during class to develop an example which was unplanned—an example in which the social world made an appeal to a child who, despite his focused engagement in a play-based activity, chose to act on that appeal with care.

Care: A Snapshot of Josiah. After rearranging "Hush, Little Baby" to be about themselves through a small-group activity during Lesson 2, the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class were ready for a break. When I then directed the children to their starting positions for a known singing game, several of them began to cheer. Grinning, Tom excitedly skipped across the room while Aubrey and Josiah ran to their starting positions. Several rounds of singing and chasing later, an accident occurred.

Riley beamed as the song ended—the signal for her and her peers to run to the other side of the room. Literally hopping with excitement, David chased Riley, tagging her on the back. In the process, Riley lost her footing and an audible "thud" was heard as she tripped into the piano and slid down to the floor. While the rest of the class continued to play, two children responded in differing ways: David stood several feet away, still hopping at first, saying repeatedly, "I got you!"; meanwhile, Josiah crouched down to her level, placed one hand on her knee, and brought his face about one foot from hers. Due to the noisy nature of the game going on around the children, it is unclear exactly what

Josiah said to Riley, but his concerned expression and calm demeanor both seemed to communicate care—while David stood by and watched. Within 3 seconds of Riley falling to the ground and this interaction beginning to take place, I approached Riley, Josiah, and David. I assessed that Riley was hurt, but not seriously injured. I leaned over Riley, gently placed my hand on her back, and started to talk with her. After a few seconds, I placed my other hand on David's back, engaging them both in discussion about the incident. Shortly after, I chose to end the game, encouraging the children to sit together close to me at the front of the classroom. I did not realize until that moment, as my attention turned from Riley and David back to the whole class, what Josiah had done in response to Riley's need: While I was comforting Riley and encouraging dialogue between Riley and David, Josiah had run across the room to the drawer in which he knew I stored bandages. As the game ended and the children joined me on the floor, I saw Josiah rummaging through the drawer, brow furrowed, searching for something to help his friend. I encouraged him to come join us, too. Riley chose to stay by the piano for a few extra seconds before rejoining the class and wiping away her tears.

Reflecting on my experience of this moment, I noted the following: "Josiah went right over to the bandage drawer, opened it, and was looking for a bandage—even though Riley's situation was not one that needed a bandage, it's still the way he knew to take care of other people" (Research Journal Entry). Despite his active engagement in the game, when Josiah was confronted with the needs of a peer—the social world—he engaged in an act of care that balanced his own interests with the needs of those around him. I will return to Josiah's snapshot later in this chapter to unpack the ways in which I

later framed this interaction with the whole class, drawing their attention to Riley's ability to calm herself and to Josiah's enactment of care.

Moving Through Resistance

While the moment-to-moment enactment of care may be bound up in subject-ness, mature subject-ness itself is not a fixed state. At the outset of the project, I noted several ways in which the children's enactments of subject-ness fluctuated and were actively negotiated in the moment:

> From the very first day, right after teaching [Lesson 1], I was like, "Oh, some of these kids are already doing this—they're already outside of themselves." Then I already see other kids who are not. And then obviously, those aren't fixed states. (Research Journal Entry)

One explanation for this might be that these children were approaching "the decline of ego-centrism" (Piaget, 1928/2015, p. 74) observed among some 7- and 8-year-old children. In my own analysis, however, I am more interested in the fact that children are not "inchoate, lesser adults" (Dansereau, 2023, p. 57) awaiting teacherly interventions. Rather, children are children—messy and complex in both their present beings and their potential becomings, just like the rest of us. I described one such example of this complexity in the previous chapter in which Penny and Clarence each wanted to incorporate their own ideas into "Hush, Little Baby," and neither was willing to accommodate the ideas of the other. Eventually, it was Abigail who broke the stalemate by proposing a compromise between their differing ideas: WALL-E the robot working in an ice cream shop. In this example, neither Penny nor Clarence were willing to engage

with the other, but Abigail, an outsider from a different group within the project, was. A similar example took place in Ms. Hemsworth's class after performing their final lullaby for Ceecee, Penelope's three-year-old sister. Near the end of telling Ceecee and her family about the ways in which we made the lullaby special for Ceecee, the following dialogue took place:

Mr. Dillon: Reuben and Alecia, you're the last ones for now.

Alecia: Umm, I make, like—

Reuben: We were trying to put My Singing Monsters [a video game] in it.

Mr. Dillon: Right. My Singing Monsters would be if it was your lullaby.

[...]

Mr. Dillon: Reuben, whose lullaby is this one, though? Is this one yours or Ceecee's?

Reuben: Ceecee's.

Mr. Dillon: Right. That's why, we're trying to think about someone else. Alecia, what were you trying to say?

Alecia: [Stuttering as she begins to speak to Ceecee.] I—I—I—I ga—I gave the pig a yellow bow because you like—you like yellow.

In this moment, Alecia was thinking about Ceecee and was able to articulate specific actions she had taken on that thinking. More specifically, Alecia explained that she had added a hair bow to one of our illustrations intentionally using Ceecee's favorite color. Reuben, however, maintained focus on his own personal interests until I pointed him back to Ceecee. In addition to the content of this dialogue, these engagements with self and other are evident in the ways in which Alecia and Reuben interacted with one

another. Reuben, for example, appeared to be unaware of the fact that he verbally interrupted Alecia's speech. Alecia initially yielded to Reuben's verbal interruption, but was then so excited when directly invited to share her thinking (and perhaps to get a word in edgewise) that she stuttered for a moment as she verbalized her response.

While moments in which subject-ness is negotiated might matter, there is only so much we can learn about subject-ness by atomistically focusing on such individual moments in isolation. Biesta (2020b) noted that arts educators can provide "concrete opportunities for experiencing what it means to encounter resistance and go *through* it, rather than shy away from it" (p. 91, emphasis in original). That is to say, a world-centered education is one in which these individual moments have the potential to add up to something. By constantly pointing children to the world, children do not necessarily experience a single state-change from object to subject or from subject to mature subject, but rather experience multiple opportunities in which they might "*practice* grown-up ways of being in and with the world" (p. 89, emphasis in original), and through that practice, they might change over time. In the following section, I revisit a moment mentioned in the previous chapter. In returning to this moment and introducing additional moments, I hope to contextualize my perception of one child's experience in this project with a long-term lens, demonstrating the ways in which these moments of resistance and interruption might amount to something more—to growth.

Resistance: A Snapshot of Zane. Right from the beginning of the project, Zane focused on his own wants and seemed only infrequently aware of the needs of others. The following example is drawn from Lesson 1:

Christina: I can't see.

Mr. Dillon: You're right. So, Zane, this is hard to know, but when you're moving your body, it's affecting other people's bodies. [Turns toward Michael.] I noticed you scooted back, that was really helpful. [Turns toward Zane.] Zane, you went right back to where you were. Now look, Zane, look at Christina. Can Christina see now?

Zane: Oh, yes.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, Zane, right on.

Later in that same class period, Zane expressed his frustration when I asked Jackson to share something—Zane said, "I didn't even get a turn." Yet even when Zane did get what he wanted early in the curriculum project, he still struggled to balance self and other. When creating versions of "Hush, Little Baby" about ourselves in the next class period, for example, Zane experienced this sort of resistance again when we added his Fortnite idea to the song:

Mr. Dillon: Here it is. [Adds the Fortnite logo on the display, but the graphic is large and obscures the other graphics.] Well, that was a really big Fortnite, wasn't it? [Shrinks the Fortnite logo to a size comparable to the other child-contributed ideas represented on the display.]

Zane: No, I want it big as it was!

Mr. Dillon: I know. Here's the thing, though, Zane: If I made it that big, we would see your idea. But would you see Ryan's idea anymore?

Zane: No.

Mr. Dillon: Would you see Brittany's idea anymore?

Zane: No.

Mr. Dillon: That would be really hard. Here, I'll show you what I mean. Let's make Zane's idea gigantic. [Makes the icon fill the screen. Zane smiles.]

Raelynn: [Also smiling.] You can't see mine!

Mr. Dillon: You're right, Raelynn. [Simultaneously, Ryan says, "You can't see anybody's." Several other children offer similar, overlapping remarks.] It's really hard to take care of a class, isn't it? It's really hard to take care of the other people around us.

As we progressed through the project, I continued to pursue opportunities to point Zane's attention to his peers, as when Zane ignored a child who felt that Zane had violated her personal space. I asked Zane to listen closely to the tone of the child's comment and repeated it for him—Zane appeared to be genuinely surprised and seemed to understand then that the child was serious about the boundary violation and not simply playing or making a joke. Such interactions are bound to happen in kindergarten, a unique context in which many children are in and among large groups of their same-age peers for the first time. Even so, the consistency of Zane's focus on himself and his lack of awareness of those around him—and especially at the outset of this curriculum project—are worth noting.

As the unit continued, I began to use aspects of the curriculum project to point Zane's attention beyond himself. In a discussion of the ways in which we care for others, I tried to reframe Zane's response:

Mr. Dillon: [To the whole group.] You told me last time that the reason we sing lullabies is to take care of people, specifically to help babies fall asleep. But basically to take care of people. Are there other ways that you take care of people?

[...]

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, Grace?

Grace: Feed them.

Mr. Dillon: Feed them. Yeah, Zane, how do you take care of people?

Zane: Fortnite Battle Pass.

Mr. Dillon: You play Fortnite with them?

Zane: Yeah.

Mr. Dillon: That could be fun for some families.

Whether or not Zane found this individual reframing to be helpful was unclear to me in the moment and remains unclear in retrospect. But as explained previously, the data lead me to believe that such moments have the potential to add up to something more than their isolated meanings. I continued to nudge Zane's thinking outward in the following brainstorming session about the instruments we would use for Sam's lullaby:

Mr. Dillon: So here's our job for today: Now that we remember about the baby and now that we remember about lullabies, what should we do for instruments in our lullaby?

Grace: Oh, quiet sounds!

Mr. Dillon: [Begins to write on a notepad.] I'm writing down "quiet sounds." Zane,

what else?

Zane: Fortnite sounds.

Mr. Dillon: Fortnite sounds. Now, I'm gonna ask you a question and I know this is gonna be a tricky one, but I know you're smart and can handle this: Does Sam like Fortnite or does Zane like Fortnite?

Zane: Zane. [Several other children say this with him, too.]

[...]

Mr. Dillon: So, I don't know, maybe the baby likes Fortnite. That'd be awesome, if you went in and the baby had, like, a gamer headset on and a little controller! That'd be awesome. But I don't—I don't see that. So Zane, I'll keep that on the list, but again, are we writing a lullaby for us or are we writing a lullaby for Sam?

Zane: Sam. [Several other children reply "Sam" or "the baby" simultaneously.]

A curious thing happened when we transitioned from making a lullaby for a baby doll to making a lullaby for Annie's not-yet-born sibling: The children in Ms. Bailey's class decided it would be best to remove the medkit from their lullaby, which was a direct reference to Fortnite contributed by Zane in a previous draft. At first, Zane resisted their efforts by simply stating that he thought Fortnite should stay in the song. Eventually, however, Zane incorporated into his argument the perspective of the not-yet-born child for whom we were creating the lullaby:

Mr. Dillon: [To the whole group of children.] So, what do we know about Annie's baby? Does—does Annie's baby sister like Fortnite?

Zane: [Firmly.] Yes. [Simultaneously, several other children say, “no.”]

Mr. Dillon: Maybe when she grows up. Think about the things we know that she does like—

Zane: Wait, wait, wait! Wait, what if—what if her was in the war and her needs a medkit? Maybe her will think about the medkit when her’s in the war.

Whether or not Zane’s intention in this interaction was to tend to the needs of Annie’s not-yet-born sibling—or perhaps to rationalize his own preference by imagining the needs and interests of Annie’s not-yet-born sibling—he enacted a form of subject-ness that at least nominally considered needs beyond his own.

Zane’s beyond-the-self thinking continued to manifest in the later stages of the curriculum project, most notably during our performance of the lullaby for Annie’s mother—Ms. Jamie—and the not-yet-born child for whom we created the lullaby. Before singing the lullaby, we showed Ms. Jamie the iconic notation we created using photographs and clip art representing activities that Annie’s family enjoyed doing together and that specifically guided our decision-making regarding the lyrics. Many of the children who volunteered to explain parts of the notation focused on themselves in their responses, as when Jeremy said, “I love popcorn,” instead of explaining that we included popcorn in the lyrics because Annie’s family eats popcorn together when they have movie nights. When we finished sharing the notation with Ms. Jamie, Zane raised his hand. I earnestly wish that I could say I was excited to see him volunteer, but I confess that I was uneasy, concerned that he would direct the discussion to Fortnite or another of his personal interests, forgoing an opportunity to engage with the world around

him. Wanting to understand and unpack this feeling of mine, I later documented the following: “I was thinking, like, ‘I am going to do this, I’m going to call on him. But I need to start thinking about how I’m going to fix this’” (Research Journal Entry). Simply put, I was wrong.

Mr. Dillon: Zane, did you want to add something about it? [Gestures at the lullaby notation.]

Zane: Yeah.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah. What’s that, Zane?

Zane: Becau—because they’re like doing that stuff.

Mr. Dillon: Who likes doing that stuff?

Zane: Annie’s mom and Annie’s dad and Annie.

Mr. Dillon: Wow, Zane! That’s such a big thing for you because I know you really liked your ideas. You really liked your ideas, but you’re also okay with doing other people’s ideas. I know that’s really hard.

Zane’s kindergarten teacher, Ms. Bailey, was present for the performance for Annie’s mother. After the conclusion of the curriculum project, I invited Ms. Bailey to an individual interview so that we might unpack the experience together and otherwise co-reflect on the project. I opened our discussion of the performance by asking Ms. Bailey generally if she had any thoughts or reflections to share. She offered the following:

> But the biggest impression I had was when Zane made the comment about the things that they liked and—and probably because he—I’m just seeing so much change in him. And it just really touched me that that came out in a setting that I

> wasn't in. Because I've seen it in my room and I want—I was just glad to see it in another setting and that you recognized it also. (Individual Interview)

It is not possible—nor desirable, in my opinion—to untangle the threads of subject-ness from the growth of a child. Ms. Bailey noted that many such children experience a "Christmas miracle" (Individual Interview), going home for several weeks in December and returning with a budding maturity that went unnoticed earlier in the school year. Based on the timing of Zane's growth, I quipped back in our interview that Zane perhaps experienced a "Valentine's Day miracle," instead. But whatever the reason, Zane did, indeed, grow and mature socially in ways observed by both Ms. Bailey and myself during the course of this curriculum project. While I am not claiming a causal relationship between the unfolding of the curriculum project and Zane's particular growth, I am also unwilling to discount the possibility that his engagement with this project—and, in particular, the ways in which the project enabled him to "*practice* grown-up ways of being in and with the world" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 89, emphasis in original)—contributed to that growth.

Voicing Dissent

In my interpretation of the possible examples of subject-ness explored so far in this chapter, I have emphasized mature subject-ness as made tangible through encounters with the needs of others—experienced as an interruption to the self and/or through an act of care meant to address those needs. And yet, these are not the only means of conceiving of mature subject-ness. If educators are to take seriously the interplay between the needs of the self and the needs of the other in the emergence of subject-ness, then what of

children who experience relevant barriers with regard to those needs? What of those children whose own needs are not being met, for example? And what of those children for whom a peer or an authority figure stands in the way of them meeting their own needs or tending to the needs of the other? In such instances, a subject may need to voice dissent as a means of addressing these barriers.

Throughout the implementation of this curriculum project, there were several instances in which I attempted to help children develop the skills needed to speak up for themselves with their peers. For example, when Daisy came to me with a concern about another child, I said: "Oh, Daisy, did you want to talk to him about that, or did you want me to talk to him?" When Daisy then addressed the situation herself, the other child denied doing anything to hurt Daisy, and so I modeled for Daisy a response to the other child: "You said you didn't do it, but what you meant was you didn't do it on purpose. It still happened, and she still doesn't want you to do it again. Right, Daisy?"

In several encounters, I framed a direct request of a child in terms of how their actions affected others as an act of modeling such discussions for those who were affected. The following two examples took place at varying moments during a class period with the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class:

Mr. Dillon: David, for safety, you can't get up and throw your jacket again.

David: That's my sweatshirt.

Mr. Dillon: Let me say that again then. For safety, you can't get up and throw your sweatshirt again. I don't want it to touch Alecia.

[...]

Mr. Dillon: *Hush, little green group, don't say a word*—Oops, I'd love to keep going, but for safety, I need to remind David: We sit and hold our sweatshirts safely, or you could put it on the table so you don't accidentally play with it. But I don't want it to accidentally hit Alecia.

In other instances, I did not intervene, as in the following example drawn from an in-class transition to a focus group interview with Ms. Bailey's class. When I dismissed the children to go to their various stations for a three-part station rotation, the children in the focus group arrived about ten seconds before I did. In that time, Wayne placed his hand on Brittany's arm, got within one foot of her face, and loudly made various animal noises in her ear. Brittany first responded to Wayne using facial expressions and body language and then, when Wayne did not relent, her voice: "Did you know I was right here first?" In other words, Brittany acted when her own needs were not being met in relation to the wants of those around her. As Biesta (2021a) noted of the emergence of subject-ness, "It is the moment where I begin to realise that I do not coincide with the course of events" (p. 117). In some instances, then, subject-ness manifests in acts of dissent.

Coming to understand the self in relation to the other can also be complicated by issues of authority. In articulating the distinction between subjects and objects, Biesta (2021b) drew upon the examples of Rosa Parks and Adolf Eichmann. Eichmann allowed himself to be made into an object, a Nazi bureaucrat who arranged "the mass deportation of Jews and others but denied responsibility for the consequences—their extermination—on the account that he was only following orders" (p. 27). Parks, by contrast, famously refused to obey the orders of a bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. Stonebridge

(2024) drew a similar comparison between the alarmingly banal complicity of Eichmann with the thoughtful disobedience of Hannah Arendt, a contemporary of Eichmann who documented his trial (Arendt, 1963/2006) and on whose work in political theory Biesta's (2021b) notions of subject-ness and world-centeredness are partially based. Biesta (2010) once described the process of encouraging another to claim their subject-ness in this way: "it is precisely *not* about the insertion of 'newcomers' into existing orders, but about ways of being that hint at independence from such orders" (p. 21, emphasis in original). To that end, I offer in the following section a snapshot of a child who, in the course of this curriculum project, chose to stand up for a friend in need by confronting an authority figure: me.

Dissent: A Snapshot of Grace. At the outset of Lesson 6, most of the children in Ms. Bailey's class joyfully engaged in a singing game. We then continued our task of creating a lullaby for Sam by using our shared understanding of melodic contour to collectively draft a melody to go with the lyrics we had created in the previous class period. Using horizontal, diagonal, and "squiggly" lines corresponding to icons which represented the lyrics, we created, sang, and revised melodies for each of the four phrases of the lullaby. We then crowded around the piano and performed a relatively complete version of the vocal part to our lullaby for the first time. At the end of the performance, I grinned and playfully asked: "Did it work?" Intuiting that I was asking if they had fallen asleep, several of the children laughed and cried "no!" before returning to their seats.

Despite the cheerful climate in the class, Raelynn alternated throughout the period between laughing, singing, and playing in one moment and quietly moaning and sobbing

to herself in the next. I first noticed this pattern emerge in Raelynn the week prior and had since consulted with Ms. Bailey, her teacher, who had herself consulted with Raelynn's mother. Each of the three of us had separately noticed that when Raelynn was moaning, she seemed to become more upset when we focused more attention on her. The inverse seemed to be true, as well: When we acknowledged her but did not place undue attention on her groaning, she was typically able to handle and resolve her own distress. In other words: While we were not certain that the purpose of this behavior was attention-seeking, the three of us agreed to each use our own judgment in the moment to decide if Raelynn was in need of assistance or, more likely, if she just needed a little space to regain her composure. Grace, however, was unaware of our behind-the-scenes care and planning on behalf of her friend, Raelynn.

After singing our newly created melody, it was time to review and continue to refine the lullaby instrument parts we had worked on in previous class periods. I said, "So first off, let me show you real quick how to do the ukulele again and the rainstick and then we'll take out our instruments." As I walked toward the drawer in which the rainsticks were stored, I looked directly at Raelynn and noticed that she was covering her mouth with one hand and softly groaning. It was unclear to me whether she was crying or not, and based on my understanding of her engagement throughout the rest of the period, I decided to give her some space. I looked away from her, rummaging through the rainstick drawer, and said: "I know, Raelynn. I hope you feel better soon—not much I can do to help with that, Raelynn." Reviewing the video footage of this moment, it strikes me that Zane was tying his shoes and Derek was looking around the room—but Grace

was staring intently at my back. After telling Raelynn that there was "not much I can do to help with that," Grace continued to stare for about 5.5 seconds before exclaiming:

Grace: How dare you just leave her crying, Mr. Dillon!

Mr. Dillon: What?

Grace: [Quieter this time.] How dare you just leave—

After Grace voiced her dissent, I nervously attempted to explain myself. Grace eased somewhat when I told her that "I wasn't trying to be mean or ignore [Raelynn], I was trying to help her be strong and learn from it, too… Trying to give her some space." Grace seemed to understand this notion of strength—that I genuinely believed that Raelynn could handle her own distress. And yet, while discussing this with her in the moment, several other children in the class decided to enact care in the ways in which they knew how to: by standing up, walking over to Raelynn, crouching down, and hugging her.

I have since watched the recording of this moment countless times and I am still surprised by Grace's tone of voice and that she chose to engage in this act of dissent despite the potential risks. Surely, I would stand up for my own friends—but under what circumstances would I be bold enough to voice my dissent with an authority figure to do so? I later invited Grace and one of her friends[16] to discuss this moment with me further. I

[16] The methodological literature on conducting interviews with young children is inconsistent as to when and whether such discussions ought to take place in individual and/or group settings (Ey, 2016). Yet I suspected that within this school-based setting, Grace may have assumed that my intent was punitive if I had asked to talk with her one-on-one. To prevent this sort of confusion, I invited both Grace and one of her friends to review the class video with me and engage in discussion about that video.

posed a hypothetical situation involving children in 5th grade, and Grace insisted that a child in 5th grade would similarly stand up for her friend. We watched the video of our encounter and both Grace and her friend clearly articulated various aspects of that moment, discussing, for example, how the other children got up to hug Raelynn. But when we discussed the one person in the room who directly stood up for her friend—who confronted the teacher—Grace quieted:

Mr. Dillon: Have you ever seen times where, umm, where something goes wrong, and someone doesn't stand up for them?

Grace: Sometimes.

Ryan: Yeah.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, sometimes that's hard, but in this case, what happened?

Grace: Raelynn was right here and hurt herself.

Mr. Dillon: Yeah, but did someone stand up to help her?

Grace: [No words, but she nods her head in assent. She flashes a tentative, modest smile, and discretely points to herself with her index finger.]

Mature subject-ness is, essentially, "the challenge of reconciling ourselves to reality" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 49; see also Arendt, 1994). More specifically, mature subject-ness is implicated in

> our freedom to act or to refrain from action, to say yes or no to what we encounter, to stay or walk away from the situations we find ourselves in, to go with the flow or offer resistance. Put in these terms it is clear that freedom is not a theoretical construct or a philosophical ideal, but a thoroughly existential

> matter—a possibility we encounter at some point in our own life, and something we also encounter in meeting and interacting with other human beings. (Biesta, 2020a, p. 14)

This mature subject-ness sometimes takes the form of care, as children learn to balance their own needs with the needs of others by considering and tending directly to those needs. But as demonstrated by Grace—and by Rosa Parks and Hannah Arendt before her—there are moments in which this balance might be struck boldly through acts of dissent.

Pointing: An Invitation to Explore Subject-ness

Having developed several "snapshots" (Research Journal Entry) of subject-ness, I turn next to aspects of the curriculum project which served as invitations to the children to explore and negotiate their emerging subject-ness. First, I articulate the ways in which acts of pointing the children outward to the world amounted to such invitations. Second, I describe three facets of the curriculum project—dialogue, responsiveness, and creation—which specifically contributed to the potential of these invitations to "encourage children to 'take up' their subject-ness, helping them not to forget the possibility of existing as subject of their own life, and working on the conditions under which this remains a real possibility" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 7). Taken together, these invitations address the second research question and two sub-questions posed within this study, which are as follows: In what ways, if any, can world-centered experiences in elementary general music education support the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study? What role, if any, does the teacher-researcher have in supporting or hindering the

emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study? What role, if any, does dialogue play in the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?

Pointing to the World

Biesta (2021b) argued that teachers point, (re)directing the attention of children, and so have the potential to encourage children to encounter the world. Through this act of pointing, children become aware of needs beyond their own and the relationship between those needs and their own wants. When asked in a lecture to describe an educational practice demonstrative of world-centered education, Biesta (2021c) described gardening. He said,

> What's interesting about a garden or a plant is that you can think as hard and as long as you want about a plant, but that won't make the plant grow any faster or better. The encounter with a plant is precisely an encounter with something that asks something from you. And therefore, you can say, to have gardening on the curriculum is not in order to learn physics in an experiential way, but precisely to meet the reality that is immune for your thinking… And if you begin in a curriculum by letting children encounter that with plants and then maybe with animals where there is a bit more at stake but then also see that a classroom is a social organism that puts the question back to the student, you suddenly begin to see the world-centeredness in the everyday practice. (55:09)

Of note in this excerpt is Biesta's emphasis on the ways in which world-centered education might progress from plants to animals and then from animals to the social

organism of the class itself. This notion of gradually putting "a bit more at stake" (56:18) was central to the ways in which I organized the curriculum project.

At the outset of this study, I deliberated on what would constitute the world to which I was pointing. In an early research journal entry, for example, I included notes about whether the lullabies would be about "a real specific kid" or someone imagined, who I worried would be perceived as "less real-world" (Research Journal Entry). Ultimately, I decided to organize the curriculum project in three phases: one in which I pointed the children to themselves; one in which I pointed the children to a baby doll; and one in which I pointed the children to a baby or infant in our school community. Similar to Biesta's (2021c) remark about putting "a bit more at stake" (56:18), I imagined the order of these three phases as a way to "up the risk level" (Research Journal Entry), with each phase an opportunity to take "another micro step onto that real world continuum" (Research Journal Entry). In Figure 5.2, I use a wheel as a means of illustrating this "real world continuum"—a spectrum of thinking and action for and about the self to thinking and action for and with the other, including additional stages that I identified while analyzing the data. In using a wheel as a visual framing for this continuum, I attempted to honor the fact that while a teacher may try to point a child from one section of the wheel to the next in a progressive, linear fashion, the child may choose to cross the center of the wheel, moving from one section to another in a nonlinear fashion at will. The ways in which these stages actually unfolded in the context of this study are further depicted in Figure 5.3. In the sections that follow, I describe and offer examples of the six sections of this wheel of world-centered experiences.

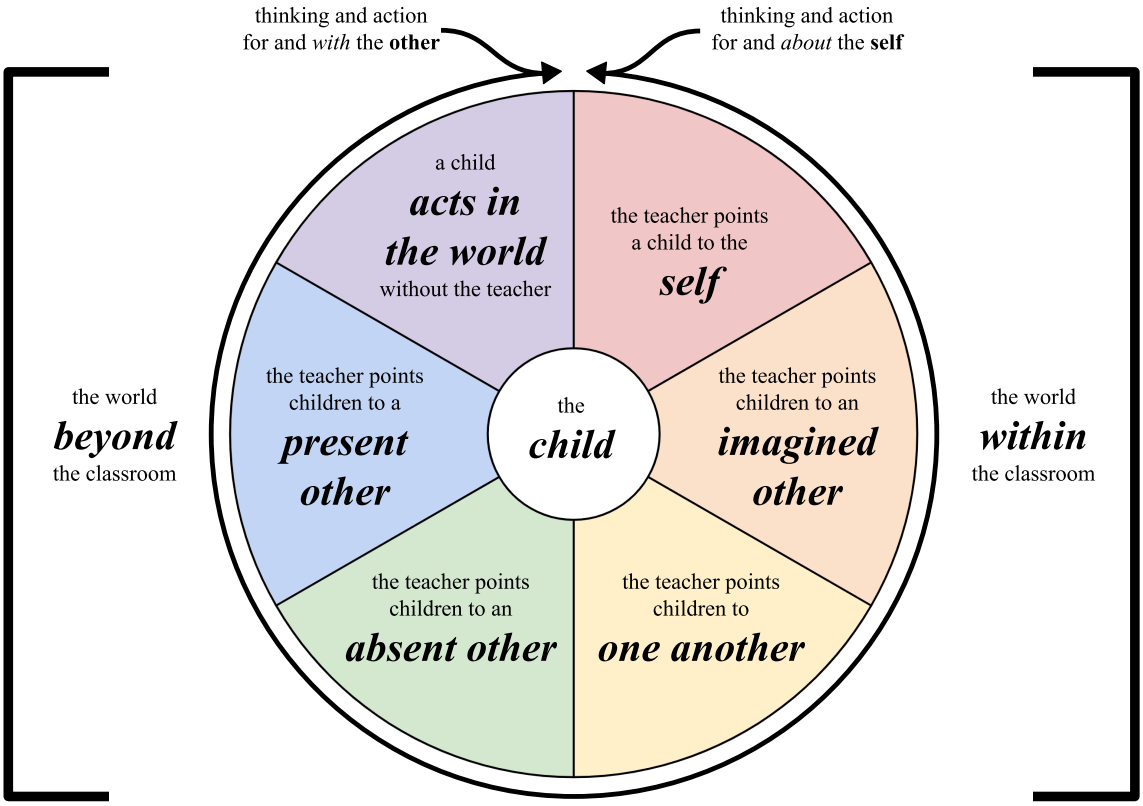

Figure 5.2: Wheel of World-Centered Experiences Enacted in this Study

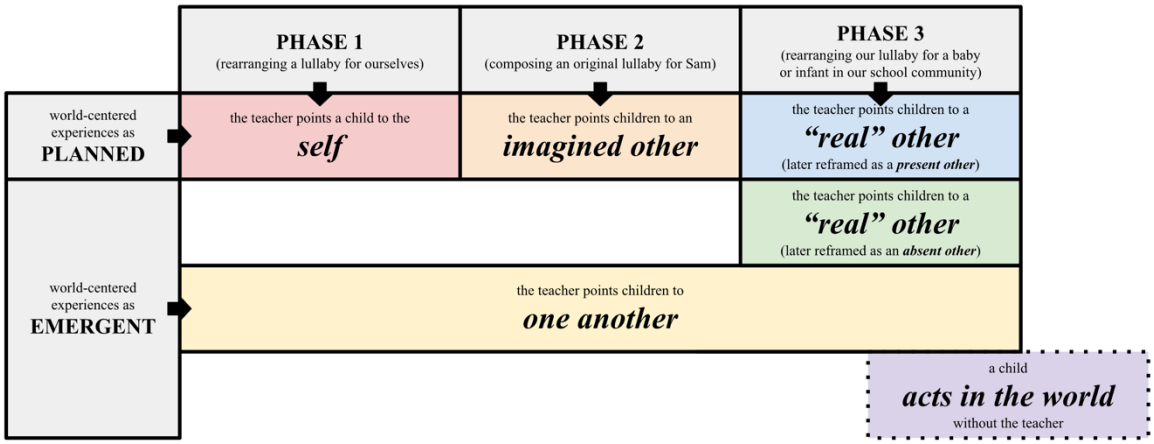

Figure 5.3: World-Centered Experiences Organized by Curriculum Project Phase

Pointing to the Self. As a teacher engaged in education toward subject-ness, I was interested in opportunities for children to explore the relationship between their wants and the needs of others. Our first "micro step onto that real world continuum" (Research Journal Entry) involved focusing on the self. As described in detail in the previous chapter, one instance in which I pointed children to themselves was through an activity in which small groups of children rearranged a lullaby, "Hush, Little Baby," to feature their own personal interests. In one group in Ms. Hemsworth's class, for example, each child decided to contribute a favorite food. Amber, who was not in that group, immediately responded to the food that most interested her—again, focusing on the self.

Mr. Dillon: Did you guys decide one together?

Tom: Yes.

Mr. Dillon: What is it?

Tom: It is peanuts, strawberries, and mac and cheese.

[...]

Amber: I love peanuts. That's for squirrels!

Additional opportunities for pointing to the self arose, too, in acts of framing. In several instances, for example, I chose to mirror and reframe Zane's language, as when he encouraged his classmates to keep a Fortnite reference within the lullaby lyrics for Annie's not-yet-born sibling and I responded, "Ah, see, now, Zane really likes the medkit." In this case, reframing the discussion in a way that pointed Zane to the self may have helped him to identify his interests as such, an important step toward developing an interdependent sense of self and other.

Pointing to an Imagined Other. As we progressed from Phase 1 to Phase 2, I sought to "up the risk level" (Research Journal Memo). Rather than move outward to a real child beyond the context of the classroom, I decided that using a baby doll would be a way to first "*practice* grown-up ways of being in and with the world" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 89, emphasis in original). To situate this in psychological terms, this act of practicing might be construed as part of the continued development of *theory of mind* on the part of the child (see Wellman, 2014). While the children had opportunities during Phase 1 to interact with Sam—a baby doll and the imagined other in the context of this curriculum project—pointing toward Sam was a major focal point of Phase 2 as we collectively created an original lullaby for Sam. Opportunities to explore the continuum from self to imagined other emerged in dialogue and in reflection, as in the following excerpt from a focus group interview conducted with children from Ms. Spin's class.

Mr. Dillon: What part of our song was for Sam?

[...]

Kendra: Pikachu.

Mr. Dillon: Pikachu? Do you like Pikachu? Do you think Sam likes Pikachu?

Kendra: I think he does.

Ivy: I like Raichu.

Mr. Dillon: You like Raichu, right? So, if this was the Ivy song, what would it say?

Hush, baby—

Ivy: Raichu!

Mr. Dillon: But is this the Ivy song? [Ivy and several other children smile and laugh.]

In the context of this study, Sam—an imagined other—provided the children with opportunities to move beyond themselves and into a consideration of others.

Pointing to One Another. While pointing to the self and to an imagined other were both intentionally planned as part of the curriculum project from the outset, pointing the children to one another was not. Rather, pointing the children to one another emerged through the moment-to-moment enactment of the curriculum project as pedagogy. In many such instances, this form of world-centeredness emerged when providing specific reminders to children. Instead of telling a child what to do, for example, I sought to situate such discussions in an awareness of the needs of an individual peer or the possible needs of the group—still very much an act of teacherly control, but one which approached care. To one child, for example, I said, "One way to show kindness to Aubrey is to not talk on her turn." To another, I said, "By the way, it'd be safer for Mia's body if you stayed sitting."

Similarly, opportunities to point children to one another arose through acts of framing. To return to the opening of this chapter, one example took place when David accidentally knocked Riley to the floor while playing a singing game and Josiah chose to comfort Riley. When the following dialogue began, Riley was still sitting next to the piano, David was standing by and watching, Josiah was rummaging through the bandage drawer, and the game was drawing to a close for most of the other children.

Mr. Dillon: [To the whole group of children.] Now, I had a question for you before we go, but… something more important happened. Someone got hurt while they were trying to play. I know it's a fun game. Is it okay that sometimes

we get a little hurt?

Logan: Yeah.

Mr. Dillon It happens sometimes, but we still want to take care of them. Take a breath in your nose, out your mouth.

Gabriel: I, I, I'm trying to do a—

Mr. Dillon: Gabriel, when someone gets hurt, we've got to focus in for a moment. I also really wanted to celebrate, for a second, Josiah. I don't know if you know this… When Riley fell, do you know what Josiah did?

Amber: Hold her. Helped her.

Mr. Dillon: And he listened to her. He talked to her. He even went to see if we had bandages in the drawer. Josiah, that was really, really helpful. Riley, did that help when he did that?

Riley: Yeah.

Mr. Dillon: Riley, I'm really sorry you got hurt. [Turns from Riley to the rest of the children.] But, wow, looks like she's calmed herself down already. Isn't that great?

After class, Josiah and I went to share and celebrate this interaction with an adult with whom he had a positive relationship—a school administrator. I later reflected, "He was practically shaking as he was telling her what happened… He was very, very excited to tell her" (Research Journal Entry). Curiously, in subsequent periods with that same class, several children made reference to "bandages" when discussing means of caring for the other—a reminder that this sort of pointing can also act as a form of reinforcement, as

children notice what is valued by the teacher and then act on that noticing. Regardless, acts of framing and of revisiting social situations within this project became opportunities to engage in "a more critical rereading of the world as a 'route' to the 'rewriting'—the transformation—of that world" (Freire, 1994/2014, p. 34; see also 1970/2018)—and, more specifically, opportunities for me to point the attention of the children so that we might engage in this rewriting together.

Additional examples of pointing children to one another arose in response to specific activities within the curriculum project. Consider, for example, this exchange involving a group of children in Ms. Hemsworth's class who collectively revised "Hush, Little Baby" to be about their own interests, but in a way in which those interests intentionally built upon one another and which thereby evinced a burgeoning understanding of self and other among some of the children.

Wendy: So, we got princess making, umm, a smoothie with, umm, bananas, apples, and—and while she's waiting for the smoothie she's watching Cocomelon.

Mr. Dillon: Wow, these are really complicated.

Aubrey: Thank you. Thank you so much, we wanted to be complicated.

While pointing children to one another was not originally planned as part of this project, doing so clearly emerged from the data as a means of pointing the children beyond themselves and into dialogue with the social world.

Pointing to an Absent Other. In the final phase of the curriculum project, we focused our attention outward—to Annie's not-yet-born sibling for the children in Ms.

Bailey's class, to Penelope's younger sister for the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class, and to Abigail's younger brother for the children in Ms. Spin's class. While I had not originally planned to distinguish between instances in which the other was absent or present, that distinction became clear to me while analyzing the data. Each group of children began Phase 3, for example, with a slideshow of photographs and clip art pertaining specifically to a baby or child connected to that particular class community. This activity led into a discussion of the ways in which we might then change the lullaby we had originally created for Sam to better fit the person for whom we were now rearranging the lullaby. These moments—when faced with the idea of the other, but not their physical presence—served as opportunities for the children to experience resistance between their own interests and the possible interests of the other. These discussions enabled rationalizations—moments in which children found ways to pursue their own interests because they imagined, assumed, or knew them to be aligned with the interests of others. While Ms. Hemsworth's class was revising Sam's lullaby to be about Ceecee, for example, several children suggested that we remove Sonic the Hedgehog from their previous lullaby draft to make space for one of Ceecee's interests. While David was visibly disappointed that his peers would suggest this,[17] Wendy, another fan of Sonic the

[17] In a previous iteration of Figure 5.2, I organized the various forms of pointing using a more linear visual framing. Inspired by a conversation with a "critical friend" (Schuck & Russell, 2005) about David's disappointment, I later changed the visual framing to that of a wheel. As this critical friend pointed out, it can be painful to lose something important to you—in this case, the removal of Sonic the Hedgehog from the draft lullaby, which David had contributed during a previous class period. In such instances, it may be helpful or even necessary to return to and tend to the self, as when David expressed his disappointment.

Hedgehog, quickly moved to install another character from the same series of video games and cartoons: Amy, a pink hedgehog.

Wendy: Wait, what about, like, Amy? Like, [Ceecee] might like Amy because she's a—[several children interrupt with overlapping responses, including "no," "no, she doesn't," and other similar sentiments]—she has a pink coat!

We had no inclination from Ceecee's family that Ceecee was interested in Amy or any other Sonic the Hedgehog characters. And yet, Wendy identified that in Ceecee's photograph, she was wearing a pink snowsuit. These dialogic encounters about an absent other differed from those about an imagined other in that, when confronted with an imagined other, the children could simply imagine that the other shared their own personal interests. This may have happened, for example, when David imagined that Sam liked Sonic the Hedgehog earlier in the curriculum project. These dialogic encounters about an absent other were also distinct from those about a present other. When present, the other can communicate their own wants, needs, and interests. But in this in-between dialogic space—in these conversations with present others about absent others—children were invited to think as and about that absent other. Wendy, in other words, was not inventing Ceecee nor encountering Ceecee directly. Wendy may have been thinking through what she thought Ceecee would enjoy or perhaps Wendy was thinking about Ceecee as a means of rationalizing her own lyrical preferences. Either way, these conversations can be viewed as invitations to subject-ness—opportunities for the children to play within and along the world-centered continuum from self to other.

Pointing to a Present Other. Imagining that you and the other share interests and rationalizing your own interests using what you think you know about the other are not possible when actually faced with the other—when pointed outward toward the world and the "challenge of reconciling ourselves with reality" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 49; see also Arendt, 1994). After discussing multiple options for sharing their work at the end of the curriculum project, each group of children collectively decided to invite the person for whom they were composing to visit the class: Penelope's younger sister, Ceecee, and her family visited Ms. Hemsworth's class; Annie's mother, carrying her not-yet-born daughter, visited Ms. Bailey's class; and Abigail's older brother visited Ms. Spin's class as a proxy for Abigail's younger brother, who was unable to visit. Some children, such as Zane, chose to tell their guest(s) about the ways in which the children had revised the lullaby to be about the particular child for whom they were composing. Other children, such as Reuben, continued to focus on their own interests, even when faced with the physical presence of the other. But regardless of the individual responses of the children, the arrival of the other within the context of the classroom amounted to an invitation for the children to try "to exist in the world in a 'grown-up' way" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 22).

Children Acting in the World Beyond the Classroom. While my intention in this project was to point children to the world through both curriculum and pedagogy, I would be remiss if I did not mention the ways in which the children actively pulled the curriculum from the classroom with them out into the world beyond. For example, when I asked Abigail if she had tried singing our class lullaby to her little brother at home—she had—several other children in Ms. Spin's class explained that they, too, had performed or

were planning to perform the lullaby for a sibling, cousin, or parent. I explore this last section of the wheel at greater depth in the epilogue of this manuscript.

Responding to the World: Facets of the Curriculum Project

Biesta (2021b) described the work of education toward subject-ness not as an act of "cultivation," but of

> "Aufforderung," of "summoning," of "calling"... And the whole point of the summoning here is that no one can respond to this call but *me*. This means that it is this call that subjectivises, puts the subject-ness of the one being called "at stake" (although the "I" may still decide to walk away or keep silent, of course). (p. 36, emphasis in original)

That is to say, while a teacher may point a child to the world, a world-centered education is also one in which the child experiences opportunities to meaningfully engage with what they find there. While pointing may have acted as an invitation to subject-ness in the context of this curriculum project, various facets of the project specifically created space within which children could "respond to this call" (p. 36). In the sections that follow, I describe three such facets: dialogue, responsiveness, and creation.

Dialogue. My decision to emphasize dialogue within this curriculum project was based on the idea that, as moments arise in which subject-ness might be actively negotiated, those negotiations might be made tangible through dialogue. In an early entry in my research journal, I noted that engaging children in dialogue was "kind of like creating real-world context out of those moments. I mean, it is already a real-world context. But if there's no dialogue, it didn't happen" (Research Journal Entry). All along

the continuum of world-centered experiences made manifest within this curriculum project, dialogue was used as a means of unpacking those experiences in ways which sought to make subject-ness tangible. Reflecting on how this approach differed from the ways in which I typically taught primary general music, I documented the following in a research journal entry.

> …from my training of how to teach elementary music—okay, steady beat, now we're onto the instrument, now we're dancing, yada yada yada… And some of that is good classroom management and a sense of these snappy transitions—but when do I ever actually hear anyone's voice other than my own?... Kind of never. (Research Journal Entry)

This embrace of children as dialogic partners is, I hope, a lasting change within my teaching practice. By creating opportunities for the children to engage in dialogue within the context of this curriculum project—opportunities for the children to be heard, too—I hoped to create space within which subject-ness might be enacted and perceived.

Throughout this chapter, I have offered several possible examples of subject-ness, the enactment of which was often made tangible through dialogue with and among the children participating. Before proceeding, however, I would like to linger on a collection of dialogic encounters that surprised me: moments of consensus and dissensus. Within the data collected in this study, consensus first emerged in the ways that I felt myself compelled to teach and in my reflections on those moments.

> It's odd—compromise hadn't really occurred to me in this space before some of these moments came up… in my lesson plan, I specifically wrote, "it is not

> necessary to come to compromise in this activity in this group project." But then, in the moment, that's not what I did. I was like, "Okay, how can we help this group come to one idea together"... I definitely didn't grapple with any of that complexity. (Research Journal Entry)

In a later reflection, I wrote, "I've sort of been socialized as a teacher to think that [compromise] is of value" (Research Journal Entry). Bylica (in press) described this as "good-natured consensus" which, within music education, is often "prioritized over opportunities for disjuncture and dissension" (p. 2; see also Lines & Bartels, 2023). As detailed in the previous chapter and earlier in this chapter, such moments of consensus and dissensus emerged early in the project as children reimagined a lullaby, "Hush, Little Baby," to be about their own personal interests. One group in Ms. Spin's class, for example, came to consensus on making their verse about noodles.

Later in the project, while working collectively to make creative decisions about our original lullaby compositions, it was no longer possible to assume that we would always arrive at a consensus. Anecdotally, when describing this curriculum project to colleagues and "critical friends" (Schuck & Russell, 2005), this is typically the point at which they remark that this project would be difficult to implement because they imagine that the children would argue with one another. It is clear from the ways in which I felt compelled early on to guide the children toward consensus that I, too, was uncomfortable engaging in and with dissensus. In retrospect, I find this to be a puzzling perspective. Not only are conflict and dissensus often positioned as fundamental to pluralistic and democratic visions of education and music education (see Biesta, 2011b; Bylica, in press;

Kallio, 2020; Schmidt, 2008), they represent concrete ways in which children might encounter the social world and their own desires in relation to that world (see Biesta, 2021b; Skregelid, 2020). In one notable instance in which we encountered a creative conflict, I asked the children how we might address that conflict, curious to hear what they might suggest.

Mr. Dillon: Grace and Zane have different ideas. What do you think we could do if they don't have the same idea?

Ryan: Umm—umm—umm, we see, umm, how many people, umm, would go for Grace and how many people would go for Zane and whoever had more people would, that means they would—that means, umm, that was—That's what lullaby they would get.

Mr. Dillon: We do a lot of voting at school, that's true, Ryan—voting to see which one is the best. But can they both be right? [Several children say "yes" simultaneously.] What do you think?

Faye: Well, them be equal.

Mr. Dillon: Them be equal. Faye, I hear that.

Following Faye's suggestion that we simply let the two ideas "be equal," we kept both in the lullaby. While this might be interpreted as a sort of compromise, my intention in the moment was rather to create space for dissensus—for the "existence of multiplicity, of plurality and of conflict" (Mouffe, 1993/2020, p. 18). Curiously, however, such a space was opened following this encounter, rather than during it. Zane was pleased with the idea of letting "them be equal," but Grace, as communicated by her facial expression and

body language, was not. As I experienced both joy and exasperation in this moment—at the challenge of "living one's life well, with others" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 35)—I offered the following thought to Grace as she sat in the resistance posed within this interruption.

> You don't like that because you want your idea, right? It's really hard when we have our idea and other people have ideas. That's really tough, isn't it?... I bet Ryan, when you go home, you're probably like, "I want pizza," and your little brother is like, "I want tacos." And it's like, "Ah! How do we make this work?"

Even as I said this to Grace, I knew that it would not provide closure. But in retrospect, closure was not the point of my reflection. This interaction was, rather, an invitation to Grace to tend to what it might mean to be in relation to others and to consider her peers' contributions, whether or not she believed her own contribution was better suited to the task. In other words, this dialogue was an invitation for Grace to encounter the social world and her own wants and ideas in relation to what and whom she encountered there.

Responsiveness. Early in the development of the curriculum project, I decided to keep several aspects of the project design open-ended, leaving space for responsive, emergent experiences within the curriculum project. More specifically, I planned the main idea for each of the three phases in advance, but planned the details of Phase 2 near the end of the implementation of Phase 1 and the details of Phase 3 near the end of the implementation of Phase 2. This progressively iterative planning model corresponded to the three phases of the action research trellis presented in Chapter 2 and helped me to draw what I learned from each phase into the planning of subsequent phases.

Responsiveness manifested in many forms within this project. Planned

opportunities for responsiveness, for example, included the ways in which the children in each class collectively understood and experienced lullaby singing, determined which instruments might accompany their lullaby compositions, and presented their class lullaby to the child for whom they composed. This notion of planned responsiveness is perhaps best illustrated by comparing the idea of responsive curriculum design with, say, the ways in which "creative or imaginative options are foreclosed or limited" (Allsup & Westerlund, 2012, p. 127) within and by methods-oriented music teaching. Put another way, the predetermined ends of traditional music teaching methods may provide a "level of safety and certainty" (Benedict, 2012a, p. 156) for music teachers, but leave little room for children to "do something with these musical skills" (Research Journal Entry). Emergent opportunities for responsiveness arose, too, as when the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class decided to create their lullaby using a storybook structure. In this section, I highlight another example of emergent responsiveness which specifically created space for the children to act in response to my pointing.

As the first phase of the curriculum project proceeded, I began to notice patterns idiosyncratic to each group of children. By way of example, several children in Ms. Bailey's class frequently made reference to white noise machines and devices that play ocean sounds to help the listener fall asleep. This recurring pattern was so bound up in the ways that some of these children defined, thought about, and created lullabies that it manifested in their final composition in the form of a rainstick played during their performance. In Ms. Spin's class, however,

it was really interesting to see how many kids engaged in lyric play, whether it

> was one kiddo who swapped out a rhyming word, one kiddo who swapped out a near rhyme, and then one kiddo who just substituted in the word "chicken" randomly into the song. (Research Journal Entry)

As the children in Ms. Spin's class proceeded from making lullabies for themselves to collectively creating a new lullaby for Sam, I perceived that their lyric play was moving in two distinct directions: "Gentle-gentle-gentle, silly-silly-silly, gentle-gentle-gentle, silly-silly-silly. There were a lot of funny jokes interwoven" (Research Journal Entry). Following are a few alternating lyric suggestions: after Daisy shared "*Nature, nature, sing of love*" and Kendra offered "I love you," Clarence countered with, "Uh, Star Wars, do a Star Wars song"; after several children suggested "milk" and "baby formula," Abigail countered enthusiastically, "Come out of a portal and give you a kiss!"

The dual nature of the lyrics created by the children in Ms. Spin's class—and, in particular, their interest in making the lyrics funny—surprised me. Near the end of our lyric brainstorm session, I mused aloud: "Maybe we're making two different songs. Maybe we're making a lullaby and maybe we're making a funny song, too?" In hindsight, I find it puzzling that I apparently thought that a lullaby could not be funny. Around that time, however, two experiences caused me to change my thinking. First, while reading more on topics related to early childhood music education, I encountered an article in which Trehub (2019) described the vocal performances of caregivers to infants as either playful or soothing. Within that article, Trehub did not argue that a single song might be both playful and soothing, and yet reading about these two modalities caused me to consider the possibility that a single song might serve both purposes. While

planning and preparing lessons, a second experience caused me to change my thinking: I recalled that "All the Pretty Little Horses," a lullaby, does feature two distinct, alternating sections—at least in the way that I am accustomed to listening to and performing it. A slow, legato verse section in which the singer lulls the baby to sleep while promising "*all the pretty little horses*" gives way to a fast, energetic chorus section in which the singer lists various "*pretty little horses*" for the baby. During the next class period, I shared Saport's (1999) illustrated version of this lullaby with the children in Ms. Spin's class, highlighting the dual nature of the lyrics before proceeding to work alongside the children to turn their own lyrics into a draft melody.

Through their lyric selections and the ways in which those selections contributed to their broader pattern of lyric play, the children in Ms. Spin's class communicated the way in which many of them hoped to respond to the interruption posed by Sam: They would care for Sam with music, but they would make Sam smile, too. In the same way that pointing toward the world emerged from the data as an invitation to explore subject-ness, responsiveness emerged from the data as a means of then following the children as they embarked on these explorations.

Creation. Relative to other curricular areas, Biesta (2020b) argued that music and the arts constitute "different ways of being in dialogue with the world" (p. 112). Such encounters with and within the arts raise questions particular to the arts:

> This is not the question 'How can I make sense of this?' and even less so the question 'What can I learn from this?'—questions that go from 'me' to the art we encounter—but is the question 'What is this asking of me?', the question 'What is

> this trying to say to me?', or the question 'What is this trying to teach me?' (p. 100)

While I agree with Biesta's assertion here, I wonder, too, about the assumptions that underlie it. Namely, I get the sense that Biesta was thinking primarily about "the *doing* of art" and, in particular, the ways in which such creative acts put the child in contact with "the reality of paint, stone, wood, metal, sound, bodies…" (p. 66). Biesta invoked various examples from the visual arts, such as the creation of a sculpture. Within examples drawn from the performing arts, by contrast, Biesta emphasized performance rather than creation:

> We can't just play a piece of music or sing a song at any tempo. We can speed it up a little, or slow it down, but at some point it becomes a different song, or disintegrates altogether. Again we are called into dialogue and are taught that not everything that we want, desire or fancy is possible. (pp. 80–81)

What is missing, however, from these descriptions of music and the performing arts as interruptive is that, through musical creation, children can act on those interruptions. That is, while children may hear the "call" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 36) in encounters with music, they may be specifically invited to respond to that call through musical creation. As noted by Bylica (2024), "It is possible… that shifts in pedagogical practices, including those in composition, create the possibility for moments that help educators and students see musical endeavors as complex, multifaceted, and, often, inextricably bound up in the world" (p. 593). I pointed the children to Sam in Phase 2 of the curriculum project, for example, but it was during specific songwriting activities within that phase that the

children were invited to respond to that pointing and to experience resistance between their own wants and the perceived wants of Sam.

In the context of this curriculum project, the use of "guardrails" (Research Journal Entry) emerged as a specific teaching strategy by which I supported the children in their creative decision-making. This term first appeared in the data in a question I asked myself: "Am I going to put up guardrails around their compositions? And if so, how much?" (Research Journal Entry). As a teacher relatively new to songwriting and composition pedagogies, I was concerned that such pedagogies would be unmanageably broad or controllingly narrow. While weighing these extremes, a "critical friend" (Schuck & Russell, 2005) encouraged me to ask myself whether my use of guardrails were "for my vision or… for setting [the children] up for success" (Research Journal Entry). Put another way, if my concern was that the project turn out in a way that met my expectations, then the use of guardrails would probably lead to a narrow experience with songwriting pedagogies, whereas if my concern was that the project unfold in ways in which the children could engage in and contribute to our songwriting efforts, then the use of guardrails would likely be helpful. Bandlien (2020) came to a similar conclusion in the context of a technology-based composition unit directed toward subject-ness among 8th grade musicians: "I suggest giving compositional tasks formulated as invitations without any prescriptions, while prohibitions or restrictions could be included as frames for the task" (p. 253). One such frame or guardrail was the process by which we created lyrics: First, the children brainstormed lyrics together as a group while I took notes; second, outside of class, I compiled those suggestions and organized them into a rough draft

using images to represent the lyrics; third, I shared the draft lyrics with the children; and fourth, the children revised the lyrics (see Kaschub & Smith, 2009). Such practices encouraged the children to meaningfully engage in songwriting, and such songwriting encouraged the children to respond to that which I pointed them to.

The Reflexive Gifts of Teaching

While the term *educational* is frequently used to describe something from which one might learn, there is another possible definition in the context of world-centered education. To Biesta (2021b; see also 2011a), the term educational refers rather to features of education that are particular to education. Learning, for example, is not uniquely educational—but teaching is. Biesta (2021b) explained the decision to focus on teaching and teachers in this way:

> This is not because I would hold that students are not important or because I would deny that learning exists—albeit that I remain concerned about the extremely superficial use of the word—but because the work of education can neither be reduced to nor understood through students and their learning. (p. 59)

Biesta then continued by articulating various "gifts" (p. 69) given to children "*in* teaching and *as* teaching" (p. 68, emphasis in original) in relation to their emergence as subjects.

Ms. Bailey relied on curiously similar language when describing the depth of teacher-child relationships made possible in and by this curriculum project as a sort of gift. She was not, however, describing a gift given to the children, but reflexively, to a "little gift [I] created for [myself]" as the teacher (Individual Interview). In the following sections, I unwrap two gifts that I encountered both reflexively and unexpectedly as an

educator engaged in teaching toward subject-ness. Taken together, these gifts address the third and final research question which guided this inquiry: In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher change through critical participation in this study?

The Reflexive Gift of "Philosophical Play"

As outlined in Chapter 1, much of my initial interest in this project was animated by a sense of disillusionment with my own curriculum-centered and methods-oriented teaching. In retrospect, this was a crisis of purpose and, in particular, a crisis of functional literacy understood as purpose. Gould (2009) situated the teaching of functional literacy in music education as a focus on "basic skills necessary to function in traditional general, instrumental, and choral school music programs. Typical curricula are based on pre-packaged materials, such as music series books, beginning band, orchestra, and choral method books, and the U.S. National Standards" (p. 47). Similarly, Bylica (2024) noted that functional literacy in music education implies "the prioritization of the mastery of skills and concepts" (p. 584), often at the expense of more critical and creative endeavors.

Throughout the enactment of this curriculum project, however, these frustrations with functional literacy were slowly supplanted by a sense of playfulness. Reflecting on the aims of the curriculum project, I wrote the following early in the study: "It's not a focused silver bullet on how to do this thing or how to do that thing. But it really is starting to feel more like philosophical play" (Research Journal Entry). By *philosophical play*, I mean playing with educational theory—doing something tangible with educational theory and with my concerns about the purpose of my work. More specifically, I mean doing so in a playful, exploratory manner, rather than as a quest for a solution to these

concerns. These two threads—my personal experiences with functional literacy and the sense of philosophical play that accompanied my challenge to the primacy of functional literacy—are drawn together in the following reflection:

> This sort of lesson planning—this long-term project, digging into subject-ness, through lullaby, world-centered, etc.—this whole thing is actually getting further and further from what I would normally be doing with kindergarten and I love that it's getting away from the, "Okay, here's the four instrument families and here's the steady beat—there, we covered the kindergarten curriculum" sort of issue… I feel I'm really enjoying exploring something further. (Research Journal Entry)

In this reflection, the term "exploring" (Research Journal Entry) is key in that I did not simply replace one purpose with another. The gift, in other words, was not a new, singular purpose for my teaching, but the philosophical play enacted while exploring Biesta's (2021b) three domains of educational purpose through both the curriculum project itself and the process of conducting action research.[18]

Teaching for functional literacy can be understood as a form of qualification, a purpose which "has to do with the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills, and understanding" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 44). Biesta did not suggest that teaching for subject-ness should replace qualification nor socialization. Rather, Biesta argued for a

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[18] Elliott (2009) described a related way of thinking about this connection between educational theory and action research. With regard to music education, Parker (2023) encouraged teachers engaging in action research to "develop theory inside of practice" (p. 413). Neither, however, situated this theory-building or theory-developing specifically as a form of play.

realignment of educational priorities:

> It rather is that all education should first and foremost be interested in the student's subject-ness, knowing that arousing a desire for wanting to exist in and with the world needs to make this encounter with the world possible—socialisation—and needs to ensure that children and young people are sufficiently equipped to act in the world—qualification. (p. 51)

That is to say, the functional skills associated with qualification ought to be taught, but toward the emergence of mature subject-ness. In the context of project-based teaching in music education, this qualification can manifest as a nonlinear process by which children acquire the musical skills needed to enact the project itself and so engage in and with the world (Dillon, 2023a).

Throughout this process of qualification-toward-subject-ness made manifest in the curriculum project, I documented personal reflections about what it meant to me that we were not simply learning musical skills, but using those musical skills to "*act* in and with the world" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 10, emphasis in original). While this was especially true in the later stages of the project when we created and then performed lullabies for young children in our community, this sense held true for day-to-day interactions, as well. For example:

> I just wanted to reflect on Lesson 3 generally and say I really enjoyed the feeling like we were doing something with music. And I know that was really just one little brief chunk of the lesson right there at the end, where we're playing an instrument that they had suggested [as an option to include in our lullaby for

> Sam], which went different directions with each class. But then, sort of micro-dialoguing about whether that would actually help Sam or maybe even bringing Sam in. In the case of one class when a boy sang a lullaby to Sam while I accompanied on piano, at their suggestion, soft piano or quiet piano, it just felt really nice to be doing something with what we're learning. (Research Journal Entry)

This sense of meaningfulness demonstrated what was made possible in and through continued and continual deliberation on purpose—through such philosophical play.

One further consequence of my engagement in this curriculum project is a burgeoning understanding of the value of "doing something with what we're learning" (Research Journal Entry). Namely, I am convinced that this something is taking place in and for the present rather than in preparation for the future and that therein lies some of its potential value. Central to this curriculum project were "these moment-to-moment interactions and what we make of those moments, rather than guiding toward, you know, 'ta tee-tee' or steady beat or whatever the preordained endpoint truth is" (Research Journal Entry). This focus on the present was also evident in the data in terms of the "tension between wanting to be thorough with the [ongoing] data [analysis] and also the need to be present in the project, in the moment, in terms of lesson planning and responsiveness" (Research Journal Entry). On one particularly difficult day in which I felt overwhelmed by personal factors outside of the project, I wrote that I wanted to "just focus on what has to happen and then creating these meaningful moments with kids" (Research Journal Entry). I can imagine other times in my career in which this sort of

exhaustion might have caused me to focus my attention forward—to address the present as merely a stepping stone toward, say, a future concert performance. But within this study, my focus on "creating these meaningful moments" (Research Journal Entry) in the present enabled me to relate differently to the children entrusted to my care.

Allsup and Westerlund (2012) argued that "the criterion of a good music education is never the constant preparation for a future life (or a future concert)... but is when one's experience is just as meaningful presently as it is imagined to be in future life" (p. 135). Similarly, Dansereau (2023) cautioned: "An overemphasis on children becoming musical adults discredits the child's existing musicianship and positions the child as musically deficient to the adult" (p. 59). Elsewhere, I situated these notions in the context of elementary general music curriculum design and part-work pedagogy in particular, critiquing that such curriculum design is often leveraged toward short-term preparation for concert performances and/or long-term preparation for future participation in large ensembles—an orientation toward the future, but at the possible expense of a more musically- and personally-meaningful present (Dillon, 2023b). As noted by Biesta (2021b), this future orientation is rooted in a perceived need to help students to adapt to the future—but that the "first question that needs to be asked… is whether the particular circumstances are worth adapting to, or whether there is a need to resist and refuse adaptation" (p. 11).

As I continually unwrap this first gift, I find that there is more ribbon yet. In other words, I find that my crisis of purpose relating to functional literacies is still unresolved. More surprising, however, is the realization that I no longer perceive of my ongoing

deliberations on purpose as a crisis, nor do I believe that resolving them is possible or even desirable. Rather, I perceive of such deliberations as a form of play—"philosophical play" (Research Journal Entry)—through which alternatives are made possible, realized, and explored together.

The Reflexive Gift of "Connections"

The ways in which I understood and related to the children involved in this study were fundamentally different from the ways in which I was accustomed to relating to children in the primary grades. More specifically:

> I feel like I have pretty good relationships with my older-older students, my 5th graders[19] in particular because a lot of them I have for general music, I have for band, I have for after-school choir, and I've had them for 6 years. And it's just been really interesting to me this last week, week and a half—in particular, some of the connections that have come up in this slow, careful way of doing kindergarten that have felt that same way… It feels more meaningful in a different way. (Research Journal Entry)

As seen in the data, the depth of these teacher-child "connections" (Research Journal Entry) emerged as a sort of gift—a gift given reflexively or, as Ms. Bailey said to me, a "little gift you created for yourself" (Individual Interview).

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[19] In my teaching practice, I try not to use possessive terms when referring to children. In this instance, however, I referred to "my older-older students" and "my 5th graders." Rather than edit this, I chose to keep this language within the transcript in an effort to honestly document the ways in which I reflected in the moment as part of this Research Journal Entry. Furthermore, I chose not to edit this quotation as an opportunity for me to reflect on my own word choice and as a reminder to myself that the language I use matters.

In a personal reflection on Kodály-inspired teaching toward functional ends, Benedict (2021) shared the following:

> But I did forsake the person in front of me, the human in front of me, in order to further my musical agenda… I believed in the openness and generosity of the questions I was asking until I began audio recording my fifth-grade classes for an assignment in one of my doctoral classes. As I transcribed those recordings, I realized that what I had believed was thoughtful student input (never discussion; even at the time, I didn't pretend there was discussion) was simply the same students answering the questions I was posing. (p. 11)

In some ways, this reflects how I now feel about the ways in which I previously related to children in the primary grades: I forsook the children in front of me in favor of the curriculum itself. But in the context of this project, I earnestly believe that our relationships began to change. Many of these changes were made possible when I sought to enact care alongside them and to engage in dialogue with them, as these experiences caused me to *notice* the children in ways I might not have otherwise.

In a more traditional general music setting, I would not have noticed Jackson in the same way that I noticed him in this curriculum project. While he seemed genuinely interested in participating, I was sometimes unable to understand his speech and he would quickly become frustrated when others—both other children and myself—would make assumptions about what he said. Early in the project, Jackson started to engage in a discussion with his peers within a focus group interview, during which I mistakenly called him by the name of a child in another class. He struggled to verbally communicate

my error and, without any of the other children speaking up on his behalf, he said: “I don’t know.” I only understood my mistake in hindsight while reviewing the data. I sincerely regret calling Jackson by the wrong name, and yet I think it is important to share this interaction as in some ways it highlights the sort of relationships I had become accustomed to having with children in the primary grades.

But in and through this curriculum project, I noticed Jackson. In the following research journal entry, I documented my decision to invite Jackson to participate in one of the follow-up focus group interviews:

> He has a very, very difficult time physically talking, but he’s very invested in the project… Jackson on one of the first days raised his hand and kind of mumbled something about Sam. And I said, “Oh, you wanted to sing for Sam?” And he went, “Yes.” And he got up and is playing with Sam and singing with. So he’s in it. I’m having a hard time understanding what he’s saying, and he gets really uncomfortable around all the other kids. Like that moment of, “I have something to say, but it’s not coming out.” And then he’ll get frustrated and say “later” or something like that. And so I’m thinking I didn’t do much with that in the past when he said “later”—I just waited to see if he’d raise his hand again and he didn’t in the whole class setting. So I’m wondering if maybe beyond the focus group… He needs to not feel rushed by the other kids, I think. I actually have one video clip in particular where two other kids put words in his mouth, and they might have been taking that from me ‘cause I was trying to be helpful—I did the same thing when I was like, “Oh, you want to sing it for Sam?” (Research Journal

Entry)

When asked in the follow-up focus group interview to revise the lullaby we had written for Sam to be about "someone you care about," Jackson decided to change the lullaby for Brittany—another child in the same class and present at the time—by changing the lyrics to be about a little turtle. I later wrote of Jackson: "his voice was still lost in the in-class station rotation. His voice didn't really have the space to come out until it was a follow-up focus group, which is an artifact specifically of the research process" (Research Journal Entry). This was a messy noticing in that while I welcomed my newfound relationship with Jackson, I was concerned that this particular encounter might not have happened outside of a focus group interview. I worried, essentially, that had the curriculum project unfolded without the accompanying research procedures, I would still be calling Jackson by the wrong name and stifling or overlooking his contributions in class. But in retrospect, I understand these data differently in two ways: First, in the context of the present study, I understand the curriculum project and the research process to be inextricable; and second, regardless of how my noticing of Jackson arose within the present study, it happened. As my teaching practices changed within this project, my noticing changed; and as my noticing changed, my teaching practices changed further in what I hope to be ways which will endure beyond this project.

My engagement in this curriculum project also helped me to notice Brittany in a way that I might not have otherwise. Near the midpoint of the curriculum project, Ms. Bailey and I shared the following exchange by email (Artifact):

Mr. Dillon: Everything alright with Brittany lately? I know she was absent today—but

she was on my radar as someone to keep an eye out for today. I've just noticed the last week or two that she hasn't been speaking up as much and that, when they can choose their spot, she has been choosing to sit alone. Hopefully I'm just exaggerating, but figured I would check.

Ms. Bailey: Oooh you are very observant!

Ms. Bailey then offered to discuss the matter with me in-person. Referring to my subsequent conversation with Ms. Bailey, I later reflected that I learned the following about Brittany: She "wants to do the right thing all the time, but also wants everyone else to do the right thing" (Research Journal Entry). According to Ms. Bailey, this likely made it difficult for Brittany to speak up, especially in the context of unstructured group dialogue. Ms. Bailey encouraged me to "invite Brittany back in more directly" (Research Journal Entry).

I encouraged Brittany "more directly" (Research Journal Entry) in the following interaction drawn from a discussion among the children in Ms. Bailey's class about how to change their lullaby for Sam to be a lullaby for Annie's not-yet-born sibling.

Ryan: I think we should change the medkit and the underpants one, or the llama gets, gets changed off, too—

Alexander: [With a smile.] Not the llama!

Ryan: —and we keep, uh, the little star, and then we pick two other, three other ones.

Wayne: Because, of course, the baby will like, not like the underpants, and the medkit, and the llama.

Zane: It would like the medkit.

Mr. Dillon: Ah. See, now, Zane really likes the medkit, though, so why would we—[noticed Brittany, who is sitting alone toward the back of the room instead of sitting together with the rest of the children]—Yeah, Brittany, were you gonna say something about the medkit or another idea?

Brittany: Umm, I think the—I think we should change the medkit and the underpants 'cause the baby wouldn't like that.

Several seconds later, as the dialogue continued around her, Brittany stood. She brushed the hair out of her face, approached the group, sat down next to Sophia, and started to laugh with her friends while discussing whether or not Annie's not-yet-born sibling would like playing Fortnite. Importantly, my decision to encourage Brittany to join us ran counter to my own inclination to assume that "she want[ed] to be left alone or want[ed] a little bit of space" (Research Journal Entry). And yet, this encouragement was made possible through my noticing—both the prior noticing that inspired me to collaborate with Ms. Bailey and my in-the-moment noticing.

By enacting care alongside one another and engaging in dialogue together, I noticed and connected with the children in ways I would not have otherwise. These opportunities for noticing and for connection emerged from and were made possible within the context of the curriculum project. While pointing the children from themselves outward to the world, I found myself pointed from the curriculum outward to the children—a "little gift" (Individual Interview).

Summary

The findings presented in this chapter encompassed three overarching themes: snapshots of emergent subject-ness in childhood focused on care, resistance, and dissent; pointing as an invitation to explore subject-ness, including the myriad ways in which this pointing manifested and facets of the curriculum project which contributed to this pointing; and the reflexive gifts of teaching, including "philosophical play" and teacher-student "connections." In the final chapter, I summarize the findings of this study in relation to the research questions, explore the implications of those findings, describe the limitations of the study, and pose several areas for future study.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

> The primary purpose of a teacher is to help [their] pupils learn to live in the world, and the practice of art, in its widest sense, is a major tool in that learning… (Small, 1977/1996, p. 224)

In this study, I engaged in "philosophical play" (Research Journal Entries) with subject-ness as a possible purpose of elementary general music education and did so alongside children engaged in such classes. Functional literacy, sometimes framed as the de facto purpose to be pursued in such classes (see Benedict 2012a, 2012b), "refers to the various competencies needed to function appropriately within a given society" (Gutstein, 2006, p. 5). In the context of music in elementary schools, Benedict (2012a) noted that "music learning is often understood functionally as preparatory" (p. 155)—as a means of developing skills and acquiring knowledge pertaining to Western art music notation, itself sometimes framed as a means of preparing children for later experiences with large ensembles (see Dillon, 2023b).

Biesta (2021b) described the teaching of skills and concepts as *qualification*—one of three *domains of educational purpose*. Through *socialization*, a second domain, children "are welcomed into social groups and encounter groups with which they are unfamiliar" (Dillon, 2023a, p. 4). Biesta (2021b) argued that both qualification and socialization are necessary, but that they ought to serve a third purpose: encouraging the child to be and become a *subject*, not an object. *World-centered education* (Biesta, 2021b) is a means of addressing subject-ness in a particularly "grown-up" way (p. 22; see also 2017a). Rather than referring to age or development, however, Biesta (2021b) described this mature orientation to subject-ness as one in which the subject is "*in* the

world and *with* the world, and not just with themselves" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 37, emphasis in original).

The purpose of this study was to explore the emergence of subject-ness among children in the context of a world-centered elementary general music class. This purpose was addressed through the creation and implementation of a curriculum project in which young children engaged in lullaby songwriting. Furthermore, I sought to examine how such an approach may have changed the participants involved, both the children and myself. This curriculum project was enacted alongside children in three kindergarten general music classes in the elementary school at which I taught at the time.

I designed this study as a form of critical educational action research drawing upon Somekh's (2006) principles of action research. In particular, this study was influenced by the following three principles: that action research "*is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants and researchers*," "*involves a high level of reflexivity*," and "*locates the inquiry in an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts*" (pp. 7–8, emphasis in original). The progressively iterative nature of this three-phase project was initially influenced by the *self-reflective action research spiral* (Kemmis et al., 2014) which I later adapted into the *action research trellis*, a visual framing in which inquiry is illustrated as potentially growing in divergent and unpredictable ways.

Responding to the Research Questions

Research Question 1

I developed the first research question in an effort to illustrate subject-ness as enacted among the children—to offer and explore a "down-to-earth, and tangible description of what subjectification may be about" (Dyndahl, 2021, p. 173), of which there are relatively few direct examples in the extant research literature. The final version[20] of Research Question 1 is: In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher perceive the enactment of subject-ness among the children participating in this study? In this section, I first list and then unpack the findings relevant to this research question.

1. I observed several "snapshots" of emergent subject-ness among the children participating in this study as they engaged in the curriculum project.
    a. The children and I operationalized mature subject-ness as a form of compassionate care.
    b. I perceived the negotiation of subject-ness among the children in moments of interruption while they were actively experiencing and moving through resistance relating to their own wants and the needs of others.
    c. I perceived subject-ness among the children in acts of dissent.

Like a latent image made visible as a photograph is developed, several "snapshots" (Research Journal Entry) of subject-ness emerged from the data. Throughout the implementation of the curriculum project, the children and I operationalized mature

[20] See Chapter 5 for a detailed account of the ways in which this research question changed over the course of the study.

subject-ness as a form of compassionate care (Hendricks, 2023). Through acts of care, the children and I recognized and acted upon the relationships between our own wants and the needs of others—that is, we sought to accept "the challenge of reconciling ourselves to reality" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 49; see also Arendt, 1994). When Riley was injured, for example, David continued to focus on his own desire related to a game they were playing while Josiah put his wants aside to comfort Riley and tend to her needs.

The data collected in this study suggest that subject-ness is not a fixed binary. In other words, it is possible to act in ways that do not meet Biesta's (2021b) description of "grown-up" (p. 51) subject-ness, but which approach or negotiate subject-ness. In accordance with Biesta's argument, these moments arose in the context of *interruption* while children were actively experiencing and moving through feelings of *resistance* relating to their own wants and the needs of others. Zane's trajectory in this project, for example, is marked by such moments.

Lastly, mature subject-ness was enacted by children in acts of dissent. In these occurences, a third party obstructed the ability of a child to address either their own wants or the needs of the other. In some of these instances, I intervened in such boundary violations, framing the situation in terms of the other or providing a model and language for children to use when asserting themselves. In other instances, I did not intervene and the children communicated their boundaries using words, facial expressions, and body language. In one notable instance of subject-ness emerging in an act of dissent, Grace confronted me when, from her perspective, I failed to support her friend. Of particular note in this situation was the power differential between teacher and child—by

expressing her frustration and voicing her dissent with an authority figure, Grace risked the self in support of the other. If subject-ness is about understandings of the self in relation to the other, then subject-ness can be perceived in acts of care—but also in acts of dissent.

Research Question 2

By asking the second research question, I turned my attention from the enactment of subject-ness to the specific ways in which general music education might contribute to or encourage subject-ness. Research Question 2 is as follows: In what ways, if any, do world-centered experiences in elementary general music education support the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study? In this section, I first list and then unpack the findings relevant to this research question.

2. Acts of pedagogical pointing served as invitations to the children to explore their emerging subject-ness.
    a. I observed a broad range of world-centered experiences which involved pedagogical pointing within the curriculum project and organized them on a wheel-shaped continuum.
    b. Responsiveness, creation, and dialogue emerged as notable facets of the curriculum project which contributed to the world-centered potential of pedagogical pointing.

During the planning phase, I conceived of three distinct forms for these world-centered experiences: pointing children to the self, as when the children engaged in songwriting about the self in Phase 1; pointing children to an imagined other, as when the

children engaged in songwriting for and about a baby doll in Phase 2; and pointing children to an actual other, as when the children rearranged their original lullaby to be about an infant or child in the school community in Phase 3.

In practice, additional forms of world-centered experience emerged from the data—experiences that can be conceived of as a broader continuum along which subject-ness is negotiated. The stages of the continuum identified during data analysis include: pointing children to the self, as when the children rearranged "Hush, Little Baby" to reflect their own interests; pointing children to an imagined other, as when the children engaged in songwriting about Sam; pointing the children to one another, as in moments in which I framed student-to-student conflicts in terms of the other; pointing children to an absent other, as when children rationalized their own preferences using what might feasibly be true of the other; pointing children to a present other, as when the children explained their creative decisions and performed for the child for whom they created their class lullaby; and in the last stage of the continuum, children act in and with the world beyond the school and without the support of the teacher, an example of which is presented in the epilogue to this chapter. Notably, I illustrated this continuum as a wheel in an effort to honor the ways in which children might move between the stages depicted: In some instances, a child might progress linearly from one stage to another with the support of a teacher, while in other instances, that same child might cross the center of the wheel in nonlinear ways and into non-adjacent stages.

From the data, three facets of the curriculum project emerged as particularly relevant to the world-centered potential of pedagogical pointing. Taken together, these

three facets address the two sub-questions included in Research Question 2. The first of these sub-questions is as follows: What role, if any, does the teacher-researcher have in supporting or hindering the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study?

First, teaching in ways that were responsive to the idiosyncrasies of each group of children made it possible for the children to respond to my pointing in ways that were meaningful to those children. For example: The children in Ms. Spin's class created a lullaby that was both "gentle" and "silly" (Research Journal Entry), the children in Ms. Bailey's class incorporated a rainstick to emulate the sound of a white noise sleep aid, and the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class structured their lullaby as a bedtime storybook. By contrast, entering into this sort of work with closed, prescriptive project outcomes would have essentially funneled the children into responding in uniform, predetermined ways.

Second, though pointing acted as an invitation to children to explore their emerging subject-ness within this curriculum project, creative songwriting activities specifically created space within which the children could respond to that which I pointed them to. Within these songwriting activities, the "guardrails" (Research Journal Entry) I established for each task helped to create this space in which they might respond. One such guardrail was the collective nature of the songwriting tasks within the curriculum project—in small groups during the first phase and as whole classes during phases two and three. Another guardrail was the use of melodic contour notation, inspired by Kaschub and Smith (2009), rather than the use of Western art music notation. These

guardrails were calibrated to provide the children with enough structure and support to be able to meaningfully engage in songwriting without imposing so much structure that the project became overly predefined or predetermined. This particular finding is reminiscent of the ways in which Hickey (2012) encouraged music educators to use prompts to guide composition activities without being overly prescriptive. Bandlien (2020), in a study involving 8th grade students engaged in a technology-based music composition unit, similarly found that "promotional challenges" (p. 252) enabled explorations of subject-ness when structured as open-ended invitations to action.

The second sub-question of Research Question 2 is: What role, if any, does dialogue play in the emergence of subject-ness among the children participating in this study? Dialogue (see White, 2016a, 2021) emerged as a means by which subject-ness was made tangible within the context of this study, as dialogue made it possible for us to reflect on actions both in the moment and later when reviewing photographs and videos of the project together. In particular, moments of consensus and dissensus served as opportunities for children to experience and move through interruption and resistance. In one instance, Abigail dialogically mediated a consensus between Penny and Clarence: "WALL-E could be the worker in the ice cream shop!" In another instance, Faye helped guide the children—and myself—through an experience of dissensus. When Grace and Zane encountered a creative conflict, Ryan encouraged us to vote on their differing ideas. Faye, however, had another suggestion: "Well, them be equal." Rather than understanding this as a form of compromise, I view Faye's comment as a crucial step toward embracing the "existence of multiplicity, of plurality and of conflict" (Mouffe,

1993/2020, p. 18)—itself a crucial step with regard to the enactment of subject-ness (Biesta, 2021b). Consider that Faye's comment, which she offered freely to Grace and Zane from outside of their creative conflict, evinced a particular kind of framing. This was not a framing about the self nor a framing about the other, but rather about both self and other in relation—"them be equal." While this comment might be perceived as a demonstration of Faye's own understanding of self and other in that moment, it also served as an invitation to the rest of us—myself included—to meaningfully engage in dissensus together.

Research Question 3

The final research question is: In what ways, if any, does the teacher-researcher change through critical participation in this study? In this section, I first list and then unpack the findings relevant to this research question.

3. The ways in which I changed through participation in this study amounted to two reflexive gifts of teaching—gifts given to myself through my own teaching.
    a. The curriculum project and research procedures created opportunities for me to engage in "philosophical play" with the potential purposes of elementary general music education.
    b. The ways in which the children and I engaged in acts of care and in dialogue together fostered teacher-student "connections" and caused me to notice the children in ways that materially impacted my teaching.

Drawing upon the language of both Biesta (2021b) and Ms. Bailey (Individual Interview), I described the ways in which I changed as gifts—the reflexive gifts of

teaching. The first of these gifts was the realization that, rather than solving or resolving my crisis of educational purpose, my participation in this project reshaped my deliberations on this crisis into a form of "philosophical play" (Research Journal Entry) animated by opportunities to "do something" in the present "with what we're learning" (Research Journal Entry). More specifically, within these opportunities, children learned vocal performance, instrumental performance, and songwriting skills while simultaneously putting those skills to use in meaningful ways. For example, the children in one class learned to play both the C major and a minor chords on ukulele. They did so, however, not as functional ends in and of themselves but because of what those skills made possible for the children in terms of songwriting for others. Put another way: This is not an approach in which functional literacy constitutes "an end-point in the formal process of schooling" (Benedict, 2012a, p. 152), but rather one in which "the key issue at stake is what the one 'receiving' *will do* with what he or she has learned" (Biesta, 2021b, p. vii, emphasis in original)—and the extent to which that doing evinces understandings of self and other.

The second reflexive gift of teaching, "connections" (Research Journal Entry), accounted for the depth of teacher-child relationships I experienced while participating in this study. In particular, the ways in which the children and I engaged in acts of care and in dialogue together caused me to notice the children in ways I do not believe that I would have otherwise. I want to be clear here: I am not referring to *professional noticing*, which can be understood as a "set of interrelated skills including (a) attending to children's strategies, (b) interpreting children's understandings, and (c) deciding how to

respond on the basis of children's understandings" (Jacobs, 2010, p. 169). Rather, the *noticing* that emerged from the data collected in this study is more diffuse and generalized—not anchored to disciplinary content knowledge,[21] but to the people involved and the care-full ways in which we related to one another (see Hendricks, 2023). Key to this concept of noticing is that it implies a sort of stillness on the part of the teacher—a "slow, careful way of doing kindergarten" (Research Journal Entry) and a form of inactive action which intentionally holds space for the actions of the other (see Pitt, 2024) and appreciations thereof.[22] In some instances, acting upon what I noticed fundamentally changed my relationship with individual children and thus materially impacted my teaching, as when I noticed a pattern in Brittany's actions that prompted a conversation with Ms. Bailey, who then helped me to more meaningfully meet Brittany's needs in the classroom.

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[21] To be clear, it is possible to anchor noticing within disciplinary content knowledge in thoughtful and relational ways (e.g., Reynolds & Burton, 2017), though that is not how noticing emerged in the data within the present study.

[22] This notion of noticing within educational contexts is not unlike Weil's (1947/2002, 1950/2021) conception of *attention* within theological discussions—and especially the ways in which this idea of attention contrasts with *will*. Weil (1947/2002) wrote, for example: "The will only controls a few movements of a few muscles… What could be more stupid than to tighten up our muscles and set our jaws about virtue, or poetry, or the solution of a problem. Attention is something quite different" (pp. 116–117). Professional noticing, then, might be interpreted as a matter of will in that the teacher tightens their muscles in pursuit of the solution to a problem—the child's learning. The sort of teacherly noticing that I offer here, rather, is defined by radical stillness, an openness to what is noticed in the moment, and care-full reflection.

Implications

I embarked on this inquiry with two concerns—one about curriculum, what music educators teach, and one about pedagogy, the ways in which music educators teach. First, I was concerned that elementary general music teaching is often curriculum-centered and method-oriented. Second, I was concerned that such curriculum-centered and method-oriented teaching might complicate and compromise the relationships of those involved. To that end, and in keeping with the focus on teachers and teaching implied by my chosen theoretical framework (see Biesta, 2016a, 2017b, 2021b), I offer in the following sections two implications of this research for elementary general music teachers: "up the risk level" (Research Journal Entry) as a way of thinking about critical curriculum design and "noticing" (Research Journal Entry) as an aspect of relational pedagogy.

Critical Curriculum Design: "Up the Risk Level"

As illustrated in the wheel of world-centered experiences presented in Chapter 5, it is possible to scaffold opportunities for children to encounter the world and to move through the interruption and resistance implied by such encounters. In particular, the ways in which Zane responded to encounters with himself, an imagined other, his peers, an absent other, and a present other demonstrated that subject-ness is not a fixed binary but can instead be negotiated along a continuum. Within education, this sort of scaffolding is commonly associated with the teaching of skills and concepts, as in Bruner's (1977) spiral curriculum. Music educators interested in teaching toward subject-ness in particular or in curriculum design directed toward critical aims more broadly may consider structuring their engagements in ways that "up the risk level" (Research Journal

Entry), continually seeking to put "a bit more at stake" (Biesta, 2021c, 56:18). In the context of this study, dialogue, responsiveness, and creation were all facets of the project that made space for such critical engagements.

I am not suggesting that elementary music educators implement a curriculum project on lullaby songwriting specifically. Rather, I am suggesting that music educators point children toward the world through their teaching—but to prepare them for those experiences, too, by starting from the self and gradually moving outward to the other. In the context of early childhood music education specifically, this may include pointing toward an imagined other, as when we engaged in songwriting for Sam, the baby doll. If an elementary music educator chooses to take this sort of process seriously, however, they ought to contend with the fact that such projects cannot be entirely pre-planned or pre-defined. An elementary music educator might plan opportunities for responsiveness, as when the ways in which each group of children collectively defined lullaby in this curriculum project later impacted their selection of instruments to accompany their lullaby compositions and lessons in which they then learned to play those instruments. But emergent opportunities for responsiveness may arise, too, as when the children in Ms. Hemsworth's class chose to adopt a storybook structure for their lullaby or when the children in Ms. Spin's class challenged my own understanding of the nature of lullaby singing by creating one that was both soothing and joyfully funny. In other words, by intentionally upping the risk level, music educators can point children to the world—but such engagements ought to leave space for the unique ways in which children choose to act (or not act) on what they find there.

Relational Pedagogy: "Noticing"

While care was specifically invoked in this study as a means of operationalizing mature subject-ness, the enactment of care alongside the children directly contributed to a change in the teacher-student relationships that were made possible in and by our interactions. More specifically, by engaging in both care and dialogue alongside the children, I noticed the children in ways I was unaccustomed to. While I previously offered examples involving Jackson and Brittany specifically, I want to note here instead that pointing—and then offering the suspension and sustenance needed to follow that pointing—entails its own sort of noticing, too. Upon noticing Grace's discomfort when experiencing dissensus and resistance with Zane, for example, I chose to verbally acknowledge how difficult that sort of discomfort can be. I did not, however, intervene and resolve this tension for her, which I may have done in a more traditional general music context in which a curriculum-centered and methods-oriented approach complicated my ability to meaningfully notice the children in front of me. On a separate day, Grace chose to confront me on behalf of her friend, Raelynn. In a traditional general music context, I may have responded punitively to such an act. But in the context of this study, what I noticed was that Grace was exercising her ability to engage in dissent—to confront power. She was, essentially, practicing "grown-up ways of being in and with the world" (Biesta, 2020b, p. 89).

At this juncture, I want to linger on a question that has troubled me throughout the duration of this study. This question was first posed to me by a "critical friend" (Schuck & Russell, 2005) during the initial planning phase: To what extent am I interested in who

these children are *being* at present and in who these children are in the process of *becoming*? Surely, Biesta's (2021b) notion of subject-ness is oriented toward the future—toward a particular sort of becoming as subject. In my opinion, however, this distinction is rightfully messy in the research literature involving young children. On the one hand, for example, White's (2021) work implied an approach in which educators and researchers sought to cast off developmental understandings of the child as an "object for adult scrutiny" (p. 1283) and instead chose to lean into dialogue with children in the moment. On the other hand: "There is no first utterance and no last word; Bakhtinian dialogue views both children and adults as becoming" (de Vocht, 2015a, p. 3). One of my personal reasons for engaging in this work, as explored in Chapter 1, was a desire to push back on common assumptions about the purpose(s) of elementary general music education. I offered a critique of future-oriented understandings of educational purpose—and yet in subject-ness, I chose a future-oriented alternative to explore. In retrospect, I suppose the reason that all of this troubled me initially was that I found myself in search of a single, tidy answer—but found instead a richer understanding of the ways in which I might notice and embrace both being(s) and the continual becoming(s) implied therein. In other words: In the "perpetual springtime" (Dansereau, 2019, p. 3) of early childhood, an educator might equally appreciate the present moment while expectantly awaiting the next bloom.

Music educators interested in exploring alternatives to the tendency toward control in schools, and especially in elementary schools, may consider exploring relational, caring pedagogical approaches (e.g., Hendricks, 2023) built upon a foundation

of noticing. I liken this process to the ways in which Small (1996) described ecological and other non-destructive research methods: as a process of sitting

> still and passively… letting them and their sets of relationships reveal themselves in their own time… it is necessary to love them if one is to sit still and become part of their environment, even their society. The knowledge obtained by such researches may not be readily quantifiable, and does not necessarily confer power… (p. 75)

I am not offering this concept of noticing as a specific solution to a specific problem—in this context, it is not a form of mindfulness nor is it directed at social-emotional learning. Rather, I am suggesting that music educators ought to notice the children in their care as the foundation of a relational pedagogy. Such noticings might make possible new understandings of self and other—while simultaneously posing a radical escape from the sort of thinking and relationships implicated by and within curriculum-oriented teaching.

Limitations

Researchers engaged in educational action research are "inevitably constitutive of the data they collect and of the way in which it is interpreted and analysed" (Hall, 1996, p. 28). Action research is, thus, openly subjective. This is a limitation in the sense that it contributes to the impossibility of generalizing the findings of this research beyond the scope of the study itself. As described in Chapter 3, however, I sought to both embrace and interrogate my own reflexive role in this inquiry (see Somekh, 2006). Kallio (2021; see also Smith, 2013) critiqued "reflexive rituals" and "reflexive statements" as means of maintaining the focus on the researcher and potentially "reinforcing the very inequities

they intend to dismantle" (p. 61). When framed instead as a means of listening, however, Kallio (2021) described reflexivity as a tree line at which the forest and arctic tundra meet:

> *Inclusion* on the tree line cannot require transformation of one side or the other, or a *knowing* of the other wholly within the onto-epistemological frames of mainstream academe. Indeed, the tree line is not a fixed boundary at all; it is constantly changing, with roots that extend underground to the other side, mosses that grow beyond set borders, ever-changing dances between light and shadow, and leaves that fall where they may... it is a path that researchers can traverse, admire the view from one side or the other, straddle with a foot on either side, or turn back. It is an invitation to deeply engaged, relational work. (p. 63, emphasis in original)

While my reflexivity and subjectivity limit the generalizability of the findings of this study, they are also central to my understanding of this work as relational and of the pedagogical possibilities such work invites. In other words: I am content to "admire the view" (p. 63).

One consequence of the limited generalizability of educational action research is that the impact of such research is often considered to be limited and localized (see Cain, 2008; Rideout & Feldman, 2002). In the present study, however, I view this not as a limitation but as an asset. Recall that research methods have the potential to make "things from relations, extracted objects cut off from meaning" (Kuntz, 2016)—to make interchangeable, generalizable objects of the children who participate in such research.

The “tools at hand” (Kincheloe et al., 2017, p. 245) within and the purposes of critical educational action research differ from those of normative educational research methods. Such critical research is “messy” (Cook, 2009, p. 279), unfolding collaboratively in ways that strive toward a greater responsiveness to those involved. In other words, to have a primarily localized impact is rather the point of such critical scholarship, especially with regard to the exploration of subject-ness. And yet despite this focus on the local, critical research invites “the possibility for methodological strategies that link more macro-level discursive patternings… with more micro-level and localized practices” (Kuntz, 2016, p. 75). That is to say, while the impact of critical educational action research is primarily local, such research has the potential to encourage participants to engage with broader ideological contexts, too.

In addition to limitations of the research design more broadly, I would like to address a few limitations specific to the implementation of the curriculum project. Children who experience difficulties with verbal communication may struggle to participate in music lessons in which dialogue is emphasized (see Pitt, 2020). As noted previously with regard to Jackson, however, there were instances within this project in which inviting a child to participate in a follow-up focus group interview provided them with additional time and space to respond to dialogue prompts and/or songwriting tasks. These responses then helped me to notice children who experienced difficulties with verbal communication in ways that I might not have otherwise and so materially impacted my teaching and the ways in which these children and I related to one another.

While the collective nature of many of the lessons within the curriculum project was intentional and served as a "guardrail" (Research Journal Entry) to help make such lessons meaningful and accessible for young children, this collective nature had drawbacks, too. Within a collective discussion or a collective songwriting lesson, for example, it can be difficult to draw each child into the activity and check-in with them individually. Furthermore, as Ms. Bailey noted of Brittany, some children "want to do the right thing all the time" while also wanting "everyone else to do the right thing" (Research Journal Entry). In Brittany's case, that sometimes made it difficult for her to participate in relatively unstructured activities—collective discussions rather than individual tasks, for example. I would like to note, however, that the interdependence of "grown-up" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 51) subject-ness emerges in relation to others rather than in isolation, and so despite this possible limitation, the decision to engage collectively in songwriting lessons was an intentional effort to align the curriculum project with my chosen theoretical framework.

Lastly, implementing the curriculum project in ways that responsively differed between each group of children required more preparation time on my part than had I taught the same identical lessons to all three classes. As such, there may be a limit to how many classes a music teacher can feasibly and sustainably do this sort of responsive, project-based teaching with simultaneously—at least with regard to the planning time offered to teachers within the school district that I worked in at the time.

Areas for Future Research

As a site in which functional literacies are often emphasized—and, thus, relationships potentially complicated and compromised—the elementary general music class is a fruitful context in which to engage in "philosophical play" (Research Journal Entry) with purpose and with mature subject-ness, in particular. However, the elementary general music class is a context that young children move in and out of as they go about their daily lives—a drop in the bucket. As such, worthwhile extensions of this research might involve the ways in which subject-ness is encouraged, discouraged, and negotiated throughout the school day and beyond. Such inquiries might, for example, include longitudinal studies in which subject-ness is explored beyond the scope of a single curriculum project. Additional variations on this study might involve cross-case analysis between multiple school contexts or a greater emphasis on directly teaching the value and importance of sleep itself as a means of highlighting lullaby singing as an act of care.

In the context of this study, I sought to explore purposes for musical engagements within elementary schools—purposes beyond functional literacy. In particular, I explored subject-ness as a potential purpose for such engagements. Subject-ness, however, is only one possibility and music education researchers ought to continue raising questions about functional literacy while imagining additional and alternative possibilities. Similarly, investigations of teachers' perceptions of purpose in elementary general music contexts and the factors influencing their reliance on functional literacies would be welcome additions to this growing body of research.

Epilogue: An End, a Beginning

> The new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. (Arendt, 2018, p. 9)

During the last week of the implementation of this curriculum project, the children in Ms. Bailey's class shared their lullaby with Ms. Jamie and her not-yet-born child. That child, Baby Lee, was born one month later. In what follows, I offer a story shared with me by Annie and corroborated by Ms. Jamie.

Annie knew that it was going to be a "special night." Her mother said that "the baby was gonna be born because it was hurting mama," and so Annie went to visit her auntie. When Annie was later invited to the hospital, she walked into the room to find Baby Lee crying. Without prompting or encouragement, she approached the newborn, made eye contact, and gently sang:

Go to sleep, my popcorn, go to sleep, my baby.

Go to sleep, my Legos, go to sleep, my baby.

Go to sleep, my shell, go to sleep, my baby.

Go to sleep, my star, go to sleep, my baby.

Since the beginning of the implementation of this curriculum project, I have maintained to the children and to myself that people sing lullabies to care for young people. I am always quick to add, however, that singing a lullaby to a child who is crying does not guarantee that the crying will stop. Lullaby is, in other words, about enacting care and offering comfort—not about stopping tears, but about sharing both love and music together. And yet in the hospital, when Annie sang this lullaby that she herself created

with her classmates, the crying did stop. This shared musical moment was, according to Ms. Jamie, their first interaction together as sisters—an invitation.

Throughout the 8 weeks in which this curriculum project was implemented, Annie learned a number of musical skills and concepts. She did so, however, within a world-centered elementary general music class—one in which music-making and dialogic encounters were threaded together, however imperfectly, to create opportunities through which the children might "encounter the world and encounter themselves in relation to the world" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 19). But the world is not just "this grand thing outside of the classroom" (Research Journal Entry). The world is us, too—aunties and siblings and babies and, yes, even Sam. Coming into communion with that world, as demonstrated by Annie, is not simply a matter of what we have learned, but rather what we choose to do "with what we have learned and with how we have developed and, more specifically, what we will do *when it matters*" (Biesta, 2021b, p. 75, emphasis in original). As explored in this study, elementary general music education—and those who teach in such contexts—can meaningfully contribute to this process.

APPENDIX A: PARENT/GUARDIAN LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Parent/Guardian Information Letter

Your child's music teacher, Mr. Dillon, is completing the following project as part of a graduate degree in music education.

Project Title: On the Purpose(s) of Elementary General Music Education: An Exploration of Subject-ness Among Children Engaged in a World-Centered Curriculum Project
Investigator: Jonathan Dillon, DMA candidate, Music Education, Boston University

1 Invitation to Participate: Your child is being invited to participate in a research study that explores how elementary music education can support students as they develop independence and social responsibility.

2 Purpose of this Letter: The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information needed for you to make an informed decision regarding your child's participation in this study.

3 Study Procedures:

- As part of this project, Mr. Dillon will teach a series of Kindergarten Music lessons during the 3rd Quarter of this school year (January through March 2023). As always, these lessons will address the Alaska Arts Standards and the District Fine Arts Curriculum. Through these lessons, students will engage in musical activities (and discussions about those activities) designed to support them as they develop independence and social responsibility. Family members and classroom teachers may be invited to participate in some of these lessons, too.
    - These lessons will be recorded using a video camera on a tripod, enabling Mr. Dillon to review the footage to better understand the impact of these lessons and his teaching. Furthermore, reviewing the footage will enable Mr. Dillon to better understand the ways in which students demonstrate and/or understand their own independence and social responsibility. Any student with a District Media Opt-Out Form on file will not be recorded.
- In addition to participating in Kindergarten Music class as normal, your child will be asked to participate in several brief focus group interviews. These interviews will be opportunities for children to discuss the project together with a small group of their classmates and Mr. Dillon.
    - These focus group interviews will take place during music class in the form of a small-group rotation activity or will take place at a convenient non-instructional time. For example, a focus group interview might take place while students are eating lunch together. Students *will not* miss any instructional time.
    - These focus group interviews will also be video recorded so that Mr. Dillon can review and learn from the recordings. Any student with a District Media Opt-Out Form on file will not be recorded.
- Throughout the course of this study, your child will complete various assignments and projects. Mr. Dillon may ask to make and collect copies of these assignments.
- Classroom teachers may be invited to participate in individual interviews as needed.

4 Possible Risks and Harms: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

5 Possible Benefits: While there are no direct benefits to your child, participation in this study may help other music teachers learn more about the ways in which music education can support students as they develop independence and social responsibility.

6 Compensation: You and your child will not be compensated for study participation.

7 Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You or your child may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. You *do not* waive any legal rights by participating in this research study. If you do not consent to your child's participation in this study, they will still attend and participate in Kindergarten Music class as usual, but any data pertaining to your child (a quote, for example) will be discarded and not included in the study results.

8 Confidentiality:

- *No personal information will be collected as part of this study.*
- Any research data collected (a video recording of a Kindergarten Music lesson, for example) will be used for research purposes only. Mr. Dillon will maintain the confidentiality of all data collected. Data will only be accessible to Mr. Dillon and his research supervisor, Dr. Kelly Bylica.
- In the data, your child will be given a pseudonym to protect their identity. A list linking their pseudonym to their name will be kept by Mr. Dillon in a secure place, separate from any data collected. Only de-identified quotes will be used in the sharing of results from this study.
- Data will be stored electronically in accordance with Boston University's Data Protection Standards. All electronic data will be password-protected and encrypted. If you choose to withdraw your child from this study, please contact Mr. Dillon and their data will be removed from the dataset and destroyed.

9 Contacts for Further Information: Please contact us if you have any questions about this study or about your child's rights as a research participant. Additionally, please contact us if you would like to discuss the data collection process, review collected data, or receive a copy of any potential study results.

Jonathan Dillon, teacher-researcher, [contact information redacted]
Dr. Kelly Bylica, research supervisor, [contact information redacted]

10 Consent: If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above, please sign and return the attached consent form.

Sincerely,
Mr. Dillon

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Project Title: On the Purpose(s) of Elementary General Music Education: An Exploration of Subject-ness Among Children Engaged in a World-Centered Curriculum Project

Investigator: Jonathan Dillon, DMA candidate, Music Education, Boston University

I have read the Information Letter and I agree to allow my child to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Name of Student Participant: _____

Parent/Legal Guardian Name (Print): _____

Parent/Legal Guardian Name (Sign): _____

Date: _____

Consent Form Collected by: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: CLASSROOM TEACHER LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Classroom Teacher Information Letter

The school music teacher, Mr. Dillon, is completing the following project as part of a graduate degree in music education.

Project Title: On the Purpose(s) of Elementary General Music Education: An Exploration of Subject-ness Among Children Engaged in a World-Centered Curriculum Project
Investigator: Jonathan Dillon, DMA candidate, Music Education, Boston University

1 Invitation to Participate: You are being invited to participate in a research study that explores how elementary music education can support students as they develop independence and social responsibility.

2 Purpose of this Letter: The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information needed for you to make an informed decision regarding your participation in this study.

3 Study Procedures:

- As part of this project, Mr. Dillon will teach a series of Kindergarten Music lessons during the 3rd Quarter of this school year (January through March 2023). As always, these lessons will address the Alaska Arts Standards and the District Fine Arts Curriculum. Through these lessons, students will engage in musical activities (and discussions about those activities) designed to support them as they develop independence and social responsibility. Family members and classroom teachers may be invited to participate in some of these lessons, too.
    - These lessons will be recorded using a video camera on a tripod, enabling Mr. Dillon to review the footage to better understand the impact of these lessons and his teaching. Furthermore, reviewing the footage will enable Mr. Dillon to better understand the ways in which students demonstrate and/or understand their own independence and social responsibility. Any student with a District Media Opt-Out Form on file will not be recorded.
- In addition to participating in Kindergarten Music class as normal, children will be asked to participate in several brief focus group interviews. These interviews will be opportunities for children to discuss the project together with a small group of their classmates and Mr. Dillon.
    - These focus group interviews will take place during music class in the form of a small-group rotation activity or will take place at a convenient non-instructional time. For example, a focus group interview might take place while students are eating lunch together. Students *will not* miss any instructional time.
    - These focus group interviews will also be video recorded so that Mr. Dillon can review and learn from the recordings. Any student with a District Media Opt-Out Form on file will not be recorded.
- Throughout the course of this study, the children will complete various assignments and projects. Mr. Dillon may ask to make and collect copies of these assignments.
- Classroom teachers may be invited to participate in individual interviews as needed.

4 Possible Risks and Harms: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

5 Possible Benefits: While there are no direct benefits to you, participation in this study may help other music teachers learn more about the ways in which music education can support students as they develop independence and social responsibility.

6 Compensation: You will not be compensated for study participation.

7 Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. You *do not* waive any legal rights by participating in this research study.

8 Confidentiality:

- *No personal information will be collected as part of this study.*
- Any research data collected (a video recording of a Kindergarten Music lesson, for example) will be used for research purposes only. Mr. Dillon will maintain the confidentiality of all data collected. Data will only be accessible to Mr. Dillon and his research supervisor, Dr. Kelly Bylica.
- In the data, a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. You may select your own pseudonym. A list linking your pseudonym to your name will be kept by Mr. Dillon in a secure place, separate from any data collected. Only de-identified quotes will be used in the sharing of results from this study.
- Data will be stored electronically in accordance with Boston University's Data Protection Standards. All electronic data will be password-protected and encrypted. If you choose to withdraw from this study, please contact Mr. Dillon and your data will be removed from the dataset and destroyed.

9 Contacts for Further Information: Please contact us if you have any questions about this study or about your rights as a research participant. Additionally, please contact us if you would like to discuss the data collection process, review collected data, or receive a copy of any potential study results.

Jonathan Dillon, teacher-researcher, [contact information redacted]
Dr. Kelly Bylica, research supervisor, [contact information redacted]

10 Consent: If you agree to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above, please sign and return the attached consent form.

Sincerely,
Mr. Dillon

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Classroom Teacher Consent Form

Project Title: On the Purpose(s) of Elementary General Music Education: An Exploration of Subject-ness Among Children Engaged in a World-Centered Curriculum Project

Investigator: Jonathan Dillon, DMA candidate, Music Education, Boston University

I have read the Information Letter and I agree to participate.
All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Name of Participant (Sign): _____

Date: _____

Consent Form Collected by: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: CLASSROOM VISITOR LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Classroom Visitor Information Letter

The school music teacher, Mr. Dillon, is completing the following project as part of a graduate degree in music education.

Project Title: On the Purpose(s) of Elementary General Music Education: An Exploration of Subject-ness Among Children Engaged in a World-Centered Curriculum Project
Investigator: Jonathan Dillon, DMA candidate, Music Education, Boston University

1 Invitation to Participate: You are being invited to participate in a research study that explores how elementary music education can support students as they develop independence and social responsibility.

2 Purpose of this Letter: The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information needed for you to make an informed decision regarding your participation in this study.

3 Study Procedures:

- As part of this project, Mr. Dillon will teach a series of Kindergarten Music lessons during the 3rd Quarter of this school year (January through March 2023). As always, these lessons will address the Alaska Arts Standards and the District Fine Arts Curriculum. Through these lessons, students will engage in musical activities (and discussions about those activities) designed to support them as they develop independence and social responsibility. Family members and classroom teachers may be invited to participate in some of these lessons, too.
    - These lessons will be recorded using a video camera on a tripod, enabling Mr. Dillon to review the footage to better understand the impact of these lessons and his teaching. Furthermore, reviewing the footage will enable Mr. Dillon to better understand the ways in which students demonstrate and/or understand their own independence and social responsibility. Any student with a District Media Opt-Out Form on file will not be recorded.
- In addition to participating in Kindergarten Music class as normal, the children will be asked to participate in several brief focus group interviews. These interviews will be opportunities for children to discuss the project together with a small group of their classmates and Mr. Dillon.
    - These focus group interviews will take place during music class in the form of a small-group rotation activity or will take place at a convenient non-instructional time. For example, a focus group interview might take place while students are eating lunch together. Students *will not* miss any instructional time.
    - These focus group interviews will also be video recorded so that Mr. Dillon can review and learn from the recordings. Any student with a District Media Opt-Out Form on file will not be recorded.
- Throughout the course of this study, the children will complete various assignments and projects. Mr. Dillon may ask to make and collect copies of these assignments.
- Classroom teachers may be invited to participate in individual interviews as needed.

4 Possible Risks and Harms: There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

5 Possible Benefits: While there are no direct benefits to you, participation in this study may help other music teachers learn more about the ways in which music education can support students as they develop independence and social responsibility.

6 Compensation: You will not be compensated for study participation.

7 Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time. You *do not* waive any legal rights by participating in this research study.

8 Confidentiality:

- *No personal information will be collected as part of this study.*
- Any research data collected (a video recording of a Kindergarten Music lesson, for example) will be used for research purposes only. Mr. Dillon will maintain the confidentiality of all data collected. Data will only be accessible to Mr. Dillon and his research supervisor, Dr. Kelly Bylica.
- In the data, you will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. A list linking your pseudonym to your name will be kept by Mr. Dillon in a secure place, separate from any data collected. Only de-identified quotes will be used in the sharing of results from this study.
- Data will be stored electronically in accordance with Boston University's Data Protection Standards. All electronic data will be password-protected and encrypted. If you choose to withdraw from this study, please contact Mr. Dillon and your data will be removed from the dataset and destroyed.

9 Contacts for Further Information: Please contact us if you have any questions about this study or about your rights as a research participant. Additionally, please contact us if you would like to discuss the data collection process, review collected data, or receive a copy of any potential study results.

Jonathan Dillon, teacher-researcher, [contact information redacted]
Dr. Kelly Bylica, research supervisor, [contact information redacted]

10 Consent: If you agree to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above, please sign and return the attached consent form.

Sincerely,
Mr. Dillon

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Classroom Visitor Consent Form

Project Title: On the Purpose(s) of Elementary General Music Education: An Exploration of Subject-ness Among Children Engaged in a World-Centered Curriculum Project

Investigator: Jonathan Dillon, DMA candidate, Music Education, Boston University

I have read the Information Letter and I agree to participate.
All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Name of Participant (Print): _____

Name of Participant (Sign): _____

Date: _____

Consent Form Collected by: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: CURRICULUM PROJECT OUTLINE

LESSON	PHASE TITLE/PURPOSE	ANCILLARY PURPOSES AND OUTLINE
Lessons 1–3	Interruption and resistance: Pointing children to the world	Ancillary purposes: to honor the ways in which the children already understand and experience lullabies, to frame lullabies as a musical means of caring for one another, and to engage in lullaby songwriting focused on the self. Outline (organized by lesson number): 1. The children learn to sing a lullaby and engage in dialogue about lullaby qualities. 2. The children work in small groups to create a new lullaby verse about themselves and engage in dialogue about ways in which they care for others. 3. The children are introduced to Sam (baby doll), to the next phase of the songwriting project, and to the idea that lullabies are not about their wants, but about the needs of others. The children brainstorm instruments and sounds for Sam's lullaby.
Lessons 4–7	Suspension and sustenance: Offering time and support	Ancillary purposes: to engage in lullaby songwriting focused on an imagined other while developing the musical skills necessary to enact such a lullaby. 4. The children engage in a station rotation including a focus group interview, an exploration of instruments they brainstormed in the previous class, and an opportunity to play with and care for Sam. 5. The children collectively brainstorm lyrics and continue to refine the instrument parts before experimenting with various possible melodic contours for their lullaby.

		6. Using graphic notation of their draft lullaby, the children revise and finalize their collective lullaby for Sam. 7. The children review their lullaby, perform the lullaby for Sam, and engage in a station rotation including a focus group interview and an opportunity to play with and care for Sam.
Lessons 8–11	The concrete artefact: Setting the stage for action in and with the world	Ancillary purposes: to point children outward toward the world by engaging collectively in lullaby songwriting focused on an actual person beyond themselves, to offer the lullaby to that person as an act of caring, and to engage in critical dialogue and reflection. 8. The children are introduced to an actual child in our school community for whom they will rearrange the lullaby they originally created for Sam, brainstorm possible revisions, and brainstorm ways in which they might share the lullaby when the project is completed. 9. The children revise their collective lullaby for the child they were introduced to in the previous class period and perform this revised lullaby for their classroom teacher. 10. The children perform for the child for whom they created the lullaby and engage in dialogue about the process with that child and that child's family. 11. The children watch a video showing several highlights of the project and engage in a station rotation including a focus group interview and an opportunity to say goodbye to Sam.

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (STUDENTS)

Each of the focus group interviews conducted as part of this study were semi-structured: Specific questions were developed in advance as means of opening and inviting dialogue on particular topics while leaving space for additional questions and topics to emerge as the interviews were enacted.

Focus Group Interview 1

Posed shortly after the conclusion of Phase 1, the purpose of this first focus group interview was to encourage the children to engage in dialogue about subject-ness, operationalized as care, in ways that began with understandings of the self. A secondary purpose was to encourage the children to think beyond the self while imagining possible connections between care and the musical practices in which they participated. This focus group interview took place within a three-group station rotation during Lesson 4 and every child present for that class period had the opportunity to participate. Questions included:

1. In what ways do people take care of you?
2. In what ways could you use music to care for someone?

Focus Group Interview 2

Posed after performing their class lullaby for Sam at the conclusion of Phase 2, the purpose of this focus group interview was to encourage the children to reflect on their participation in the curriculum project thus far. More specifically, the questions asked in this focus group interview emphasized what the children had already done musically in support of an imagined other (Sam) while envisioning what they might do musically in

support of a real person with whom they have a connection. This focus group interview took place within a three-group station rotation during Lesson 7 and every child present for that class period had the opportunity to participate. Questions included:

1. What did we do to make our lullaby special for Sam?
2. Think of someone you are connected to. How could you make a lullaby special for that person?

Follow-up to Focus Group Interview 2

This focus group interview was an extension of the previous one. After Lesson 7, I reviewed the data from Focus Group Interview 2 and selected a small group of children from each class to invite for follow-up focus group interviews. Rather than prescribing a priori selection criteria for follow-up focus group interviews, I sought to remain open to criteria that might emerge from both my review of the data and my personal experiences as a co-participant in the study. For example, I invited some children to participate in this follow-up focus group interview because, in the previous focus group interview, they seemed interested in the question about adapting a lullaby for a person they care about but struggled to articulate the specific ways in which they might adapt the lullaby. Questions included:

1. Draw a picture of someone you care about.
2. What makes that person special?
3. How might you change Sam's lullaby to be about the person in your drawing?

Focus Group Interview 3

The purpose of this focus group interview was to encourage the children to engage in self- and co-reflection on their participation in the curriculum project. This focus group interview took place within a three-group station rotation during Lesson 11, the last day of the curriculum project, and every child present that day had the opportunity to participate. Questions included:

1. What do you see? [Show a photograph of children in their class performing their final lullaby for the person they created it for.]
2. What do you see? [Show a photograph of children in their class interacting with Sam.]
3. What do you see? [Show a photograph of children in their class engaging in a songwriting activity.]
4. What do you see? [Show a photograph of children in their class engaging in dialogue with one another.]

Follow-up to Focus Group Interview 3

This focus group interview was an extension of the previous one. After Lesson 11, I reviewed the data from Focus Group Interview 3 and selected a small group of children from each class to invite for follow-up focus group interviews. Rather than prescribing a priori selection criteria for follow-up focus group interviews, I sought to remain open to criteria that might emerge from my review of the data and my personal experiences as a co-participant in the study. For example, I invited some children to participate in this follow-up focus group interview because, in the previous focus group

interviews, they seemed interested in the questions but struggled to get a word in edgewise with their peers. Questions included:

1. Tell me the story of this picture. [Show a photograph of children in their class performing their final lullaby for the person they created it for.]
2. Tell me the story of this picture. [Show a photograph of children in their class interacting with Sam.]
3. Tell me the story of this picture. [Show a photograph of children in their class engaging in a songwriting activity.]
4. Tell me the story of this picture. [Show a photograph of children in their class engaging in dialogue with one another.]

APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (TEACHER)

In Lesson 11, the children in Ms. Bailey's class shared with Ms. Jamie the lullaby we created for Ms. Jamie's not-yet-born child. Ms. Bailey attended, too, and participated in the lesson alongside the children. Shortly after, I invited Ms. Bailey to participate in an individual interview to solicit her thoughts on that experience specifically and the curriculum project more generally. Furthermore, I invited Ms. Bailey to participate in this interview as a means of checking my own preliminary analysis of the data with another educator who had physically been present in the classroom and with whom I had regularly communicated throughout the implementation of the curriculum project. This individual interview was semi-structured in that the questions initially posed were intended to serve as dialogic starting points rather than closed topics of discussion. As noted by Roulston (2014): "Semi-structured interviews provide freedom for interviewers to pursue further detail concerning topics that arise in discussions with individual participants" (p. 251).

Warm-up and Background Questions

1. Tell me about your class this year. What is it like teaching this particular group of children?
2. Tell me about how the kindergarten classes were organized this year. Were students assigned to a kindergarten teacher randomly or by some other process?
    a. (If Ms. Bailey does not mention this, then follow-up by asking about the relatively high number of children assigned to her class who are related to other teachers in the school.)

3. The ways in which we teach sometimes reveal what we think is important in education. If I were to spend a few days in your classroom, what sort of things would I see you and the students doing? Or put another way: What are your values as a kindergarten teacher?

Questions Relating to the Curriculum Project

4. This week, you joined the students for music class when they shared their lullaby with Jamie. Tell me about that experience.
5. When I picked-up the children from your room that day, it seemed like you were having a class meeting right before they lined-up. What did you do, if anything, to prepare them for their experience sharing with Jamie?
6. Next, I am going to show you a brief slideshow featuring photographs and videos from the project while I narrate a few points. I honor that you are an experienced kindergarten teacher with deep, meaningful relationships with these children—I want to learn from you, so please feel free to stop me at any point to ask questions or to offer any insights you want to share.
7. Lastly, you and I co-reflected throughout this project on a few individual students. You were very helpful in teaching me to better support Brittany, for example. I want to close our interview today by co-reflecting on a few more students.
    a. (Share the video of Grace advocating for her friend. Ask Ms. Bailey for her thoughts.)
    b. (Share an anecdote about Ryan's ability to take on the perspectives of his peers. Ask Ms. Bailey for her thoughts.)

c. (Share an anecdote about Anabelle's responses—both her verbal utterances and facial expressions—to interactions that might be understood as moments of interruption. Ask Ms. Bailey for her thoughts.)

d. (Share multiple anecdotes about Zane's trajectory throughout this project. Ask Ms. Bailey for her thoughts.)

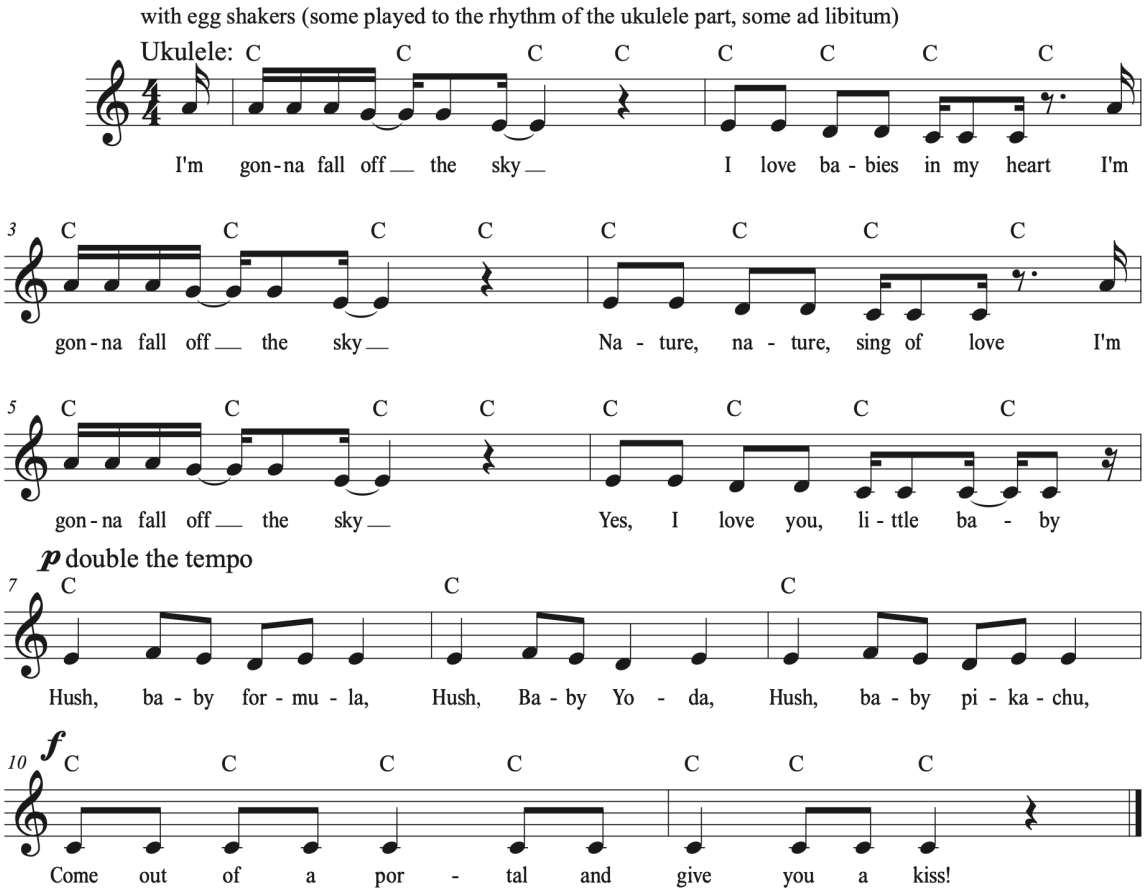
APPENDIX G: WESTERN ART NOTATION FOR FIGURE 4.2

In Figure 4.2, I offered an illustration of one of the lullabies created by the children in Ms. Bailey's class—the final lullaby from the end of Phase 3 of the curriculum project. Within the manuscript, I included the graphic notation that the children and I used during class. For the sake of the reader, I offer in this appendix both the graphic notation from Figure 4.2 and the same lullaby documented using Western art notation. Instrumentation: The entire class sings, half of the class plays ukulele, and one child plays a rainstick.


with rainstick (ad libitum throughout)
Ukulele: C C C C C C C C
Go to sleep, my pop - corn, go to sleep, my ba - by. Go to
3
C C C C C C C C
sleep, my Le - gos, go to sleep, my ba - by. Go to
5
C C C C C C C C
sleep, my shell, go to sleep, my ba - by. Go to
7
C C C C C C C
sleep my star, go to sleep, my ba - by.

APPENDIX H: WESTERN ART NOTATION FOR FIGURE 5.1

In Figure 5.1, I offered an illustration of one of the lullabies created by the children in Ms. Spin's class—an in-progress draft from Phase 2 of the curriculum project. Within the manuscript, I included the graphic notation that the children and I used during class. For the sake of the reader, I offer in this appendix both the graphic notation from Figure 5.1 and the same lullaby documented using Western art notation. Instrumentation: The entire class sings, half of the class plays ukulele, and a small group of children play egg shakers.


with egg shakers (some played to the rhythm of the ukulele part, some ad libitum)
Ukulele:
I'm gon-na fall off the sky I love ba-bies in my heart I'm
gon-na fall off the sky Na-ture, na-ture, sing of love I'm
gon-na fall off the sky Yes, I love you, li-ttle ba-by
p double the tempo
Hush, ba-by for-mu-la, Hush, Ba-by Yo-da, Hush, ba-by pi-ka-chu,
f
Come out of a por-tal and give you a kiss!

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