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# Collaborative learning among high school students in an alternative styles strings ensemble

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

Dissertation

**COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS  
IN AN ALTERNATIVE STYLES STRINGS ENSEMBLE**

by

**DAVID REED DOKE**

B.M., University of Missouri – Kansas City, 1991  
M.M., DePaul University, 1993

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Approved by

First Reader

---

Andrew Goodrich, D.M.A.  
Assistant Professor of Music, Music Education

Second Reader

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Karin S. Hendricks, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Music  
Chair of Music Education

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**DAVID REED DOKE**

Boston University, College of Fine Arts, 2020

Major Professor: Andrew Goodrich, D.M.A., Assistant Professor of Music, Music Education

**ABSTRACT**

Traditional teaching and learning structures in large music ensembles (e.g., orchestra) place the teacher as the leader and sole dispenser of knowledge with the students as passive learners (e.g., Allsup, 2003; Hendricks, 2018; Rogoff, 1994). However, research indicates that students can play an active role in the learning that occurs in school music ensembles. Alternative style string ensembles, which often involve informal learning, are ideal musical settings for the development of a student-centered, collaborative learning environment. The purpose of this study was to explore how high school string students collaborated with each other as they learned alternative music styles music in an after-school fiddle group. Communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) served as the theoretical framework for this investigation in which I explored student participants' perspectives, experiences, and interactions as they learned new alternative styles music. During the course of this study I also explored the changing learning roles of the participants and the role of the teacher as facilitator during the learning process. The following research questions guided this study: (1) What various roles did the students undertake in their community of practice? (2) How did the participants move toward legitimate participation as they collaborated with each other in

alternative styles of music? (3) How did the teacher serve as facilitator of this community of practice?

Data were collected via observations and by way of semi-structured interviews of the participants and their teacher. I used a system of coding to identify important components of learning, what the participants learned, and their movement through the community of learning. From these codes, I identified the following themes: teaching and learning aurally, collaborative learning, changing learning roles of students and the teacher, transfer of participation, leadership and sharing knowledge, student centered learning, enjoyment of playing with others, confidence, perseverance, and students gaining a deeper interest and understanding of the music. These themes served as the basis for presenting the findings for the reader. Findings from this study may inform secondary school string teachers in developing strategies for incorporating alternative styles and collaborative learning environments into their own string curricula. Findings may also provide insights with helping teachers in developing and refining student-centered collaborative learning settings and alternative styles.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

As a veteran high school orchestra director and multi-styles string player, I have always been interested in programming non-classical, alternative styles concerts as a part of our string program. Alternative style strings repertoire is non-traditional, not always based in western classical music, and necessitates improvisation and personal stylistic interpretations of the music. Unfortunately, for many years there was not much alternative style string repertoire to choose from, and our string orchestra arrangements of popular and rock music did not sound like the recordings that everyone was familiar with. I struggled with the lack of authenticity in these arrangements and felt that we needed to get away from the printed music on the page. Something was lacking, and I would ask myself the following questions: Where were the guitar solos? Where was the electric bass? What about drums? I realized that I needed to do something different with my students; something creative. As I pondered these issues, my struggle with integrating alternate styles changed when I met a young student named TJ.

TJ was a handsome young African-American student with short dreadlocks, a wide smile, and contagious laugh. He could easily be spotted in the halls at school and he was quite popular with everyone that knew him. I had known TJ since his days in the middle school orchestra. He was a talented bass player, always noodling before rehearsal working out songs by popular music composers such as Jack White, and songs performed by Coldplay. He had a great ear, and was a strong leader in the bass section. I knew that he would be a standout bassist in my high school orchestra program and I was looking forward to having him in my orchestra. So, when I found out that he had dropped

orchestra at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I was shocked and disappointed.

I seldom saw TJ after he started high school. Occasionally I would see him in the halls at school, but we never got to talk about why he quit. I think he was embarrassed about dropping orchestra and was uncomfortable around me because of it. Sometime around the end of his freshman year, I spotted him in the lunchroom. As I approached his table, he waved hello. Seizing the opportunity to talk, I sat down across from him and opened the conversation by asking how he liked high school. "It's alright," he answered. When I asked why he quit orchestra, he responded, "Man, Mr. Doke, it just wasn't for me. The kids were okay, but the music was boring. All that 'Canyon Sunset' and 'Gauntlet' stuff was just not my kind of thing." I laid out all of the wonderful things I had planned for the year and asked him to think about joining again. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Maybe." After that day, whenever I saw TJ in the halls, I thought about what I could have done differently.

Two years later, during a rehearsing for our Spring Pops Concert, I was surprised to see TJ coming into my classroom. He came in very quietly, cushioning the door as it closed. From my podium I watched as he moved to a spot along the wall several feet behind the basses. He listened and observed. It turned out that because he did not have orchestra as a class, he had space in his schedule to be an office aid, which is why he was there. He had some papers from the front office that I needed to sign.

He smiled as we continued to play. As the orchestra reached the end of the piece we were working on, I stopped and turned to TJ to say hello. He was happy to see all of his old friends from orchestra, and everyone was happy to see him. As he approached me

to shake hands and say hello, he said, “Mr. Doke, I might be trippin,’ but that sounded a lot like Jimi Hendrix.” He paused for a second. Then, as if trying to solve a difficult riddle, he asked, “You know who Jimi Hendrix is, right Mr. Doke?” The room erupted with laughter as I explained that yes, I knew a little bit about Jimi Hendrix. I was proud to tell TJ that we were playing “Little Wing” for our Spring Concert and that he should come and check it out. His eyes suddenly widened and he laughed as though he had just understood the punch line of a joke. “C’mon man, orchestras don’t play that kind of music!” Immediately, I turned to the orchestra and had them start from the top, continuing through the entire orchestra rendition of “Little Wing.” When we finished playing, I turned to see TJ’s reaction. He looked from me to the orchestra then to me again. His lips formed a straight line and his eyes narrowed. With a shaky voice, he asked, “Mr. Doke, is there any way I could play guitar with you guys? Seriously. I know this song and I can play the solos note-for-note.” I explained to him how we were an “audition only” orchestra and I would need to hear him play before I could make a decision.

By the end of that same day TJ had gathered all he needed for his audition. He entered my room with two of his buddies, Mike and Jason. With them they carried Mike’s drum set, which they set up at the front of the room. Next they brought in Jason’s electric bass, TJ’s electric guitar, and two large-sized amps. I listened from my office while they warmed up and tuned their instruments. When TJ announced they were ready to play, I moved to a chair just a few feet in front of the eager trio. They started with the familiar opening guitar line of “Little Wing.” As the bass and drums joined in, I got

chills. TJ swayed back and for, just like Jimi had done so many years before. Most importantly to me, they each played with superb musicianship. They were authentic and impressive, and when they finished, I was rendered speechless. Excited at the opportunity to include these non-traditional music students in our upcoming concert, I was now faced with the challenge of how I was going to bring it all together.

TJ, Mike, and Jason ended up rehearsing with the orchestra four or five times prior to the concert. We worked out the structure of the song, where the solos would be, where the orchestra would repeat, how to handle the coda, and so on. When I asked if they understood how the key change would work, there was silence. TJ, Jason, and Mike had no idea what I was talking about. A violist in the front of the section began to explain how it was going to work. Then a bass player explained that if he moved up two frets, and followed the same pattern, as before, he would be in the new key. He had explained it in a way that TJ understood perfectly. TJ played through the key change to be sure that he understood it, and then explained it to Jason. Before I knew it, there was a discussion among my students about key signatures and the tonic-dominant relationship. One of my cellists noted that there is actually a sub-dominant right before the dominant. TJ explained that a lot of Jimi's songs, and many others, follow the same 12-bar blues pattern.

Every rehearsal with them was this way—full of energy and excitement. Having played at venues such as the Kennedy Center, Orchestra Hall in Chicago, Symphony Hall in Boston, and Carnegie Hall in New York, these students had always been a motivated group. But the excitement, energy and enthusiasm that were present as we prepared for



our rock concert was undeniable. They worked very well together, offering up new ideas. “Let’s try this. How about if we do that.” By the third or fourth rehearsal with TJ and the boys, three of my students with electric violins and violas were working on solos, trying to improvise and willing to work at the edge of their comfort zone. Everyone was comfortable, collaborating with each other and working together toward a common goal.

We played the concert two weeks later to an enthusiastic standing-room-only audience. TJ, Mike, and Jason had told his friends about the concert, and there were many in the audience that had never seen our school orchestra perform. CD recordings of the concert were sold the following weeks and a video of the “Little Wing” performance was posted to *YouTube*. My students were proud to be a part of such a unique concert, and they demanded that we do it again the following year. In the matter of a few short weeks, my program had moved from strictly formal rehearsals where I served as the sole authority of knowledge, to a structure that placed more emphasis on students providing input and sharing their knowledge as they learned non-traditional music together.

### **Communities of Practice**

I realized that students from different backgrounds and abilities could provide input into making rehearsal decisions via informal collaborative learning groups while learning non-traditional music together. As I read the literature on student-centered learning, I found that this type of collaborative learning can be described as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Grounded in the perspective of social constructivism, a community of practice is defined as, “... groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in

this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002, p. 4). One of the central tenets in a community of practice is the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), or the experience of a newcomer to the community who evolves into full member. Rogoff (1994) described this as “transformation of participation,” and argued that, “how people develop is a function of the transforming roles and understanding of the activity in which they participate” (p. 209). I realized this is similar to what had occurred with TJ, Mike, and Jason.

Lave and Wenger (1991) regard learning as a function of activity, context, and culture. This model of situated learning proposed that learning involves a process of engagement in a community of practice. The focus of a community of practice is not to learn *from* others, but rather to learn *with* others. In chapter two, I present the theoretical foundations of communities of practice in detail, along with key terms and concepts associated with this theory for the reader, and discuss research that supports and contextualizes how I used this theory as a framework for this study.

### **Problem Statement**

Dewey (1938) posited that teaching should be a shared learning experience between the teacher and learner. Traditional teaching and learning structures in large music ensembles (e.g., orchestra) however place the teacher as the leader and sole dispenser of knowledge with the students as passive learners (e.g., Allsup, 2003; Hendricks, 2018; Rogoff, 1994). In this teacher-centered setting that is based in the opera conservatory model from the western classical music tradition, the teacher serves as an authority figure and students are rarely given the opportunity to contribute their own

knowledge to the group, make decisions about their learning, select repertoire, or engage in leadership.

Students in a teacher-centered environment are not afforded the opportunity for musical independence, and Shuler (2011) concluded that this could be the reason so many students set aside their instruments after graduation. However, in a student-centered learning structure, where students work collaboratively at their own pace under the guidance of a teacher, they can develop their own strategies to solve problems and become active participants in their learning (Crumley, 2014). Music students can learn from each other in a collaborative setting (e.g., Goodrich, 2007; Green, 2001, 2004; Hebert, 2005). Scruggs (2008) found that music students in a learner-centered classroom were more engaged and showed increased musical growth.

Music is social in nature (Jorgenson, 1993; Levy & Byrd, 2011), as is collaboration, and researchers have found that students in a collaborative, student-led ensemble develop a shared understanding (Sawyer, 2008; Wiggins 2000), and a deeper comprehension of the subject matter (Johnson, 2013; Scruggs, 2008). Collaboration also promotes and nurtures independent thinking, and fosters a safe environment where students feel at ease generating musical ideas (Wiggins, 2000; Allsup, 2003).

Unfortunately, many music educators are uncomfortable teaching in contexts in which they are not the sole deliverers of information (Berg, 1997), and music teacher training in collaborative learning strategies is lacking (Campbell, 1995). Fetter (2011) suggested that, “If teachers can get ‘off the podium’ and into the group, they can foster openness that can allow for teachers to become leaders among equals” (p. 124).

Chamber ensembles and other small ensembles can provide excellent opportunities for students to collaborate with each other, share their knowledge, and contribute to making musical decisions. Researchers have shown that students working collaboratively in a chamber ensemble develop problem solving strategies that help to improve group performance as the result of increased self-efficacy (e.g., Allsup, 2003; Berg, 1997; Scruggs, 2008). For example, reciprocal peer-mentoring in a college level piano class enhanced the level of understanding among the students while constructing knowledge with each other (Foster, 2014). Similarly, string students working collaboratively in small groups can participate as active learners and develop supportive, encouraging relationships that foster creativity and learning (Harrington, 2014). In these types of collaborative small group settings, each student contributes to the group, bringing their own knowledge and experience, including those learned from private teachers (e.g., Webb, 2012) and their peers (Campbell, 1995; Goodrich, 2007). The traditional teacher-centered approach to learning may limit student development in a typical music ensemble setting. However, if teachers can promote a collaborative learning environment by cultivating a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and embracing their role as facilitator and guide, students may be afforded the opportunity to advance their musical knowledge in many ways not found in a traditional music classroom settings.

### **Need for the Study**

An alternative style string ensemble is an ideal setting for the development of communities of practice in a musical environment. With an emphasis on large ensembles

where music educators typically program repertoire based in western classical music with the ultimate goal of a formal concert performance, music in schools is typically different from music that students in these programs listen to and play outside of school. A disconnect appears to exist between the music that is performed in school and the music of common youth culture (Snell, 2007).

Numerous researchers have examined youth musical preferences, finding that adolescent music students generally enjoy musical styles alternative to western classical music styles (e.g., Boyle, Hosterman, & Ramsey, 1981; Campbell, Connell, & Beegle, 2007; Furman, Duke, & Baak, 1986; Geringer & McManus, 1979; Leblanc, 1982; LeBlanc, Sims, Siivola, & Olbert, 1996; McCrary, 1993). Boal-Palheiros and Hargreaves (2001) noted that, “The ‘cultural dissonance’ between music taught in school and music listened to at home by students deserves greater attention from music educators” (p. 117). Recognizing the disconnect between the classical music that is studied in school and alternative styles of music, Snell (2007) stated, “Music in schools is typically approached very differently from how the majority of people participate in and with music in their everyday lives” (pp. 5-6). It is likely that this disconnect will continue to grow with the rapid growth of digital media. Youth now listen to *their* music anytime and anywhere they choose, while the music of the string classroom remains, for the most part, in the classroom. An alternative style string ensemble is an ensemble in which students can choose their music, share their knowledge, improvise, and collaborate with making musical decisions. A community of practice that includes alternative musical styles and the music of common youth culture may enhance student learning in ways not possible in

a traditional setting.

Teaching alternative musical styles that often involve informal learning, including popular music, creates issues for music teachers. According to Rodriguez (2004), “Popular music has always been problematic for music educators because while it meets the public need for musical understanding, it does not inhere in the principles and processes of formal music instruction” (p. 3). Interest in the use of alternative styles of music in the instrumental music curriculum, however, has become more prevalent in classrooms over the past 20 years; for example, reflected in the number of recent popular music studies in peer-reviewed journals. Research on alternative styles of music has increased since 2000, including studies by Byrne and Sheridan (2000), Dunbar-Hill and Wemyss (2000), Hebert and Campbell (2000), and Folkstead (2005). In these studies, researchers used band, choral, and general music programs, but not string programs. In the area of string music education, there are relatively few studies that included discussion of alternative styles in the secondary string classroom.

Despite current instructional materials available for learning and performing alternate styles of string performance, it is unclear how string teachers teach these styles in their programs. Part of this issue resides within the structure of school music programs which places the teacher as the sole authority and students as passive learners. However, in “a classroom based on a community of learners, students learn the information as they collaborate with other children and with adults in carrying out activities with purposes connected explicitly with the history and current practices of the community” (Rogoff, 1994, p. 211). Findings from a study that entails an exploration into how alternative

styles of music are learned may inform school string teachers in developing strategies for incorporating alternative styles and a collaborative learning environment into their own string curricula. Findings may also provide insights for developing and refining string teacher training programs that include alternative styles.

### **Alternative Styles of Music in American Music Education**

To provide context for this study and to establish the place of popular music and alternative styles in the American school music curriculum, I provide a brief overview of music education in the United States and the influence of the Western European Conservatory model. Beginning with the first American singing schools, the music of European composers has paved the way for singing and music education in American schools (Mark & Gary, 2008). Early American church leaders recognized that if religious life were to remain strong in New England in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, people would need to be sufficiently educated in music to support church services, and singing schools would need to be established (Mark & Gary, 2008). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Americans began to restore relations with European countries, American singing schools fell into decline and a new European style of music became the new norm. The old vernacular practices of American singing schools had been replaced with a refined European style. Lowell Mason (1792-1872), who considered himself to be the “father of singing among the children” in the United States, and William Woodbridge (1780–1861) both promoted the music of European composers in American music education in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Throughout the nineteenth century, classical music, especially opera, was very

popular in the United States. Several elite symphonies were formed in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and New York (Humphreys, 2004). Following the Civil War, brass bands and other instrumental music was introduced in public schools and the purpose of music education began to move away from serving the church and towards teaching music for the enjoyment of the individual and the community. Popular music of the day had begun to establish a place in the music curriculum, and by the 20<sup>th</sup> century marching bands and band music were the standard in the instrumental curriculum.

With the popularity of American jazz after World War II, music educators began to include jazz in the music curriculum as an alternative to traditional band and orchestra music. Jazz styles had traditionally been taught by informal aural and oral methods. However, including jazz in school music programs required that it be codified and taught using the same methods as concert bands. This resulted in a disconnect between the practices of jazz musicians and jazz education (Goodrich, 2008). By the time jazz had been implemented in the curriculum, its popularity had waned (Bowman, 2004), and as jazz grew more fragmented with complex virtuosic styles such as bebop and fusion, jazz and jazz education parted ways (Beale, 2000).

During the 1960's, several large-scale programs were designed to inject life into the American educational system. Among the most significant of these for music education was the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium sponsored by MENC. Among the points made in the Tanglewood Declaration is that "music of all periods, styles, forms and cultures belongs in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to include music of our time in its rich variety, including currently popular teenage music,



avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures” (Choate, 1967). This declaration is widely considered to be the first attempt by music educators to include alternative types of music in the school music curriculum.

In 1969 a collection of articles entitled, “Youth Music: A Special Report” were published in the *Music Educators Journal*. This report included ‘pro-pop’ articles written by Wiley L. Housewright, Emmett R. Sarig, Thomas MacClusky, and Allen Hughes (Hebert, D. G., & Campbell, P. S., 2000). During the 1970’s educators and researchers began to design curriculum and develop strategies for including popular music in the curriculum (Grashel, 1979, Vuillamy & Lee, 1980).

Not everyone was receptive to including popular styles in the music curriculum at that time. According to Reimer (2004), “Popular musics are held in low esteem by many if not most music educators” (p. viii). Articles written in response to the Tanglewood Symposium questioned the use of popular styles in the music classroom. “Popular music . . . must not be taught in the public classrooms . . . The music educator’s job is to perpetuate Western art music” (Anderson, 1968, p. 87). An analysis of popular music positions and practices during the 1960’s found six common arguments that rock music has historically faced in gaining acceptance in the music curriculum: a) rock music is aesthetically inferior; b) rock music is damaging to the health of youth; c) school time cannot be spent on the vernacular; d) music teachers are not trained in rock; e) rock music encourages rebellious and anti-educational behavior; and f) rock music curriculum is difficult to acquire (Hebert & Campbell, 2000).

The American String Teachers Association (ASTA) first recognized the “non-

classical” movement by forming a small committee for the 2003 ASTA National Conference. Lieberman (2004) recalled that the widely used term *non-classical*, which implied that classical was innately superior, was replaced with the term *alternative strings*, which includes nearly 30 styles of music. While the term “eclectic styles” is still widely used, for this study I will use the term “alternative styles.” The alternative styles track at the conference drew a standing room only crowd at every clinic and jam session (Liebermann, 2004), and has continued to grow. Farrar-Royce (2006) acknowledged the growth of the alternative styles sessions at the 2006 ASTA National Conference, noting that pioneers in the movement were becoming well-known.

Fiddler Magazine currently lists nearly 80 festivals, workshops and summer camps featuring numerous fiddling styles. Strings Without Boundaries (SWB), founded in 2004 by Liebermann and Pittsburgh Symphony violinist Roy Sonne, has grown into one of the largest alternative styles summer camps in the country with classes in in Seattle, Wisconsin and Atlanta. In addition, there is a growing list of college programs that feature alternative styles, including The Berklee School of Music, The New England Conservatory of Music, Belmont University, University of Wisconsin – Whitewater, Dennison University, McNally Smith College, The Frost School of Music at University of Miami, The New School at Mannes College, The Manhattan School of Music, Oberlin College, The University of Michigan, The University of Southern California, The University of Northern Colorado, The Peabody Conservatory and VanderCook College of Music.

Practitioners have increasing access to sources that include some type of

alternative styles of music for use in the string ensembles. Bergmann (2012) lists over 40 alternative style method books and other recourses in a comprehensive guide for improvisation on string instruments. Popular alternative styles titles from Alfred Publishing include the *Fiddler's Philharmonic Series* (Dabczynski & Phillips, 2000), *Jazz Philharmonic* (Sabian & Phillips, 2000), *Latin Philharmonic* (Lopez & Phillips, 2015), and *Mariachi Philharmonic* (Nieto & Phillips, 2015). Mark O'Connor's *The New American School of String Playing* (O'Connor, 2009) now includes ten books for violin, viola, cello and bass. Jeremy Cohen has arranged numerous jazz standards, tangos, and Mexican folksongs for string ensembles, and jazz violinist Christian Howes' *Creative Strings Academy* includes a comprehensive body of online instructional materials for improvising string players. *Jazz Fiddle Wizard* (Norgaard, 2000) is a method book designed to help string players learn jazz improvisation, and Mark Wood's *Electrify Your Strings* (Wood, 2008) includes numerous rock standards to be played on electric instruments.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how students collaborated with each other as they learned alternative music styles in a high school string ensemble. Community of practice served as the theoretical framework for this investigation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994; Hoadley, 2012). I sought to understand the student participants' perspectives, experiences, interactions and changing roles in the group as they learned new music, and I investigated the changing role of the teacher as a facilitator during this process.

## **Research Questions**

To explore the various ways that students learned in this alternative string ensemble, I used the following questions to guide this investigation:

1. What various roles did the students undertake in their community of practice?
2. How did the participants move toward legitimate participation as they collaborated with each other in alternative styles of music?
3. How did the teacher serve as facilitator of this community of practice?

## **Orientation of the Study**

This study is presented in five chapters. In chapter one I describe my personal interest in alternative styles of music, present a brief overview of communities of practice, the theoretical framework for this study, and provide an overview of alternative styles within the context of music education in the United States. In chapter two I present to the reader more detailed information about communities of practice. I also include a review of relevant literature, including studies on situated learning, alternative styles in music education, collaborative and student-centered learning in music education, and socialization in music education. In chapter three I describe how I conducted the research procedures for this study, including the research design, how I selected the site and participants, data collection, and analysis procedures for this study. In chapter four I present data that was collected during personal interviews and observations of a high school alternative styles fiddle group over the course of a semester. Finally, in chapter five I discuss the findings, provide implications for music teachers, and offer suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature**

Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) was a cognitivist who believed that all learning was the product of social interaction, and that learning precedes development. He rejected Piaget’s assumption that learning could be separated from its social context (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). Vygotsky’s research showed that when students interacted with each other rather than with adults, they collaborated more effectively in tasks that require skill development (Wertsch, 1991). Vygotsky argued that all cognitive functions are the products of social interaction and that learning occurs within a knowledge community. Like Vygotsky, Lave and Wenger (1991) viewed learning as a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs (viz., it is situated), rather than something that occurs within the minds of individuals. Their model of situated learning proposed that learning involves a process of engagement in a ‘community of practice,’ defined as “...groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4).

### **Communities of Practice**

A community of practice is based on situated theories of knowledge that are shared by a group of learners with common goals and passions. “Knowledge is a property enacted by groups of people over time in shared practices, rather than the idea that knowledge is a cognitive residue in the head of an individual learner” (Hoadley, 2012, p. 298). Rogoff (1994) described a community of practice in educational terms as a

community of learners, and stated that “learning and development occur as people participate in the sociocultural activities of their community” (p. 209). A community of practice is dynamic and involves learning on the part of everyone involved. It is not merely a group of people with a common interest. It is a group of people of various skill levels, sharing a common interest, becoming better by working and learning together. “In a community of learners, both mature members of the community and less mature members are conceived as active; no role has all the responsibility for knowing or directing, and no role is by definition passive” (Rogoff, 1994, p. 213).

Wenger (1998) suggested the following trajectories as a model of how membership within a community of practice occurs:

- Peripheral. One who may not become an insider to the community but who nevertheless takes part in community events (e.g., parents who volunteer in the classroom).
- Inbound. A person who is becoming a fully participating member of the community (e.g., a student teacher or new teacher).
- Insider. A person who has become a fully participating member of a community (e.g., a teacher).
- Boundary. A person who is not a fully participating member of the community but who participates by bringing a different set of skills or services to the community (e.g., a technology specialist).
- Outbound. A person who is preparing to leave the community (e.g., a teacher who is moving to an administrative position or is planning to retire). (Dennon, 2008, p. 428)

One of the central concepts in a community of practice is that legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) slowly evolves into full participation or a “transformation of participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994). Initially, participation is that of a newcomer or novice, evolving to an expert, all while learning and performing a variety of roles as a part of the group. In their initial study involving communities of practice, Lave

and Wenger (1991) analyzed several examples of situated learning, including: midwives, tailors, navy quartermasters, butchers, nurses, impressionistic artists and alcoholics. The focus of a community of practice is not to learn from others, but rather to learn with others. Lave and Wenger (1991) explained, ‘the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation” (pp. 108-109). Although Lave & Wenger did not mention music ensembles specifically, Wenger (1998) recognized artists as a possible example of community of practice: “Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression” (Wenger, 2007). Green (2001) noted, “The acquisition of musical skills and knowledge in many traditional contexts could form a model for similar studies of apprenticeship learning” (p. 16).

A notable aspect of Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism as it relates to communities of practice and music learning is the role of the skillful tutor; identified as the “more knowledgeable other” (MKO). This MKO models behavior for the learner in a collaborative learning process, which Vygotsky called collaborative dialogue. Most folk and traditional musics of the world are learned by enculturation and extended immersion in listening to, watching, and imitating music-making practices of the surrounding community (Green, 2004). It is important to recognize that the MKO does not necessarily need to be a teacher or an adult. In fact, most secondary school classrooms tend to be a community of *peers*, as was the case in our alternative styles rehearsals. Some students had a solid understanding of form and theory, while others had a better understanding of

improvisation and style. Some were more highly skill players, while others were less skilled. Everyone participates and contributes, which instills in everyone a sense of purpose and belonging.

This type of 'situated learning' requires teamwork skills that promote individual as well as group learning. In an investigation of mutual learning and collaboration in the band classroom, Allsup (2003) found that there was an emphasis on "interpersonal relationships, peer-learning and peer critique, as well as an expectation that members will take care of each other." In a case study of communities of practice in a music school, Silva (2007) concluded that the development of communities of practice in a music classroom, "demands change in the institutions and the instructors' practices from providing teacher form self-contained structures to offering situated learning experiences" (p. 164). In a study examining online music teaching and learning, Waldron (2009) found that "over the past ten years, online communities of practice have evolved in cyberspace formed around different folk music genres, including Bluegrass, Irish Traditional and Old Time music" (p. 97). Recognizing that apprenticeship learning and communities of practice were already being used in musical learning, Green (2001) stated, "A comparative study of popular music learning with apprenticeship and traditional music learning in many world music contexts and jazz could form an interesting topic" (p. 16). The purpose of this study was to examine how students collaborated with each other as they learned alternative music styles in a high school string ensemble, and to describe the interactions of this group within a community of practice instructional model.



### **Studies on Alternative Styles in Music Education**

Numerous researchers have explored the role of informal learning strategies as a model for including popular styles in a classroom setting (e.g., Allsup, 2003; Boespflug, 2004; Cutietta, 2004; Green, 2001, 2004; Jaffurs, 2004; Silva, 2007; Westerlund, 2006). In a content analysis of 81 articles related to popular music and music education, Mantie (2013) found that American-based authors focused on issues of repertoire and teaching, while non-American authors focused on quality of learning and pedagogical relationships. Although there have been numerous studies on the use of popular music in music education, there are few that involve non-traditional, alternative string styles. Research on alternative styles include studies related to student-centered and informal learning, student motivation, teacher surveys, improvisation and learning aurally, and students' musical preferences.

### **Student-Centered Learning and Informal Learning**

Researchers have found that students who engage in learning and performing alternative styles of music have more input into the learning process (e.g., Fetter, 2011; Mick, 2012). Students participating in an alternative styles ensemble were more motivated to learn from each other, to practice more, and to explore through improvisation and experimentation (Fetter, 2011). In a case study of the Lakewood Project (one of the few rock orchestras in the country), Constantine (2010) found that students in the program were provided with “a unique opportunity to create music, arrange, improvise and ‘get down’ with the feel of non-traditional repertoire” (p. 59). Students played electric instruments, including keyboards and drums, which are found

more commonly in informal settings. This provided performance opportunities for informal music students, who may not otherwise participate in school music ensembles. Students in the group were tasked with setting up sound equipment and using technology such as amplifiers, soundboards, mixers and lighting. Constantine recognized that, “[b]y including a rhythm section and amplified instruments, the Lakewood Project is contextual and relevant to students’ lives” (p. 62).

### **Motivation and Meaningful Participation**

Learning alternative styles of music provides opportunities for increased engagement and motivation with participation in string ensembles (e.g., Hendricks & Smith, 2018; Sawyer, 2008). Alternative styles might provide “motivational opportunities for creative and communal music-making, in contrast to the relatively larger emphasis on competition and social comparison that is often associated with classical performance” (Hendricks & Smith, 2018, p. 47). Positive social experiences can play a role in students’ musical engagement at both camps, and that musical confidence was best achieved when students were provided appropriate levels of scaffolding and support (Hendricks & Smith, 2018). These findings reflect those of Sawyer (2008), who used the concept of *scaffoldings* to describe how teachers provide students with the appropriate level of structure. Sawyer argued: “An effective scaffold activity allows for all learners to participate meaningfully regardless of their level, and it is structured so that each level of participation naturally propels the child to increasing mastery and central participation” (p. 57). Students who engage with alternative styles “come alive with interest, become more deeply involved in rehearsals, and practice with greater stimulation at home”

(Lieberman, 2004, p. 17). Farrar-Royce (2006) noted that alternative styles offer numerous opportunities for differentiation among students of varying abilities.

### **Teacher Perspectives, Learning Aurally, and Improvisation**

Although inclusion of alternative styles in formal music learning spaces has increased substantially over the years due to increased media presence, resources, and professional development opportunities, there is still a need for more professional development and teacher training opportunities for teaching strategies using alternative styles (Lindamood, 2011). In a national survey on the use of traditional, jazz, and popular styles in secondary orchestra classes, Lindamood (2011) found that although many teachers have a positive perspective of the place of alternative styles in the curriculum, most are uncomfortable teaching alternative styles due to a lack of knowledge and experience. Although string teachers in this study reported attending an alternative styles session at a conference, less than 30% felt that they had any training in teaching alternative styles. Edinger (2013) conducted a survey of string educators in Pennsylvania and found that although many teachers offered non-classical ensembles, there was little training available for alternative styles teaching strategies, and most of the strategies used in alternative styles were not associated with the style of the music being performed. Younger students in an alternative styles music camp complained that help from the faculty was insufficient to help them learn in ways that they needed (Hendricks & Smith, 2018). In a national survey of members of the American String Teachers Association, Norgaard & Taylor (2016) found that 40% of respondents had performed alternative styles on concerts, but less than 10% performed alternative styles for adjudicated

festivals.

In a study that examined the use of improvisation in Maryland and Virginia string classes, Blockland (2014) found that the majority of string teachers did not include improvisation as part of their instruction due to a lack of time, lack of opportunities to improvise in orchestral repertoire, limited teacher training, a preference to teach only classical music, and a lack of student ability. McMahon (2014) found that orchestra directors are not comfortable teaching a style that is traditionally passed on through the aural tradition, and suggested that teachers may not have control over what their school district specifies in their scope and sequence for orchestra classes. Although it appears that alternative styles are generally accepted by many string teachers, many are still uncomfortable teaching non-traditional literature, teaching aurally, and teaching improvisation.

### **Students' Musical Preferences and Listening Habits**

Students enjoy learning and performing alternative styles of music (e.g., Fortune, 2011; Mick, 2012). Styles most preferred include Celtic music (Mick, 2012) and rock and fiddle (Norgaard & Taylor, 2016). Student preferences were influenced to a degree by what music they had most recently played, suggesting that lack of exposure to various genres may have an influence on students like or dislike of a genre (Mick, 2012). Students enjoyed various musical styles inside and outside of school, were interested participating in musical activities other than traditional orchestra classes, and willing to learn music aurally (Fortune, 2011). Utilizing the ARCS Model of Motivational Design (Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction) with eclectic or alternative styles

along with traditional orchestra literature may be an easy way to foster more learning in string students (Fortune, 2011).

### **Studies on Collaboration and Learning in Music Education**

Studies on collaborative learning have been relatively sparse in music education until recently. In a review of literature on collaborative learning in music, Luce (2001) stated, “Although collaborative learning has been discussed widely in educational literature in general and in specific learning disciplines, it has been noticeably absent within the field of music education until recently” (p. 20). Bruffee (1999) identified three basic principles of collaborative learning that are consistent throughout the literature: (a) knowledge is socially constructed, (b) the authority of knowledge is shared among the members of the community, and (c) interdependent personal relationships shape a community of knowledgeable peers. Studies on collaboration in music classrooms include those by Stabley (2000), Wiggins (2000), Allsup (2003), Larson (2010), and Harrington (2016). Wiggins (2000) observed that a collaborative environment promoted independent musical thinking and empowered students to explore higher levels of complexity when creating music. Allsup (2003) found that students working collaboratively were more curious and musically free to explore. Chamber ensembles were found to provide excellent opportunities for collaborative learning in the music classroom (Harrington, 2016). In those chamber ensemble settings students were found to foster deeper interpersonal relationships, develop higher levels of performance achievement, motivation (Berg, 1997; Carmody, 1988; Kim, 2018; Larson, 2010; Stabley, 2000).

Potential issues related to collaborative learning have been also been identified by researchers. Brandler & Peynircioglu (2015) found that interacting with others could block individual production. They called this *collaborative inhibition* and found that, “in collaborative settings, the quality of attention might have been reduced, and freedom of choice for exactly what to rehearse and for how long might have been curtailed” (p. 292). Nelson (1994) discussed issues related to varying abilities and interests of students in a collaborative learning process, and Wiener (1992) noted that moving from traditional learning approaches to a collaborative learning style may prove difficult for some teachers.

Studies investigating informal learning strategies in a music classroom include those conducted by Allsup (2003), Campbell (1995), Green (2001, 2004), Jaffurs (2004), and Westerlund (2006). Folkstead (2006) identified four key aspects that are helpful in considering whether learning is formal or informal. The first key aspect is the situation, or physical space in which the learning is taking place. The second aspect is learning styles, or the quality of the learning experience. The third is ownership, or determining who is making the musical decisions. The fourth is intentionality, which is the distinction between playing to learn or playing for the sake of performing (pp. 141-142). Dakon & Cloete (2018) conducted a qualitative study which examined Violet, a Flemish youth orchestra, and identified qualities which constitute an eclectic ensemble space. Through observations and interviews, data revealed that eclectic ensembles can be defined with the following criteria: a) taught with both formal and informal methods; b) taught in a space that nurtures self-respect; c) taught in a social space that promotes social interaction

and mutual respect between members; d) taught in a socio-musical space that cultivates peer-learning; e) taught in a social space that demonstrates music's capacity for social engagement. Many of these criteria mirror the qualities of a community of practice. Dakon & Cloete (2018) suggested that "teachers might consider endorsing a more integrated formal and informal learning approach that promotes social engagement and self-appreciation among members in eclectic music ensembles" (p. 70).

### **Socialization and Communities of Practice**

Socialization serves as a means by which students interact while learning and includes all processes in which culture is transmitted from one generation to the next (Maccoby, 2015; Scruggs, 2008, 2009; Smetana, Robinson, & Rote, 2015). Socialization has been found to be a reciprocal dynamic process in which the individual actively participates and influences the group (Kuczynski, Parkin, & Pitman, 2015). This group dynamic is what Lave and Wenger (1991) called a community of practice. Countryman (2009) recognized that communities of practice in music programs may be fostered by encouraging individual musical creativity within the group, independent musical decision-making, and guiding musical leadership. Froehlich (2009) and Countryman (2009) both recognized that collegiality is preferred over hierarchical relationships, and both emphasized cooperation rather than competition as important aspects of music education. This would suggest that the role of the teacher is not to be the sole dispenser of knowledge, but rather a facilitator that guides students through collaborative learning experiences.

Drawing from the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), Sawyer (2008) recognized

that, “As students collaborate, they become socialized into classroom communities of practice. In addition to learning how to make music, students in these communities learn how to listen and respond and how to communicate in social contexts” (p. 58). Hendricks and Smith (2018) shared a similar viewpoint and stated, “Considering the importance of social musical experiences for youth, we may do well to not underestimate the potential of motivation through collaborative and cooperative music learning structures, no matter the genre” (p. 47).

Leadership is perhaps the most important aspect of socialization, and student-centered learning provides students the opportunity to establish leadership skills (Darrow et al., 2005; Goodrich, 2007; Scruggs, 2008, 2009). Scruggs (2008) found that students in a student-centered classroom demonstrated increased engagement with each other, increased musical growth, and sought out more leadership opportunities. In addition to improved leadership skills, improvements in student problem-solving and decision-making, and a deeper understanding of the subject matter has been shown in both mentors and mentees in a student-centered classroom (Johnson, 2013; Scruggs, 2008). Similar to my own classroom experiences learning popular music, Green (2001) found that in an informal learning situation peers can lead their own learning, working together improvising and sharing knowledge about technique and theory.

Although socialization serves as a means by which students can interact, peer-mentoring can also present problems. During peer-mentoring not all students are treated as equals due to their varying levels of musicianship (Goodrich, 2007), and some students become uncomfortable assuming the subordinate role (Darrow et. al., 2005). Researchers



have suggested that teachers be aware of the cultural and socio-economic status of their students to help maximize learning during mentoring, and when guiding their students in leadership skills (Johnson, 2013; Taylor, 2016; Koenig, 2011). Knowledge domains can be barriers, rather than enablers in a community of practice due to interactions with people who may have different perspectives and experiences (Froehlich, 2009). “Music educators must be willing to do the joining rather than asking others to join us, and accept as legitimate each point of difference, examining it critically for the purpose of strengthening the group’s core objective” (p. 100). Scruggs (2008) suggested that the teacher be involved in the selection and development of leadership in peer-mentoring, and Mullins (1997) recommended that teachers allow students to take responsibility for their learning, ensure that authentic learning experiences occur, and clearly communicate high expectations to all members of the group.

### **Chapter Summary**

Teaching and learning structures in the music classroom typically places the teacher as the leader and the students as passive learners. This teacher-centered approach to learning may limit student development in a typical music ensemble setting, and could be the reason so many students stop playing their instruments after graduation. Grounded by the work of social constructivist Lev Vygotsky, Lave and Wenger (1991) viewed learning as a function of activity, context and culture in which it occurs. Their model of situated learning proposed that learning involves a process of engagement in a community of practice, and is based on theories of knowledge that are shared by a group of learners with common goals and passions. Music ensembles and music classrooms

may be seen as suitable settings to establish communities of practice.

Researchers have found that there is a need for more professional development and teacher training in alternative styles teaching strategies. Although alternative styles are generally accepted by many string teachers, some are still uncomfortable teaching non-traditional literature, improvisation and teaching songs by ear in an informal learning setting. In studies examining students' experiences in alternative styles ensembles, researchers have found several benefits such as increases in self-efficacy, creativity, leadership, and motivation.

Research shows that collaborative learning environments in music promotes independent thinking and higher levels of creativity. Chamber groups and other small ensembles have been found to provide excellent opportunities for students to work collaboratively, where they can share their knowledge and contribute to making musical decisions. Based on the research cited in this chapter, it may be that music teachers can promote a collaborative learning environment by cultivating communities of practice and embracing the role of facilitator and guide. This can then provide students opportunities to advance in leadership, problem-solving, and decision-making skills, as well as gaining confidence and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Data cited above shows that students in student-centered classrooms seek out more leadership opportunities, demonstrated increased engagement with each other, and increased musical growth. However, teachers need to be aware that there are potential issues in promoting student collaboration, stemming from students' socio-economic status, cultural differences, and varying abilities among students.

Alternative style string ensembles may be an ideal musical setting for the development of communities of practice in a musical environment. A community of practice that embraces alternative styles, and the music of common youth culture, may enhance student learning in ways not possible in a traditional classical performance setting, and foster independent musicianship. The focus of this study is to examine the perceptions and experiences of a secondary school string teacher leading an alternative style group, and to describe the interactions of this group as a community of practice (Hoadley, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994).

### **Chapter 3: Method**

In this chapter, I discuss the methods I used to explore the learning that occurred during this study. I present to the reader the research design, data collection techniques used to collect data, and how I analyzed the data. I then discuss how I established reliability with the findings that included peer review, external audit, member checks, and the biases I brought to this investigation.

The purpose of this study was to explore how students collaborated with each other as they learned alternative styles of music in a high school string ensemble. Guiding questions for this study included:

1. What various roles did the students undertake in their community of practice?
2. How did the participants move toward legitimate participation as they collaborated with each other in alternative styles of music?
3. How did the teacher serve as facilitator of this community of practice?

#### **Research Design**

I had initially considered a quantitative national survey of members of the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) in order to gather data regarding the use of alternative styles. While this approach would provide a very broad perspective of how alternative styles are being used across the country, it would not offer the subtleties of the personal interactions between students with how they shared in the learning process, or the perspectives and role of their teacher when using alternative styles. According to Phillips (2008), “The main outcome of qualitative research is not to look at the big picture but, rather, to present a close-up picture of one participant or a small group of

participants in relation to some criterion” (p. 83). In order to describe the social and musical interactions among members of an alternative styles ensemble within a community of practice, an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) appeared to be most appropriate for this study.

Qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and inductive investigation strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive (Stake, 1995). Creswell (2007) noted that “a case study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases within boundaries and seeks to provide an in depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases” (p. 74). Results of this study will add to the existing body of knowledge on how students share in the learning process.

An instrumental case study approach allowed me to focus on the social and musical interactions between members of the selected alternative style ensemble. With this instrumental case study, I portrayed the learning among students as they collaborated with each other in an alternative style strings ensemble to aid the reader in understanding how they shared and engaged in the learning process. Strategies of inquiry included observations, interviews of teachers, and collection and examination of artifacts (see Stake, 1995, 2010).

### **Site**

Out of the initial ten programs considered, I selected Albacore High School Orchestra (pseudonym) for my study. Albacore was opened in 2008 and is located in

Cobb County, Georgia, a northern suburb of Atlanta. The student population at Albacore was 1,737 for the 2018-19 school year. The school offered three string orchestra classes as part of the curriculum and included an alternative style group as a regularly scheduled, supplemental after-school activity. The string orchestra program included 190 students of varying ages and ability levels in grades 9-12 during the year of this study. The program also included an extra-curricular alternative styles fiddle group that met once a week after school and performed one or two concerts each year.

### **Gatekeepers**

I contacted the school district's Supervisor of Instrumental Music, seeking help in gaining access to the selected site for the study. I also submitted an application to conduct research to the school district, which was approved prior to observations and interviews. Letters of introduction, participation and consent were sent to the District Supervisor, the student participants and the participant teacher. These letters complied with Boston University's International Review Board (IRB) protocol and are included in all IRB paperwork. Although the IRB did not consider this study as research that could be generalized or replicated (and thus did not require approval), I nevertheless gained consent and assent of participants prior to beginning this study.

### **Participant Selection**

Qualitative researchers strive to purposefully select individuals who are likely to be a good source of information, experiences, and are knowledgeable (Stake, 1995). For the design of this study I used purposeful sampling to find an experienced high school string teacher who (a) had more than 10 years teaching experience; (b) taught in an

established program of at least 100 students; (c) incorporated alternative styles in their programs; (d) allowed students to contribute to the learning process; and (e) was comfortable with serving as a facilitator in rehearsals.

I initially contacted the directors of seven high schools and three middle schools that had offered alternative style groups as supplemental activities to their programs. I discovered that only two of these programs had regularly scheduled alternative style rehearsals. Three programs had fewer than 100 students and three of the teachers had been teaching for less than 10 years. Two of the middle school teachers indicated that although they occasionally taught alternative styles music, it was not regularly, and they did not foster collaborative learning because they felt that the students were too young and inexperienced. Given that the school district had 40,000 students enrolled in music elective programs and orchestra programs in 25 middle schools and 17 high schools, it was surprising that it was so difficult to find a teacher and program that fit the requirements for this study.

**Director.** The director at the school was Mr. Parker (pseudonym). Mr. Parker has been teaching for 27 years, 16 years with fiddle groups, and was also the founding orchestra director at the school, which opened in 2008. He has served as president of the Georgia chapter of the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) and was a current member of ASTA. Mr. Parker holds a Bachelor of Music Education degree and was a strong advocate for alternative styles.

**Student participants.** After I found a site that met my criteria for this study, and a teacher who taught an alternative styles fiddle group, I then selected student

participants. I sought a variety of student participants; those who were considered near the center of learning and demonstrated leadership skills, and those who were newcomers to the fiddle group and were on the periphery of learning. I also wanted to select student participants who collaborated with each other in the learning process while they learned new music. The following twelve students met my criteria for the study, and agreed to participate. All names are pseudonyms to hide their identity.

***Amber.*** Amber was a senior violinist and a member of the orchestra board. She was a high-achieving student and described as a student leader by her peers. Amber was a member of the fiddle group in middle school, so she had prior experience with this type of music.

***Amelia.*** A senior violinist, Amelia played piano since the age of four and her younger brother, Andy, was a freshman that played violin in the orchestra and fiddle group. She enjoyed performing music from the Romantic era.

***Andy.*** Andy was a freshman who played violin and Amelia's younger brother. Like Amelia, Andy was a high-achieving student and played piano. Andy viewed himself as a leader among the younger students. Andy was a member of a fiddle group in middle school. He enjoyed listening to hip hop, but also enjoyed playing romantic period music.

***Brian.*** A freshman violist, but he played bass in the fiddle group. He did not play in a fiddle group in middle school. He did not go to school in 8<sup>th</sup> grade due to "some problems." He finished eighth grade by taking online classes, which caused him to miss a year of orchestra.



**Keith.** Keith was a sophomore who played violin. He took honors classes, and indicated that he did not have many friends, mostly “acquaintances.”

**Charles.** Charles was freshman violinist who aspired to be a game designer and compose his own music for the games. He has suffered from tinnitus for several years. He had difficulty playing by ear, and recognized that he lacked confidence when he plays.

**Curt.** A sophomore violist, Curt made all-state in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and played in the Georgia Youth Symphony (GYSO). He wanted to be a conductor, performer, or maybe a music teacher.

**Dawn.** Dawn was a senior violinist who began to play violin at 3. She was recognized as a leader in the group. She was an AP student and wanted to be a doctor in neurology or osteopathy. She said that she enjoys alternative rock and always wants to try playing all string instruments.

**Jessie.** Jessie was the only graduate whom I interviewed. In high school she was concertmaster of the orchestra, and took honors and AP classes. She participated in the fiddle groups at both the high school and middle school levels. At the time of this study she was in her second year of teaching middle school orchestra in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

**Jimmy.** Jimmy was a sophomore violist, and an AP student. He played in a fiddle group in middle school.

**Natasha.** A senior violinist who also played guitar. She took honors and AP classes, as well as chorus. She wanted to be a music teacher, and taught herself how to

play guitar as a sophomore. She reported that she had difficulty memorizing the music on violin.

*Nick.* Nick was a freshman who played bass. He had taken a few honors classes. He was very proud to play bass, and stated that, “the bass is the dinner plate of the orchestra.” Although he participated in the fiddle group, he did not like listening to fiddle music or bluegrass, but preferred classic rock.

### **Data Collection**

“Methods for gathering data are selected to fit the research question and to fit the style of inquiry the researcher prefers” (Stake, 2010, p. 102). Data collection for this case study were based on ethnographic techniques including observations of rehearsals, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, field notes, and collection of artifacts. Data was collected during regularly scheduled rehearsals at the school, and interviews were conducted each week over the course of one academic semester.

### **Observations**

“The first responsibility of the observer is to know what is happening, to see it, to hear it, to try to make sense of it” (Stake, 2010, p. 107). Observations for this study took place at the school during regularly scheduled rehearsals over the course of one semester. Descriptive and analytical notes were taken during each observation. Stake (2010) suggested taking notes “about everything in the research” (p. 113).

### **Interviews**

To explore the perspectives of the participants with their respective roles with learning, I conducted interviews. Interviews were used for a number of purposes that

included obtaining unique information from the interviewee, collecting numerical aggregation of information from many people, and discovering things that were not easily observable (Stake, 2010). Interviews for this study were one-on-one, semi-structured, and open-ended, and conducted on-site. Analysis of field notes from classroom observations helped guide interview questions during the course of the study.

While attempting to keep the interviews relaxed and conversational, I gathered as much information as possible about the experiences and perspectives of the students with their learning and with the role of the teacher as facilitator for this study. In addition to formal interviews, I also utilized data from informal discussions. All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and reported on in a timely manner to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were carefully marked and labeled for future reference.

### **Documents**

In addition to conducting interviews, and collecting field notes and memos from observations, I collected and reviewed documents that related to the alternative style group at the site. Documents corroborated observations and interviews, helped to make the findings trustworthy, and provided additional information (Glesne, 1999). Documents such as music, guidelines for rehearsals, fees associated with the group, rehearsal and performance calendars and programs were collected and analyzed to provide context to observations and interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis involves making sense of notes taken during observations and transcriptions of interviews by identifying common themes and

patterns, drawing conclusions and eventually discussing the findings (Stake 1995). Case study and ethnographic research involve a detailed description of the setting of individuals, followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues (Stake, 1995). Data analysis for this case study occurred throughout the study and followed Creswell's (2003) six generic steps of data analysis:

- (1) Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This involves transcribing interviews, optically transcribing material, typing up field notes, or sorting and arranging data into different types depending on the source of information.
- (2) Read through all of the data. A first general step is to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. What is the tone on the ideas? What is the general impression of the overall depth, credibility and use of the information?
- (3) Begin detailed analysis with a coding process. Coding is the process of organizing the material into "chunks" before bringing meaning to those "chunks".
- (4) Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes. Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting. Then, use the coding to generate a small number of themes or categories, perhaps five to seven themes or categories for a research study. These themes are the ones that appear as major findings in qualitative studies and are stated under separated headings in the findings sections of studies.

(5) Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.

(6) The final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation or meaning of the data. (Creswell, 2003, pp. 191-195)

All interviews were transcribed and carefully reviewed to gain a general sense of the information and the overall meaning. After the transcripts were coded, the codes were sorted and analyzed to discover any relationships, patterns, and commonalities; and were then organized into categories. Finally, categories were compared with each other to find deeper patterns and connections between them so that a narrative of what occurred could be written. From these categories, similar categories were grouped, and from these categories, themes were established. These themes allowed me to portray the learning and socialization that occurred in the alternative style string ensemble.

### **Reliability**

I used several different techniques to aid with the reliability of the findings. Triangulation involved corroborating evidence from different sources (interviews, observations, artifacts) to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2007). I sought to meet with the participants to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the account (Creswell, 2007). Although the student participants declined to engage in these member checks, I had discussions with the primary teacher regarding field notes from my observations for clarification and verification. I used peer review, or peer-examination with a doctoral student and graduate assistant at the University of Georgia Hodgson School of Music to analyze the preliminary findings. Finally, my supervisor, Andrew

Goodrich, provided an external audit to help me report my biases, and assisted me with coding and reviewing themes. He also reviewed drafts of the dissertation and provided feedback as needed.

### **Disclosure of Researcher Bias**

Stake (2010) noted that everyone has biases and that “most researchers work hard to recognize and constrain hurtful biases” and “the best researchers help their clients and readers to be alert to those biases” (p. 177). Because of this, before I conducted any interviews, I shared with the interviewees my personal interest in the subject. I began playing violin at age 9. I studied music formally in school, but I also learned to play fiddle from a family friend outside of school. My parents hosted regular bluegrass jam sessions that I played in when I was young. Learning fiddle tunes aurally helped me to develop a good ear, and I was comfortable improvising and playing solos. I earned two degrees in violin performance and played professionally in several orchestras around the world before I became a high school orchestra director. As a teacher, I have led my students in performances of traditional classical music at the Kennedy Center, Orchestra Hall in Chicago, Symphony Hall in Boston, and Carnegie Hall in New York. I have also become an advocate for teaching alternative styles, and regularly program alternative styles on our high school orchestra concerts.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

In this chapter I present to the reader how the students shared in the learning process in the Albacore Fiddlers. Throughout this chapter I explore the role of the teacher, and the roles of the students with learning. Roles of the students included leadership from those that I observed as being close to the center of the community; and newcomers, those students on the periphery of learning. During the course of this study, I found that collegiality, cooperation, reciprocal learning, sharing knowledge and peer mentoring were all significant aspects of learning, and I portray these learning techniques throughout the chapter. Analysis of observation and interview data indicated that this type of situated learning environment helped to increase student confidence, creativity, and motivation, and foster student leadership skills in a collaborative setting. I begin the findings with portraying the situated learning environment with the Albacore Fiddlers.

### **Situated Learning**

In a situated learning environment, learning occurs in the same context in which it is applied. One of the primary characteristics of the practice in this community of learners was learning tunes by ear. Learning songs aurally is what provided the setting to bring all students in the fiddle group together in a collaborative learning process. Students in the fiddle group were clearly motivated to participate and interact with each other as they learned new music and developed new skills together. During the course of this study, several members of the group were happy to share that they had recruited friends to join the group, some of whom had dropped orchestra after middle school. The social aspect of the fiddle group provided a relaxed, friendly environment that allowed for newcomers,

younger students, and older students to fully participate and grow as members of the group over the course of the semester.

### **Entering the Community**

The fiddle group had a reputation among the students for being a welcoming group that was relaxed and fun to participate in. During the course of the semester, the students enjoyed their interactions with each other and also appreciated the opportunities to learn from each other. The students played a major role with recruiting their friends to participate in this group. They commented on how much fun they had as a member of the group and that even in middle school, they heard that it was a relaxed, fun place to make music. Charles, who was new to the group, viewed the fiddle group as a very welcoming group where, “you don’t have to be super good at your instrument to join. It’s open to anyone.” Keith pointed out that students were placed in the regular orchestra classes “based on our skills. But for fiddle group it's based on our interest and like being open to learn new things.”

Even students that had dropped out of orchestra between middle school and high school were welcomed in the fiddle group, and several rejoined because of their friends. Jimmy shared that he personally talked several friends into joining. “I’m, like, come on, it's really fun. You didn't do it in middle school, you should do it now.” He enjoyed the group because, “it's afterschool and everyone's just like kind of fun. We're all tired, right? Less formal.” Natasha pointed out that it had a lot to do with everyone’s attitude, “All the people who are here want to be here because they're passionate about it and they have fun.”



Yet, not all of the newcomers found it easy to participate in the fiddle group at first. Amaya recalled that as a freshman, “you were sitting in the back and probably quiet and shy.” For Amaya, she “was, like, all intimidated by the upperclassmen, like, juniors, sophomores and seniors.” However, she eventually became more comfortable and added, “I’m, like, more relaxed because I’ve been here for four years and I got more confidence.” Both Keith and Charles, two of the quietest members of the group, indicated that it was difficult for them to make new friends when they first joined the fiddle group. Jimmy noted that he struggled his first year or two. “I had a hard time with technique and stuff that’s, like, very hard. I found the coordination stuff hard to do and so that was, like, a just a huge struggle for those first two years.”

### **Differences Between Fiddle Group and Orchestra Class**

Several members of the fiddle group recognized that fiddle group rehearsals were structured differently than the curricular orchestra class. They also understood that Mr. Parker’s role was different in the two settings. Jessie, who had already graduated, remarked “Everybody’s the same in orchestra. Right? You know, it’s very uniform. That’s part of it. Right? Whereas with fiddle group a was much less structured, which we all loved. It was after school. We were standing up, we were having fun, we were laughing.” Amaya, a senior violinist, shared that “in orchestra class he [Mr. Parker] is very focused, but in fiddle group it’s mainly just like having fun and making sure that everybody knows their music. He’s definitely more relaxed because I think there’s less pressure.”

As a high-achieving student with a heavy schedule, Andy welcomed the opportunity to be in the fiddle group. “Since it’s afterschool and, like, school is already

over it's, like, a lot more laid back. We're just there to have fun. It's more fun. You can express yourself." He viewed the fiddle group as a departure from rigors of other classes, including his orchestra class, which he found to be intense. In regular rehearsal, "Mr. Parker will work on, like, each section and detail, like, every single detail that he wants to be made. Not so much in fiddlers. It's all about having fun." Amelia noted, "You can have your own individual sounds and I really like that about it. Even if you struggle a bit in the orchestra, you can come here and enjoy your instrument without having to worry about sounding bad, because no one really cares about that here." Mr. Parker agreed that the focus of regular orchestra class is "excellence in performance," but in fiddle group "the setting is a lot more laid back. We have a good time together and it's the place in the afternoon where they get to play just for the fun of playing."

Dawn, who was one of the senior student leaders, echoed this sentiment. She recalled that regular orchestra rehearsals were "an intense experience, but fiddlers is just like a fun time. Time to just chill with friends." She described the members as being, "very excited to be here and eager to actually learn what they're doing...it's something that they enjoy." She noted that there is a group of freshmen and sophomore fiddlers that meet before school to practice together. They come in "early in the morning just hanging out, and they're just playing fiddlers music. Just jamming, that's what they do. That's really cool."

### **Freedom to Try New Things**

The relaxed nature of the fiddle group provided students with an environment in which they could try new things. Several of the younger students had never played

alternative styles or attempted improvisation prior to joining the group. Keith enjoyed the laid-back feel of the group and found that it was “fun to learn other types of music.”

Natasha enjoyed playing a different instrument and a new style of music. “I think it's fun to play different styles because, you know, we're not all classical and you know, up and proper, it's, it's more so relaxed and chill and you know, kind of having fun and getting into the groove if you will.” Natasha was not the only member that had learned a new instrument. Brian had played viola for the first few weeks that the group met, but when he saw Mr. Parker playing mandolin, he became interested in learning mandolin. Brian recalled, “Mr. Parker needed a viola player who could possibly help. And I said I'd do it. Thirty minutes . . . and boom! He showed me the C, the G and the D chords. I did all right for the first time and then after when I got home with the mandolin, I just kept on practicing trying to know the major chords.” He is now enjoying mandolin so much that he exclaimed, “maybe if I get hooked onto this, I could go to, like, maybe do this as a career.”

### **Teaching and Learning Aurally: Mr. Parker Gets the Group Started**

Before students began leading the ensemble with selecting tunes and rehearsing them, Mr. Parker led the class sessions. He did so to set the basis for how rehearsals would occur during the school year. At the beginning of the semester he modeled songs for students to learn by ear. The aural aspects of learning tunes by ear comprised a significant part of the learning that occurred among the students. Mr. Parker only handed out music after the students attempted to learn a song aurally over several rehearsals. For Mr. Parker said that if students simply memorized tunes from reading music, “it would

just be an extension of an orchestra experience.” Jimmy explained, “what he typically does is wait until I have one practice session completely by ear, and then he’ll have another one, and then he’ll either give us music at the beginning or at the end of the next practice.”

**Teaching “Ashe Grove.”** During one of the first rehearsals early in the fall, Mr. Parker taught the group a song called “Ashe Grove.” It was apparent that a few of the older students knew the tune, for they jumped right in and played along while most of the younger, newer students sat back and watched. A few of the newer students tried to jump in, but it appeared that Mr. Parker played through the tune just so that they knew what it sounded like.

As Mr. Parker began teaching, he focused on the eight-to-ten new students with his verbal directives and proximity to them. With his focus placed on the newer students, he allowed the more experienced students to model as much as possible. Mr. Parker considered “Ashe Grove” a good tune to start with because, “the newer students would be able to learn from the older students with more experience.” He began by slowly playing the A section of the tune on his violin (figure 4a).

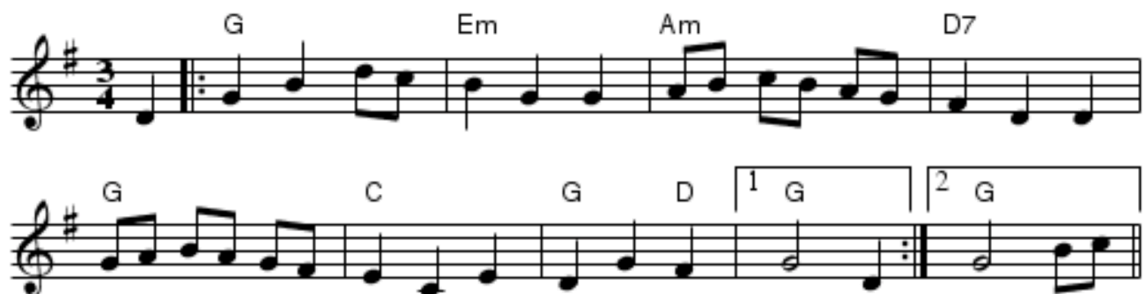


Figure 4a. “Ashe Grove” A section.

He played through it a couple of times and then modeled smaller phrases. As he began to teach the melody, he would verbally call out when it was moving stepwise, when there were leaps, and where the chord changes were. He played short, four to eight bar phrases, then had the students play it back. It took several repetitions, but they eventually played through each phrase, then put them all together to complete the A section. He modeled the B section (figure 4b) the same way, always breaking it into smaller sections with his violin and verbally pointing out intervals, patterns, and sequences.



Figure 4b. "Ashe Grove" B section.

(Return of the A section)

As they all played together, he would say, "Let's loop it!" or "Let's turn it around at the ending!" The older students knew to repeat the phrase until he moved, and they were very good at following his lead. The younger students were not quite as fast, but they eventually got it. As they learned the tune, Mr. Parker rarely stopped playing and always kept the beat by tapping his foot and counting off each time they played back a phrase or section. He was quite comfortable giving instructions while they all played. He and the older students appeared to have developed their own vocabulary for teaching and learning a song aurally.

For the first run throughs, he did not focus on details such as bowings. However,

as the students became more familiar with the tune, he prompted a discussion about bowings and asked questions such as, “How would a slur work right here? How about up-bow at the end of this phrase? Think about the articulation and clarity of rhythm.” He later explained that he often leads brief discussions among the students, where they then have the opportunity to make informed decisions about bowings.

**Accompaniment parts.** After Mr. Parker rehearsed the A and B sections for about 10 minutes, the students gained a basic understanding of the melody and the form of the tune. He then began to build upon what he had already taught. He turned his attention to the accompaniment and demonstrated how to ‘chop’ chords on the off beats using double-stops. He explained that a chop is a two-part percussive bow stroke using a vertical drop and lift motion, with a rest in between. Because of the two-part motion, the chop is both rhythmic and melodic in nature. He instructed the students with: “The first step is to push the bow into the strings on the downbeat, and the second part is to release the bow on the off-beat. There will be a crunch as you land and a pop when you release.” He then gave a brief explanation of how to play double stops, noting that “there are many ways to play double stops, and that double stops with thirds and sixths were the most common for fiddlers.” Some of the younger players struggled with the double stops as their left fingers were hitting neighboring strings. Mr. Parker explained that “with proper left-hand position and technique, those kinds of problems will go away.” He also shared with them that open string double stops might be easier to play. They all attempted a few double stops, but it was clear that some still struggled to play them in tune. Mr. Parker admitted to them that the notes were not as important as the rhythmic part of the chop.

At times, some of the students experienced difficulties because of the instrument they played. For example, Ben understood that playing in a different octave was sometimes a problem for the cellos and violas. He pointed out that “In fiddle group, all instruments are welcome, so the violas, and cellos have to shift if the song isn’t one where you can go low octave.” He recognized that “some songs are viola friendly, but for the most part you need to shift if you a viola or a cello. And so that's a little bit of a difficulty.”

**Allowing students to make musical decisions.** After everyone became more comfortable with chops, he asked for half of the students to play the melody and the other half to chop. Then they switched. Mr. Parker then asked, “How can you help others know when to change chords while chopping?” Curt, a sophomore violist, responded that a nod would work, while Andy said to watch the left hand of the guitar player. Mr. Parker then turned his attention to Charles, a freshman violinist, and asked him to chop on the off beats. He reiterated to Charles “push the bow into the string on the big beats, and release the chop on the off beat.” Mr. Parker had everyone play in the upper part of the bow for style, then asked for three volunteers to play the tune while improvising different rhythms. Approximately 20 minutes into the rehearsal the entire fiddle group was able to play through “Ashe Gove” by ear without any sheet music, complete with chops and improvisation. It was clear that even the newer, less experienced students understood the process.

### **Learning Aurally and Memorization: Difficulties for New Members**

Although everybody understood the process of learning new songs aurally, a few of the newer members of group struggled with playing by ear. Keith mentioned that he struggled with learning tunes by ear and stated, “I definitely overthink it. It’s kind of difficult because I overthink things.” Charles explained, “He [Mr. Parker] will play a little bit of the song and then you have to play it back. Then they go on to the next little bit of music. When we get it together a little bit, he [Mr. Parker] would go through the entire song.” Although Charles understood Mr. Parker’s process for teaching a new song by ear, he said that the fiddle group was more difficult than the regular orchestra class because in fiddle group Mr. Parker “doesn’t want us to look at our music.” For Charles, learning songs by ear in the fiddle group was a new experience. When he played in the middle school fiddle group, he read music first and he was then able to memorize songs. “If I was looking at music, I would learn it fast. But he [Mr. Parker] wants you to learn by ear because it’s the traditional way . . . I just can’t do that.”

Andy shared a similar viewpoint, and was also very clear about his feelings, “I don’t like learning by ear at all.” However, he also understood that “it will definitely make me a better musician. I just don’t enjoy doing it at all.” Keith shared his struggle: “I definitely overthink it. Playing by ear, it's kind of difficult for me because I overthink things. But with the sheet music, I just have to look over it.” Brian indicated that it was very hard for him without sheet music. His view was that, “because we’re freshmen, we were sort of learning how to play our instrument. You've got to remember your notes, you've got to remember the correlations between flats regarding scales.”



Participants were aware of the struggles with some of the younger members. For example, Amaya pointed out that there could be frustration among some of the older students with how long the younger students took when learning a new tune. She remarked, “He [Mr. Parker] does have to like go pretty slow just so everybody can get it right . . . which isn't my favorite. I'm not trying to be like insulting, but like the freshmen sometimes struggle.”

Although students initially struggled with learning songs aurally, the process appeared to become easier for them during the course of the semester. Jessie, an alum of the program, recalled that playing by ear was difficult at first, but that it got easier. She explained, “especially when you've been trained to read off of the page, it's so hard to step away from that. You feel almost at a loss. . . you're kind of freaking out. What do I do? What do I do? But it definitely got easier and I am so grateful that I had that. Because now I can pick something up very quickly.” Mr. Parker understood the difficulty that some his students had playing by ear, but said that was an important skill that can and should be developed: “My job is to guide them into becoming more independent musicians. I want them to be able to make music on their own without an orchestra.” Jessie was adamant that playing by ear helped with her ear-training classes in college. “I didn't take theory in high school, which I regret. When I got to college, it was hard, but I wasn't as behind as I thought it was. It definitely helped to have that background in learning by ear.”

For other students, though, learning songs aurally was easy for them. Amelia, who also played classical piano, said that playing by ear and memorization were not very

difficult for her, admitting that for fiddler music, “I don’t really practice it that much because I rely on my memory a lot. So, pretty good musical memory probably from playing piano.” Amaya, also a senior, recognized that being in fiddle group helped her in regular orchestra class. “We learned a lot of stuff by ear, so I think that helps, like, with ear training.” She said that it was important to help students that were struggling. She recalled, “I was always making sure that they can see my hand whenever I’m playing. Or if somebody is struggling, I’ll just like be like, okay, yeah, like, here’s my hand. It’s important in here because once we learn it by ear, we won’t forget the music.”

**Teaching “Mississippi Sawyer.”** During another rehearsal Mr. Parker began to teach “Mississippi Sawyer,” another tune that was new for almost everyone. He started the lesson by instructing everyone to put away their binders with no music. “Do you guys have this in your binder? If so, keep your binders closed.” Just as when he taught “Ashe Grove,” Mr. Parker played the opening four bar phrase several times. He played the song on his violin first, then the students played it. Then he said “Loop!” and they all played the same four bars over and over without a break. “Good! Now, here’s the next phrase . . . it’s a sequence. Listen.” He then played the second phrase. “Loop it.” Then they put the two phrases together (figure 4c).



Figure 4c. “Mississippi Sawyer” A section.

It was apparent that by this point in the semester all of the students, including the beginners, were more familiar with Mr. Parker’s style of teaching, and learning the A section of “Mississippi Sawyer” took less than two minutes. He played the beginning again and then the students repeated it. Mr. Parker then looked at all of the students and said, “Listen!” He then played new material. When doing so, he verbally shouted out, “me” and continued to play the next phrase (figure 4d). The students repeated what they just heard and Mr. Parker shouted, “Hop in whenever you can. We’re going to loop it. Good. Listen to this scalar passage with the turn on the end.” He continued to teach the B section (figure 4d) four measures at a time, until the group could continue on their own.



Figure 4d. “Mississippi Sawyer” B section.

A few of the students struggled with the ending because of a skip in the middle of a stepwise passage. He played it and then said, "Play the turn at the end, like in Brandenburg." He then played a similar phrase from "Brandenburg Concerto No. 3." Finally, he played the entire A section. They played through the A section several times, with Mr. Parker calling chords to the guitar and bass. It sounded quite good. "Good! One more time!" On the final play through, Mr. Parker began to play harmony. "Nice. Very Good!" Mr. Parker taught the tune in four chunks, and in less than 10 minutes the entire group learned the new tune. He modeled for the class by playing a small part of a phrase, and the students would play it back. He kept the students engaged, and constantly asked the students questions about the phrases, "is this scalar, or are there skips?" He explained the chord progression for the bass and guitar players, and demonstrated how different chord tones could work for improvisation. He had students play in small groups, and asked them to improvise using different rhythms and to try some harmony. "Okay, who wants to do chops?" Several students raised their bows indicating that they wanted to provide the rhythmic accompaniment. As they worked out the chords for the chops, Mr. Parker continued to work the harmony. Over the course of 30 minutes, the group had learned the process, the vocabulary, scales and finger patterns, chord progressions, and improvisation. Everyone was engaged, on task, and learning the tune very quickly.

### **Collaborative Environment**

After Mr. Parker set the tone for the semester by modeling the process of teaching a new song, he allowed the students to lead rehearsals. During the semester he would occasionally contribute advice to the students for how to learn tunes and to play their

instruments. Students would lead the entire group, and during the course of the semester it was apparent that the group was used to working in smaller groups that were led by the students. When students worked in smaller groups, it was usually with a section of instruments. For example, when the violinists would work together in a group, Mr. Parker occasionally worked out the octave displacements with the violists and cellists.

As rehearsals continued later in the semester, the students started to work more collaboratively with each other. They helped each other with solos, memorization, harmony parts, chord changes, and bowings. While most members were comfortable jumping in and asking for help from other students, Dawn and Jimmy pointed out that not everyone asked for help directly. Instead, many students received help just by sitting in with a more advanced group of players. Dawn explained, "It's like they'll just come in and start playing and then other people will join them. It's kinda cool." Jimmy added, "we do help and will occasionally be, like, do you need help with this? But we're not going to, like, constantly reach out if we see, like, one person messing up." He added, "Dawn wouldn't personally be, like, 'Hey, I noticed you're struggling' unless I was, like, really, really tanking it." Other students, such as Keith, usually did not ask for help from other members because he was shy. He remarked that, "It makes me nervous to talk to some of the others."

Overall, though, the students collaborated with each other. Natasha also saw this type of collaboration within the group. She explained, "So for violins, you know, when we're learning a piece, there's always that one person who's always got it. So, everyone's kinda, like, you know, tuned into what they're doing." She said that if other students were

not open to what others were doing, “you’re going to get lost and mess up.” She pointed out that as the group leaders, “Dawn and Amelia . . . they're always the first ones to pick it up so everyone kind of, you know, listens in on them and they usually do play louder because they know they have it.” Jessie remembered working with her friends in small group learning tunes together. They were close friends and always had fun while they played together. Jessie noted that they would always come out of a jam session with something new to share with the rest of the class. “We would split off into a group to learn a specific tune, maybe creating a little band and, you know, just learning the tune and sharing it with the rest of the class.”

### **Roles Within the Community**

Members of the fiddle group assumed varying roles depending on their skill level and experience. These roles typically changed during the semester as students gained more confidence with experience. Younger students were typically seen as peripheral or inbound members in that they learned group norms from the older, more experienced students. The more experienced players were seen by younger members as insiders with a clear understanding of how the group operates, and a willingness to help younger members. Keith, who was new to the group, recalled that he often got help from Curt, who had already been a member for a year. Keith noted enthusiastically that “Curt is a really good player. He would always help us freshmen with new things.” During the course of the semester, the experience alone was not always the determining factor as to the role that any student would assume. Andy and Curt, both underclassmen, were recognized as leaders in the group due to their skill level, not because of their age or

grade.

The changing roles of the directors was also an important factor in the changing roles of the students. Mr. Scott, a frequent guest clinician, was initially seen as a boundary member. Early in the semester, he conducted the group in a teacher-centered model. However, as he became more familiar with how the group operated, he allowed the students to make decisions for themselves and the class became more student-centered. Mr. Parker's role also changed over the course of the semester, moving from teacher to facilitator, allowing the students to lead themselves as they gained confidence in their collaborative efforts.

### **Role of the Director**

Throughout the semester the participants maintained various roles in the group. Mr. Parker was aware of his role as a facilitator, but recognized that his role changed during the school year. His role changed as he transitioned from one of teacher, to facilitator who guided students through the process of leadership and making musical decisions, to allowing students to lead the group. Mr. Parker reflected on his role and remarked, "When I teach a tune at the beginning of year, I teach it by rote and then my job is to get out of that scene. My job is to get them to learn their own solos, to get them to branch out a little bit to become more independent musicians." He explained that he "typically starts out the semester in the role of a teacher or guide, but as the semester goes on, the rehearsals become more student driven. During the semester of this study, his role was one of teacher for the first few weeks, and then "the group gradually becomes more student led." He considered his role of teacher at the beginning of the semester as

necessary because, “the younger students need to learn the songs and the group norms.” He believed that teaching the fiddle group in the aural tradition promoted collaboration, which then led to continuity from year to year. If the older students already know some of the tunes, they would be in a good position to be able to help teach the tunes to the newer members of the group. He recalled, “Once the kids got through two or three years of playing by ear, they learned how to use their ear better. They learned the style better. They began to be the models and the mentors for the younger ones.”

Mr. Parker viewed the beginning of the school year as an especially important time for the students to form friendships. He described the younger less-experienced students as “shy and hesitant.” But that changed as the newer students began to work with the more experienced students. “When they see the older kids, who were the cool kids and the more experienced ones leading them and not being afraid, that's been a great model; and a great part of the group is the collaboration.” He established early that the expectation is that as the year progresses, the group will become more collaborative, and that students need to take the initiative to find a partner or a group to work with. He described the relationships between older students and newer students. “I think at the beginning of the year when the new kids come in, they see the returners. And the returners, we start out with all of our standard pieces that we do every single year. So, the older kids can play that right away.” It was clear that the new students viewed the returning students as mentors and the leaders of the group. Mr. Parker explained, “The hope is as the younger kids become more comfortable, they've developed friendships and relationships and that role of mentor and learner.” He has seen those relationships grow,



and when they do “everyone plays with more freedom and more confidence.” In this student-centered environment, “everyone participates and contributes, which instills a sense of purpose and belonging for everyone.”

Several students recognized that Mr. Parker’s role in fiddle group was different than in the regular classroom. The Albacore Orchestra had been recognized as one of the best programs in the state and has won awards at state and national music festivals. Andy noted that in the regular orchestra class, “Mr. Parker would work on each section, and every detail that he wants to be made. But in fiddle group he’s more...he guides the class.” Jessie had a similar view. “In fiddle group [Mr. Parker] was more relaxed, and was open to changing things up. I don’t think he really had a lesson plan for rehearsal.” Jimmy noted that Mr. Parker was “very detailed-oriented” in orchestra class, but in fiddle class he was more relaxed.

Charles described Mr. Parker as more encouraging in the fiddle group. “He will do just about anything to get someone to come to fiddle group and play. Because some people may be shy and they might not play as good as they really can because they think they will sound bad. But [Mr. Parker] will definitely help to encourage everyone.”

Connor viewed Mr. Parker as a helper. “He helps us out. He helps take this song and make it up to the next level. His role is to help us out.” Connor also saw Mr. Parker in fiddle group as “a lot more outgoing. A lot more silly.”

Natasha also saw the differences in Mr. Parker’s teaching styles in fiddle group and regular orchestra. “In fiddle group there are really no rules. We just jump in and figure it out, and he’s always facilitating.” Jessie also pointed out that later in the year,

“he will just sit back and play mandolin with us because that’s where he has a lot of fun. He can sit back and see how we’ve changed over the year.”

### **Inbound Members: Pre-Albacore Fiddlers**

Most members of the Albacore Fiddlers had experience playing in the middle school fiddle group. As they entered the high school fiddle group they began the process of moving from the periphery of learning towards more active roles with their membership in the community of learners. Many students recalled their experiences as 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade members of the Dunham Middle School Fiddle Group as opportunities to spend time with their friends. Senior violinist Amaya remembered that, “in seventh grade we had a fiddling group at Dunham. I just did that because it was before school and I just liked hanging out with all my friends.” She was “thankful that he [Mr. Parker] still had it here [at Albacore] because some my friends I went to Harrison, they don't have it there.” The students recalled that in middle school everyone was excited about moving up to the high school fiddle group.

Jessie recalled the transition from middle school to high school: “When I was in middle school, Mr. Schaffer [director at the middle school] had a fiddle group and you could join when you were in seventh grade. So of course, I joined. I stuck through it through seventh and eighth grade. When I got to high school, um, you know, you could just join, right? Anyone could come.” She also recalled that “it wasn't easy per se because there were older, you know, there I was playing with seniors. I looked at it as inspiration.” Amaya also acknowledged that it was sometimes difficult as a freshman, “I was like all intimidated by the upperclassmen, like all of them...sophomores, juniors and

seniors. But now it's more relaxed because I've been here for four years. I got more confidence. That's the big thing that changes. It's good."

### **Peripheral Members: Inbound Moving to Insider**

Several students noted that there were leaders of varying age and experiences; the leaders were not always the oldest students. The students reported that in past years, students at any grade level served as leaders and this year was no different. As a freshman, Andy expressed that he was confident as a leader, although he was clear that he always followed the upperclassmen. "It's not because they're older or more mature," remarked Andy, "they're more skilled." Curt also recognized that there were student leaders within the newest members. "Every freshman in that fiddle group can 100% be a leader. I've seen it." Jessie, a 2012 graduate, remembered being in a leadership role as a sophomore. "I had been already been, you know, playing in the fiddle group for a few years, um, in middle school as well. So, I definitely did step into that leadership role. Although as a freshman it wasn't easy because there I was playing with seniors."

Mr. Parker remembered several years back a young freshman violinist in his orchestra that "already had experience playing bluegrass fiddle that became a leader for the entire group as a freshman." Parker recalled, "That was an interesting situation because the older kids respected the fact that he could do bluegrass and they listened to him even though he was a freshman."

### **Transfer of Participation to Insider**

The students in the Albacore Fiddlers were aware of their roles with who acted as leaders and who were the followers. During the course of this study it was apparent that

the students were also aware that these roles changed during their time in this group.

Jessie remembered that when she was a freshman, there was one senior that would always help the less experienced members. “If we weren't getting something, we would go to her and she would work with us to figure it out.”

Curt, a sophomore violist, recognized that there were different roles for each member of the group, and that these roles changed over time. He viewed the upperclassmen as having the most responsibility as leaders. He explained that the freshmen must first learn “how fiddle group works and how it goes.” He feels that his role has changed now that he is a sophomore, and noted “you get to show the freshmen what happens.”

Compared to his freshman year, Jimmy said he is much more willing to try new things as a sophomore, even improvisation. “I'm essentially just whatever you need me to help or just do in general, I'll be willing to try new stuff.” He said that he gained a lot of confidence as a sophomore. “Last year I was just kind of, like, let's just play the music the best I can and now I'm just, like, let's change things in a tune and see what works and what doesn't. I'm more willing to do that than it was last year. Juniors...they take the responsibilities as well, and they're more leaders now than they were at sophomores.” He concluded that the seniors were the real leaders of the group, “...they have been there for four years. They know how it works, and they know all the songs so they're more of the leader figures. And helping out everybody else in our group.”

However, Jessie recalled that even some of the older members took longer to learn the songs. “You had to put in the work. There were definitely the people who didn't

put in the work and they fell behind and they just sat there and chopped the whole time.” Amelia recognized that as she got older she did not practice as much. “I have to admit, like, I don't focus as often as I should because I'm making funny faces at my friends across the room because, you know, it's like, it's all fun.”

### **Boundary Member**

Not all of the members of the community were regular members. During several rehearsals Mr. Parker had a guest teacher, Mr. Scott, come in to teach Scottish fiddling styles. Mr. Scott was a friend of Mr. Parker's and wanted to help out with the fiddle group. Although he was not at every rehearsal, the students were comfortable working with him. During one rehearsal early in the semester, he taught the students a Scottish fiddle tune called “Stool of Repentance.” When he played it through the first time, it was very rough, and the students had a very difficult time playing it back by ear. When it fell apart, everyone laughed and they enthusiastically tried again. Unfortunately, it was even worse the second time through. The tempo was simply too fast for the students to learn the tune. Mr. Scott apologized several times, but continued to push ahead at performance tempo, even when students were not getting the tune.

As he worked the tune, the flow was not efficient, because he stopped to give instructions so often. The students played remarkably well, given the poor instruction. At first, Mr. Scott did not understand the group dynamics of the fiddle group during the first rehearsals. However, over the course of several rehearsals he seemed to become more comfortable. Mr. Parker had given him some advice about pacing, and encouraged him to give the students some time to work out problems together.

By the last few rehearsals of the semester, Mr. Scott slowed down the pace of instruction and was even able to teach some specific techniques such as hammer-on, grace notes, and hooked bowings in a 6/8 meter. By the end of the last rehearsal the students were getting the tune much better, and he had a better understanding of the collaborative nature of the group. His role in the community had moved from a boundary member to a peripheral member through transfer of participation over the course of the semester.

### **Socialization**

In this community of learners, socialization played a critical role in student learning. Because the fiddle group was for the most part a collaborative group, there were no specified student leaders formally designated by Mr. Parker. However, there were opportunities for each student member to make decisions, collaborate, and share what they know with each other. Students shared their knowledge with each other which provided learning opportunities for all members. Cooperation, rather than competition, was an important aspect of the learning in this group. This type of student-centered rehearsal allowed for increased engagement between students, increased musical growth and more leadership opportunities.

### **Leadership and Sharing Knowledge**

During every rehearsal, Mr. Parker would give various students the opportunity to lead or kickoff a tune, and the older, more experienced students often helped the younger, less-experienced students. Mr. Parker explained that the older students were open to helping the newer members of the group. Freshman violinist Andy noted that the juniors

and seniors “know the songs and you can like watch them learn bowings and fingerings, so they are definitely an example to watch.” He also recognized that the juniors and seniors are “not just more mature, they are more skilled.” Andy, along with several other underclassmen, seemed to think that this year there were specifically two senior leaders, Dawn and Amaya. Andy remarked that if he was struggling with the music, he looked to Dawn and Amaya, “because I know that most of the time they’re right on their fingerings.” He remembered how they became the leaders of the group. “Yeah, well just happened like kind of organically. It started out when like he [Mr. Parker] told them to teach the class in new piece, and they just taught in the class. Dawn and Amaya, they’re the leaders of our fiddle group.” Amaya remembered how, as freshmen, she and Dawn “started making duets in freshman year just because we were bored and then he would like let us play on concerts sometimes as soloist.”

Students did appreciate opportunities to lead rehearsals, such as teaching a song to the group. For example, Dawn understood that Mr. Parker was “trying to put me in more of a leadership role.” She recalled, “I got to teach this song on this. It was like fun.” When she was a freshman or sophomore, she “never had the opportunity to show someone how to do something or, like, lead a group really besides like a kickoff.” However, Amelia, also a senior, explained that there were not really assigned leadership roles, it was just everyone helping anyone that needed help. She noted that any of the more experienced members would help anyone. She added that she was always happy to help students in need: “I’m not trying to be, like, insulting, but the freshmen sometimes struggle. I always liked to help them out when they needed it.”

Mr. Parker explained that he thought it was important for younger students to move into leadership positions, but that it is not always based upon the age of the student. “I’ve seen some kids that I would have never expected to lead become a really good leader because of what they’ve learned in there...from the interest that they have in there. And a lot of times it’s the kids that are in the fiddle group because they’re confident and they know process.” During one rehearsal, Mr. Parker was playing with the group and messed up a bowing. Everyone laughed as he said, “...everyone, do it again and this time watch Dawn and Amaya. Keep your eye on them. Don’t watch me, watch Dawn.” Mr. Parker explained that if the students are able to get the bowing, lots of times the tune will come easier. “Watch Dawn’s bow and that might help you get the tune.”

### **Student-Centered Learning**

As the adult leader of the fiddle group, Mr. Parker was responsible for booking concerts, arranging travel, and managing all school-related administrative duties. He allowed students to choose music for themselves, and encouraged students to bring in new ideas and even teach new music to the group. He allowed students to make decisions about the performances such as, who would kick off the different tunes, how many repeats, what kind of bowings for each repeat, and who would take solos.

**Teaching “O’Keefe’s Slide.”** During a rehearsal in late October, seniors Dawn and Amaya taught “O’Keefe’s Slide” to the entire class. They chose the tune on their own and learned it from a fiddle website. They taught the tune using the same vocabulary and terminology that Mr. Parker had previously used. Amaya started by explaining to the group that the tune was in a minor, and then led the group in playing an a melodic minor



scale. Mr. Parker jumped in to clarify, “it is actually the Dorian mode built on A. Notice where the half-steps are . . . it is not really a minor scale because of the lowered 7<sup>th</sup> scale degree...the g natural.” After playing through the mode and discussing finger patterns with the other students, she began to teach the A section of the tune (figure 4e).



Figure 4e. “O’Keefe’s Slide” A section.

While Amaya worked each phrase with the group, Dawn would play along with the group. Just as Mr. Parker had previously taught, she played the first phrase, and had the group play it back. She kept a steady tempo, and always counted off the start of the tune. She noted when the parts were repeated, and how the first phrase was different from the second. After Amaya had taught the A section, Dawn continued in the same manner as she taught the B section (figure 4f).

The next 15 minutes were very productive as the class learned the tune from their classmates, Dawn and Amaya.



Figure 4f. “O’Keefe’s Slide” B section.

Later, during the same rehearsal, Mr. Parker asked, “Who wants to kick off Ashe Grove?” One of the students asked how to do it, and Mr. Parker explained, “just play the last four bars, or you can play the entire melody.” He demonstrated by playing the melody of the last four bars. As he finished, he said, “I just kicked it off . . . GO!” Everyone laughs. After the students learned how to kick off the different tunes, it became almost a game for them. Different students were given the opportunity to kick off various tunes, but without everyone else knowing what tune it was. This forced everyone to be fully engaged in the rehearsal, and gave the student that was kicking off the tune an opportunity to lead the group.

There were numerous instances when Mr. Parker provided students with the opportunity to experiment and make decisions for themselves. He encouraged the students to try improvisation and move outside of their comfort zone. He asked for the students to experiment and make up different rhythms for various tunes, incorporate “chops” and to try playing harmony when accompanying soloists. He explained that these variations can add your personality to the tune and turn it into something completely new. Kathy described how she tried to mix harmony lines when she led a tune: “I usually think

in thirds, but that gets boring. So, I try to do the passing things and a counter melody...something that kind of works off of the melody.” Jackson added, “Aside from harmony I thought I should bring it up an octave and maybe change the dynamics so that it is more interesting.”

### **Sense of Belonging**

It was evident during each fiddle group rehearsal that the students enjoyed making music together. Everyone in the group was engaged, motivated, and supportive of each other. This enjoyment was brought about, in part, by the roles of each member in this learning community. The participants were aware of their roles and commented on how much fun they had in rehearsals and noted that there was a place for everyone, regardless of their age, skill level, or experience. With an understanding of their roles, they were able to assist each other with learning the music and collaborate with each other in the learning process. Students indicated that the environment was a safe place to explore new things, like teaching a new tune, taking a solo, or even learning a new instrument. These supportive relationships, and the trust that they had in each other, allowed each member to collaborate with each other to contribute their own individual knowledge and experiences to the group. When there was a problem with the music, they worked out solutions together. If a less experienced player having difficulty with the music, the veteran players would help them. It was clear that students did not learn from each other, but rather with each other as they worked collaboratively towards common goals.

## **Enjoyment Playing with Others**

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the fiddle group was how much fun the students were having as they worked together to learn new music. At the end of one of the last rehearsals before the concert in October Mr. Parker asked, “Okay guys, the most important thing for this concert is...” Jonathan interrupted, “Is to HAVE FUN!” Everyone laughed. Mr. Parker agreed and remarked, “Yes...but we also need to know what the kickoff is for each song.” It was apparent that every student in the fiddle group was there because they enjoyed playing with each other. Almost every participant commented on the accepting nature of the fiddle group, the varying skill levels of the members, and the willingness to help each other. Several participants used the word “family” when describing the group, and were quick to share that everyone was welcome, and everyone supported each other, no matter their skill level. Mr. Parker wanted the group to be inclusive rather than exclusive, and made it open to anyone. “You've got different levels, and the fiddle group brought everybody together. It didn't matter if it was the advanced most advanced kid or the beginner, they all got together and they were able to make music together in some form. It became a real community and a real family-type of situation.” Brian felt comfortable in the group because, as he described, “Anyone is welcome. It doesn't matter how bad you are. Everyone gets along.”

Sophomore violist Curt felt very comfortable in the fiddle group and noted that, “It has everybody in it and everybody helps everybody. In the fiddle group we just open up with open arms. All of us are a family, and that's what I enjoy the most.” Jessie appreciated that the fiddle group is “much more individualized and collaborative” than

the regular orchestra class. She added that “we were, you know, super supportive.”

Charles, who admitted to struggling in the group and being terribly shy, described Mr. Parker as “Really nice. He’s always there for you when you need help. If you don’t get something, you can come to him and he will spend hours on something if you need it.” He felt that received a lot of encouragement. “Some people are shy and they don’t want to play as good as they can because they think they will sound bad. But they will be, like, ‘no, you can play this’ or ‘just play out.’ It made me feel less embarrassed about not getting it by ear.”

Amaya described playing in the fiddle group as rewarding. “Just like practicing and, like, working and then you’re finally able to get that lick, or whatever. I think that’s really rewarding.” She noted that she gets that feeling when playing classical music as well. “I love performing in orchestras or a quartet, and you have those little moments...it’s just so amazing. I feel bad that people who don’t play instruments are never going to experience that.”

### **Confidence**

Students in the fiddle group were always supportive of each other, which provided a relaxed, safe environment in which they could try new things and learn together. On several occasions students applauded each other as they tried something new, or if someone took a solo for the first time. Jessie shared that she was more confident playing in fiddle group because “everybody trusted each other as a member of the team.” Another notable aspect of the fiddle group and Mr. Parker’s teaching style is that he was always supportive and complimentary to the students. During every rehearsal,

Mr. Parker complimented individuals, and the group as a whole. “Nick! You’re killing it, the bass man! Thank you for helping to keep us together!” When a student tried improvisation or a new harmony, Mr. Parker would always say, “Good job!” He encouraged the students to take a chance, and then to support each other as they tried new things. For example, in one rehearsal he said, “Let’s do that again. Good job. Mike (viola), go ahead by yourself. Good job. Does everyone see that he is in third position? Good job! Let’s hear it for Mike! Bows tap.” Although the less experienced freshmen were not as likely to play in front of the group, the older, more experienced students were eager to play in front of the group for the good of the group. Mr. Parker also encouraged those that did not quite know the tune to pluck as they were learning.

To help students with their confidence, Mr. Parker shared stories about times he made mistakes when performing. For example, during one of the first rehearsals, he told a story about when he was playing for a church congregation and had to improvise. He said that he was doing great, just jamming along when he forgot what he was doing. He explained that he “just kept going . . . playing a bunch of wrong notes. But with confidence . . . and no one in the congregation knew any better.” He then asked for volunteers to play through one of the tunes. Sarah and Adriana raised their hand to volunteer. Mr. Parker showed the basses how to play a rhythmic bass line on beats one and three. Finally, he had the bass start, then the two girls joined in and played through the song melody and improvised harmony. It sounded very good as they played through the tune four times. Jim explained to the class, “What I enjoy the most is that both girls would have never tried to play in front of everyone as when they were freshmen. They

have grown in confidence and as musicians.”

There was no lack of enthusiasm when it came to volunteers for kicking off each tune. Mr. Parker said, “Raise your hand if you think you can kickoff one of these tunes? He counted hands. “Okay . . . one, two, three, four, five, six. Okay . . . you guys come with me.” He took them all aside to have a secret conversation with them, while the rest of the group waited. As they waited, everyone practiced. Two of the violas worked on a tune, the cellist practiced scales, the guitarist practiced changes, and a violinist worked on “Ashe Grove.” Two violins were on their phones looking for the music so they could hear the tune again.

For these students, part of building confidence was developing their performance skills to a higher level. Amaya noted that fiddle group helped her to be a stronger player. For Amaya, this included the fiddle group, but also extended to other ensembles, such as classical quartet and orchestra. “I got more confidence. That’s the main thing that changed because of fiddle group. I think it was important for me to have the extra time outside of school. Extra time on my instrument. It’s just good.” For other students, the emphasis on aural learning aided them with developing their confidence. Amelia felt that “learning by ear and remembering patterns and sequences really helped.”

Not all students had a great sense of confidence in their playing. Charles struggled a lot with learning by ear and stated that he was very shy: “Auditioning and all of that stuff is really awful.” Although he felt that he was improving by playing in the fiddle group, he admitted, “I don’t even know because I can’t really play some of the music. I’m just kind of back there trying to play as many notes as possible.”

## **Perseverance**

The support that members of the group provided for each other was evident at every rehearsal. Students were comfortable helping each other trying new things and taking some risks. They understood that the fiddle group was a place where they belonged, and that trying new things and failing were part of the experience. It was their perseverance through these experiences, both trying new things and taking risks, that helped the students with a sense of belonging. For example, Amaya shared that the welcoming nature of the group and the enjoyment that everyone had at each rehearsal was because nobody judged each other when learning a new tune or trying improvisation. Because of this welcoming learning environment, the students were comfortable with sharing their knowledge with each other. Amanda remarked, “I’ve always thought fiddle group was a really great place where everyone from any age group can come together and enjoy music without being judged, or without worrying about how they sound and how they compare to the others.”

During an early October rehearsal when Amaya and Dawn were leading the group for the first time, Dawn attempted to kick off “O’Keefe’s Slide.” This was the first time that they had tried to teach the tune and she was unsure of how to begin. She attempted to start the tune, but then stopped. She quickly regrouped, however, and tried again at a slower tempo and the group was able to follow along. Although the tempo was not quite right, the students all joined in and eventually completed the tune, which was a jig in 6/8. Some used a hooked bowing, while others played with separate bows. The initial run-through was rough, so they started working on it.



When these types of issues occurred, Mr. Parker would step in and provide guidance. Mr. Parker asked, “Dawn...can you chunk it a little bit? Let me give you a hint. Do one little chunk, then the next chunk, then put it together. Small chunk, another small chunk, then big chunk of both.” Dawn started the B section with a two-bar phrase, then the next, then played the two phrases together. Amaya worked through the B section in the same way. Mr. Parker then encouraged everyone, “Okay, let’s put it all together.” Then Dawn led the tune at a much slower tempo. While Dawn and Amaya worked out how to best teach the phrases, the class waited patiently and then eagerly played through the different phrases several times to ensure that everyone knew the different endings. Although it fell apart several times, everybody was determined to get it correct by the end of rehearsal, which they did. The following week, the student-lead rehearsal was much more efficient, with Dawn and Amaya exuding confidence as they worked.

For other students, arranging songs helped them to build their confidence and develop their musicianship. On one occasion, Natasha and Nick worked out a two-part arrangement of “Ashe Grove” and were asked to play it for the class. On their own, they had worked out an introduction, the melody and harmony, when to switch it up, and when each would take a solo. They incorporated embellishments such as trills and grace notes along with moving eighth-notes. It was a captivating performance and the class applauded enthusiastically when they finished.

Songs that were more advanced did provide some issues for the students. Jessie remembered struggling to learn the bowing for “Rubber Dolly,” which ended up being one her favorite fiddle tunes. “That bow stroke is so hard. I remember my friend and I

had a solo...which is insane. And we were seniors by the point when we learned it and it was so hard. It drove us crazy because the bowing is so difficult. And once you got it, you're like, Ooh, let's, let's show off!"

Brian, who played mandolin in the group, described how he initially started playing the instrument. "Mr. Parker showed me the C, the G and the D chords. I worked on those for about 20 minutes in class and did some exercises to get used to it because it's different than a viola. The next thing I knew, we were starting up a song, and I was playing mandolin. I took it home and just kept practicing those chords." Brian was motivated to the point that "there are times that I just want go as far as I can on the mandolin."

Even though some of the tunes were too advanced for some of the students, they appreciated the challenges. Charles described his difficulty with some of the music in the fiddle group, but added that it was fun to work on, "I do like "Angelina the Baker." It's fun to play all of the fast bits, even though I can't play them all one hundred percent correctly just yet. It's just fun to work on it to get it better."

Andy described the overall challenge of playing the violin, "Every move you make affects your sound. It's difficult for me, and that's a challenge that I like." He recalled playing in the middle school orchestra, "I joined the fiddle group in my middle school orchestra because everything in middle school was really easy. I needed something challenging, something different."

Keith had similar feelings about the challenge of playing violin. "I enjoy playing violin because its sometimes harder, especially on the E string...it's so sensitive. Like

you have to play in position. You have to be right with both hands so you don't give a squeaky sound. I like the violin because it's harder for me. I like the challenge.”

### **Deeper Interest, Deeper Understanding**

During the course of the semester, as students collaborated with each other in the learning process, their time together elevated their desire to perform at a higher level, and they also gained a deeper understanding of how to play the fiddle tunes. For example, when Mr. Parker taught a new song, the group wanted to learn it as quickly as possible and it was clear that even when some members were struggling, everyone was engaged during rehearsals. Early in the semester everyone had a desire to contribute to the learning to the group, which they considered essential to the success of the group. Jessie recalled that “as a member of the fiddle group, everyone had a responsibility to not fall down . . . you don't want to be that person that doesn't know their part. Everybody had a drive to be involved and to be the best that you can be.”

Everyone, including the newer members, had an understanding of the vocabulary that Mr. Parker used during rehearsals, which allowed for more productive rehearsals. It was evident that everyone understood song structure, and there was no confusion when he spoke of the A section, B section, or bridge. Mr. Parker would teach a tune in eight bar phrases, explaining that, “You can learn the tune by learning eight bar phrases. Once you know the phrases, you can start to work on the drive and ornamentations.”

Students understood concepts of tonality, relative key relationships, basic chord construction and chord changes within a tune. As he taught “Ashe Grove,” Mr. Parker explained the importance of the tonic-dominant relationship and the I-IV-V progression

in G. He had the students name the chord tones for GM, CM and DM. He then asked for volunteers to provide the bass line while he demonstrated that anything that didn't sound correct was probably just one step away. He then used this as a springboard for teaching improvisation, and asked students to make up rhythms while playing the melody. In terms of melody, they had learned to recognize scales, modes, intervals, sequences and repeating patterns.

On several occasions, students inquired about using different bowings for different styles. Mr. Parker frequently mentioned that working out bowings can make a tune much easier. Once, as they worked on "Scully's Reel," Caleb asked if a part should be slurred. Working together, the group tried it with slurred, hooked and separate bowings. They concluded that for a reel in 6/8, slurring two and one separate would work best. After the bowing was decided, the tune flowed much better. They also worked out a difficult shuffle bowing that a few students were struggling with. One of the students that seemed to have mastered the "double-shuffle" was happy to teach it to the class. He explained, "Start out slowly and use a very small bow arm. Keep your elbow from moving while moving your wrist, and try to find the sweet spot in the bow."

Several students mentioned that playing in the fiddle group allowed them to play with more personality than in their regular orchestra class. Amaya explained that, "performing classical music is like interpreting what the composers did, and that's a really cool thing because you get to play all these great masterworks and that's amazing. But I think fiddling is more like...you can do whatever you want with it."

Amelia also expressed that fiddle group helped her to play more expressively.

“It’s different from orchestra because you don’t have to sound the same as everyone else. You can work on your own individual sound, and I really like that about it.” She also enjoyed the movement involved in the fiddle group. “In fiddle group, we are encouraged to dance and move around and engage the audience. The music allows you to express yourself, your personality.” She described how Mr. Parker encouraged the students to play expressively. “He gave us tips and tricks, and encouraged us to always play musically, not just technically. Fiddle group is a social group and is about having fun...and trying new things.” Andy revealed that he really enjoyed fiddle group because “you are able to express yourself.”

### **Summary**

The learning environment of the fiddle group had a reputation among peripheral and inbound members as welcoming, relaxed, student-driven and fun. The rehearsals of the group were based in situated learning, where learning occurred within the context in which it was applied. This relaxed, situated learning environment was created by Mr. Parker, who began the semester by teaching songs to students aurally. During the course of the semester he gradually shifted his role from one of teacher to one of facilitator. Although a few of the younger students found learning aurally to be difficult, they all recognized that it was beneficial to them as musicians. Throughout the semester, Mr. Parker encouraged students to choose their own music, lead their own rehearsals, and work collaboratively. As the semester progressed and rehearsals became more student-centered, students frequently broke off into smaller groups to work together to memorize songs, work out harmonies, and improvise solos.

Throughout the semester, student member roles within the community were dynamic, and changed as students gained more confidence with experiences. As the semester progressed, students who were insider members of the community and had more experience and already knew many of the fiddle tunes, helped students on the periphery with less experience learn the tunes. Through transfer of participation, the students on the periphery of learning gained experience, and became recognized as ongoing members of the community. Socialization played a critical role in the changing roles in the community. The community was welcoming and open to anyone, regardless of experience, and all members enjoyed playing with each other. However, some of the younger members initially struggled learning aurally, lacked confidence, and did not socialize as much as the experienced members. Although some of the more experienced members expressed frustration with the time it took for younger members to learn new songs and the extra time that was needed for the viola and cello players sometimes to work out octave displacements, everyone had a sense of belonging and all members were given numerous opportunities to share knowledge and to make musical decisions both individually and collaboratively.

It was evident that this type of student-centered learning increased student engagement, leadership, creativity, confidence and musical growth. Many students viewed the community as a family where everyone was supportive of each other and were comfortable sharing their own knowledge and experiences. It was evident that all students gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of different fiddling styles and techniques. They also understood musical concepts such as song structure, intervals,

phrases, chord progressions, sequences, modes, and meter. Finally, students enjoyed the freedom to express themselves in the fiddle group and all believed that playing in the fiddle group made them better musicians overall.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which high school students collaborated in an alternative styles fiddle group. In this study I wanted to investigate the roles of the students with their learning in the fiddle group, how they moved from legitimate peripheral participation to the center of learning, and the role of the teacher throughout this process. In this chapter I discuss how I answer the research questions and situate the findings with the outside literature. I then provide implications for music teachers based upon the findings of this study with how they can establish learning among their students in a community of practice. Finally, I discuss the need for future research studies that can aid researchers with further investigations into learning that occurs in communities of practice and also with alternative styles.

### **What various roles did the students undertake in their community of practice?**

For the first research question, I sought to understand the roles of the students with their learning in the fiddle group. Based upon my observations and interviews, it was clear that members of the fiddle group assumed varying roles that were defined by their skill level and experience. As new members entered the community, the more experienced members were welcoming and played a major role in recruiting friends and younger students to participate in the group.

**Peripheral and Inbound Members.** Initial participation in the group was that of a newcomer or novice, evolving to an expert, while learning and performing a variety of roles as a part of the group (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Younger students were typically seen as peripheral or inbound members in that they learned group norms from the older,



more experienced students. For example, Brian, a new member, did not play in fiddle group in middle school, so learning tunes by ear and learning from his peers was new to him as he entered the group. He struggled to learn by ear during the course of this study, but he was helped by seniors Dana and Amelia during several rehearsals. As time progressed throughout the semester, he recognized that the older, more experienced members of the group helped him to gain confidence as he learned the group norms.

**Insider Members.** The more experienced players were seen by many of the younger members as insiders with a clear understanding of how the group operates, and a willingness to help them as newer, less-experienced members. Although most of the senior members of the group were recognized as the leaders of the group, several newer members were also recognized as leaders within the group of new members. For example, Andy, a freshman, was seen as a leader among the freshmen. Throughout my observations I noticed that everyone was encouraged to be engaged, by both Mr. Parker and their peers. These varying roles within the community supports Rogoff's assertion that "no role has all the responsibility for knowing or directing, and no role is by definition passive" (Rogoff, 1994, p. 213).

Andy and Curt both understood that everyone had a role in the group. Andy recognized that the upperclassmen were leaders because "they were older or more mature, and because they were more skilled." The members were aware of their roles within the fiddle group, and another notable aspect of this community of practice was that there was always a sense of cooperation rather than competition. The cooperation among the students was similar to findings of Froelich (2009) and Countryman (2009), who both

asserted that in a community of practice, collegiality is preferred over hierarchical relationships.

**Learning with Others.** One of the potential issues with a community of practice is that students interacting with others may block individual production with learning (Brandler & Peynircioglu, 2015). Brandler and Peynircioglu (2015) called this *collaborative inhibition*, and found that in a collaborative learning environment the quality of attention to the student could be reduced. I did not observe any collaborative inhibition during the course of this study. On the contrary, it was evident that all members were engaged and motivated to learn through collaborative structures. These findings support those of Hendricks & Smith (2018), who found that students in collaborative, student-led ensembles developed a shared understanding, increased engagement and motivation, and gained a deeper comprehension of the subject matter. The focus of a community of practice is not to learn *from* others, but rather to learn *with* others, which is what I observed during the course of this study. Lave and Wenger (1991) explained, “the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation” (pp. 108-109). As the students assumed various roles, they were able to learn with and from one another. They were supportive of each other, which provided a safe learning environment in which everyone was comfortable trying new things.

**How did the participants move toward legitimate participation as they collaborated with each other in alternative styles of music?**

For the second research question, I explored how the participants moved towards

legitimate peripheral participation. The social aspect of the fiddle group provided a relaxed, friendly environment that allowed for newcomers, younger students, and older students to fully participate and grow as members of the group over the course of the semester. As the students collaborated, they became socialized into the classroom community of practice. This finding supports that of Sawyer (2008), who recognized that as students collaborate while making music, they also learn how to listen and respond and how to communicate in social contexts.

Based upon my observations and participant interviews it was this relaxed, collaborative environment that provided opportunities for students of all performance levels to assume different roles with their learning. These roles typically changed during the semester as students gained more confidence and experience, which supports the trajectory of peripheral participation evolving into full participation in a community of practice (Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 1991). For example, I observed a significant difference in performance abilities among all student members in the fiddle group, regardless of age and experience level. Although some members did assume leadership roles based on their year in school, several of them assumed different roles based upon their abilities, not their age. A few of the younger students, including Andy and Curt, were more advanced with their performing abilities. However, there were also older students such as Amy and Natasha that were not as advanced. Jesse recalled that there were upperclassmen that did not play as well as some of the younger members.

Nelson (1994) noted that differences in varying abilities and interests of students may bring about some issues in the collaborative learning process. Although there were

instances of frustration with aural learning from a few of the younger members, differences in ability did not pose a problem in the collaborative learning process. I found that the frustrations with learning by ear were alleviated due to the relaxed, collaborative nature of the community and with the encouragement of the older, more experienced members. Every member of the community was supportive of everyone else in the group, and everyone enjoyed the collaborative process.

The various skill levels among members of the fiddle group provided opportunities for members to engage in learning with and from each other via their interactions. Everyone participated and contributed, which instilled a sense of purpose and belonging to all members of the community. Vygotsky (1978) posited that these interactions among members is an important component of a community of practice, and stated that when students interacted with each other rather than with adults, they collaborated more effectively in tasks that require skill development (Wertsch, 1991). As the members of the fiddle group engaged in learning, the learning environment resembled the shared practice espoused by Hoadley (2012), where the students shared their knowledge with each other as they learned tunes. Because of these reasons, I never observed a competitive aspect among the members, but rather an impression of cooperation among everyone. What was important among members of the community was making music and a sense of belonging, not seating placements or rankings. This finding is similar to Hendricks (2018), who noted:

The experience of working together collaboratively, over a long period of time, to produce something positive and expressive can lead to a sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the time and effort that can go into preparing for a musical event can be a powerful way to foster student learning, teamwork, and cooperation” (p. 128) Younger members of the community indicated that there was an initial period of learning how the group operates, and that the more experienced players helped guide the newer members during the first few weeks. This finding reflects those of Countryman (2009) and Froehlich (2009) who recognized that communities of practice in music programs may be fostered by encouraging creativity and independent musical decision-making, and by guiding musical leadership. In my observations I noticed that as the newer students worked with the more experienced players, their roles began to change throughout the semester.

Members of the group assumed varying roles within the group depending on their skill level and experience, and these roles changed as everyone moved towards full legitimate participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Younger members were typically seen as peripheral or inbound members of the group, but this role changed over the course of the one semester of this study. This was apparent with two sophomore members that understood their changing roles as second year members of the group. Curt expressed that the upperclassmen had responsibilities as leaders and were more confident trying improvisation. He also articulated that as a sophomore, he had gained more confidence after playing in the group for a year and was comfortable helping newer members. Jimmy recalled that as a freshman he was “just playing the best that he could,” but that as a sophomore he was willing to “try to change things in a tune to see what works and what doesn’t.” He did, however, conclude that the seniors were the real leaders of the group

because “they know how the group works and they know all of the songs.”

I noticed early in the semester that students had assumed roles as newcomers and experts. Throughout the semester, however, I began to notice that all members moved towards legitimate peripheral participation. One of the interesting findings from this study is that the relaxed learning environment was also conducive to students’ willingness to evolve in their roles with learning. The social, collaborative nature of the group provided an environment in which everyone was comfortable learning and trying new things. Insiders as well as inbound members shared knowledge, and everyone in the community encouraged each other to take solos and to improvise.

Although newer members did not always specifically ask for help learning new songs, the experienced members of the group took initiative and frequently helped the newer members learn songs that they were already familiar with. For example, seniors Dawn and Amelia would often help newer members learn tunes that were new to them. While the experienced players already knew the songs and could take solos and improvise, the newer members would often play accompanying rhythmic parts and not take the lead. The roles of inbound members changed over the course of the semester. Newer students that were initially quiet and reserved became more comfortable among their peers, and eventually began to offer suggestions for bowings, or attempt kicking off a song or taking an improvised solo. Students were observed helping each other with solos, memorization, harmony, chords and bowings. This type of situated learning required teamwork skills that promoted individual as well as group learning, and the collaborative nature of the fiddle group provided all students with the opportunity to lead,

learn and grow as musicians. Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002), who described this as a community of practice, in which “. . . groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4).

Through my observations and interviews it was clear that as the students became more comfortable and gained more confidence throughout the semester, they also became more motivated to learn from each other, practiced more, and were more likely to explore through improvisation and experimentation. For example, Jesse described playing in small groups with friends before school and coming out of jam sessions with something new to share with the group. During this study, I observed students working out solos together, discussing bowings, and determining who would lead the tune. These opportunities for musical growth via student collaboration support the findings of Goodrich (2007) and Scruggs (2008), who found that students in collaborative learning environments had improved decision-making and problem-solving skills, and had gained a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Friendships also developed between the younger and older students, and this helped contribute to the learning process. Allsup (2003) also found that in these type of interpersonal relationships, there is an expectation that members will take care of each other and that students working collaboratively were more curious and musically free to explore. As students explored new musical ideas with each other, they gained confidence.

### **How did the teacher serve as facilitator of this community of practice?**

Finally, I sought to understand the role of the teacher, Mr. Parker, in this study, specifically how he taught the fiddle group and also served as a facilitator for the student members in the community of practice. As the adult leader of the fiddle group, Mr. Parker was responsible for many aspects of managing the fiddle group. In addition to teaching songs, he was also responsible for booking concerts, arranging travel, and managing all school-related administrative duties. During the course of this study, I observed Mr. Parker's role change from teacher to facilitator, and his teaching approach included both formal and informal teaching and learning strategies. Dakon & Cloete (2018) found that this integrated formal and informal approach promoted social engagement and self-appreciation among members in eclectic music ensembles. Early in the semester, Mr. Parker utilized a more formal approach, serving as the leader as he modeled for the group. He was clearly in charge of rehearsals and provided considerable guidance for the group as he modeled songs for less-experienced members to learn by ear. He also worked to establish a relaxed environment in which the students could interact and socialize more than in the curricular orchestra classroom. Members established a sense of community and a common goal of success for all members.

In some of earlier rehearsals, Mr. Parker established the expectation that as the semester progressed, he would teach less and play more. As the inbound members learned the tunes by ear from Mr. Parker, it was evident they became more independent and comfortable as members of the community. Once the entire group was comfortable playing the songs, Mr. Parker stepped aside and allowed students to make musical



decisions about what to play, when to improvise, and who would begin the song. As the semester progressed, he facilitated discussions among the students, guiding them so that they had the opportunity to make informed musical decisions. This type of guidance is what Sawyer (2008) described as scaffolding, which places the teacher in the role of providing students with the appropriate level of structure. This type of facilitator is what Vygotsky (1978) described as a ‘more knowledgeable other’ or MKO. The MKO models behavior for the learner in a collaborative learning process, which Vygotsky called collaborative dialogue. This collaborative learning process is an important aspect of teaching folk and traditional music. Green (2004) recognized that most traditional musics of the world are learned by enculturation and extended immersion in listening to, and imitating music-making practices of the surrounding community. Members of the fiddle group were immersed in a community of practice in which new fiddle tunes were learned in a traditional aural method by imitating their teacher and other insider members of the community. Throughout the semester, Mr. Parker continually modeled the process of teaching new songs aurally. He believed that students should not use music and handed out music only after the students had attempted to learn a song aurally over several rehearsals. He explained that if students simply memorized songs from reading music, learning in the fiddle group would be similar to the orchestra. Mr. Parker was aware of the difficulty that some the younger students had playing by ear, but said that was an important skill that can and should be developed. He explained that his goal was to guide his students into becoming more independent musicians that are able to play without music or an orchestra.

Mr. Parker eventually allowed some of the more experienced players to students to lead rehearsals, modeling what they had learned from him. Late in the semester seniors Dawn and Amaya were tasked with finding a fiddle, learning it, and teaching it to the group. During the next rehearsal they were able to lead the group and teach the new song, modeling just as Mr. Parker had done earlier in the semester. This type of student engagement reflects the findings of Fetter (2011) and Mick (2012), who found that students who are engaged in learning and performing alternative styles of music have more input into the learning process.

Mr. Parker provided guidance during these rehearsals later in the semester, but he did not take charge. For example, as they were teaching *O'Keefe's Slide*, Dawn and Amaya told the group that the tune was in *a minor*. Mr. Parker jumped in and corrected them, explaining that the tune was actually in the Dorian mode based on A. This type of student-centered learning environment afforded leadership opportunities for all students. Researchers have found in a variety of music ensembles including general music (Darrow et al., 2005), jazz band (Goodrich, 2007), and full orchestra ensembles (Scruggs, 2008) that student-centered learning provided students the opportunity to establish leadership skills.

During the course of this study, I regularly observed students sharing their knowledge during rehearsals and in small groups, which in turn provided learning opportunities for all members, including inbound members and established insiders. Mr. Parker provided a learning environment where all students could make decisions about their learning, collaborate with each other, and share what they know with each other.

Weiner (1992) noted that some teachers had difficulty moving from traditional learning approaches to a collaborative learning style. Based upon my observations and interviews, it was clear that Mr. Parker was quite comfortable teaching in both the traditional curricular class and the extra-curricular, student-led fiddle group.

### **Implications for the Profession**

Based upon the findings of this particular study, music teachers may want to consider several implications with how they establish communities of learning in their school music program. Findings of this study could potentially aid music educators in a variety of ways, including student recruitment, as well as enhancing student success in aural skills, leadership, social interactions, and student-centered learning, ultimately leading to independent musicianship. Findings may also assist teachers in moving from an authoritarian, sole dispenser of knowledge to a facilitator of student-centered learning environments.

### **Recruitment**

During the course of this study, several of the older students aided Mr. Parker with recruitment. In this community of practice, the more experienced members imparted knowledge, and supported the peripheral and inbound members as their roles changed through transfer of participation. This included recruiting new members. For example, older and more musically experienced high school students may be able to influence younger, peripheral members to participate in an extracurricular fiddle group, that in turn could help with recruitment in other ensembles, such as a curricular high school orchestra class. Because newcomers to the fiddle group enjoyed learning from the older students in

this study, the opportunity to work with more advanced players may also inspire younger students to participate in the group.

Another facet of recruitment in this study is that several of the new members in the fiddle group had performed in the middle school fiddle group. A fiddle group at the feeder middle school may provide multiple opportunities to integrate the programs and aid in recruitment and retainment. Music teachers could have high school students visit middle school rehearsals, and vice-versa so that students engage in the learning process. High school and middle school fiddle groups could also share concerts and other public performances. This type of collaboration between the high school and middle school fiddle groups could potentially help to motivate middle school students to want to continue performing in orchestra when they make the transition to high school.

### **Developing Aural Skills**

A primary way that Mr. Parker taught tunes to the students was by modeling for them and having the students learn them by ear. Based upon my interviews with Mr. Parker and the students, playing by ear and improvisation skills were not taught in the curricular orchestra class. However, fiddle music is traditionally taught by ear, and Mr. Parker used this way of learning in the fiddle group. With doing so, it allowed for more student creativity via improvisation. For the student members in this study, learning to play by ear helped them to develop their aural skills. Teachers may want to consider finding ways to teach songs to students by ear—even in large orchestra ensembles—as way to develop students' aural skills, listening skills, and communication skills to a higher level. This may help to foster independent musicianship.

## **Social Interactions**

The student members of the community of learners in this study were able to engage in learning from each other because of the social nature of the community. Social interactions observed in this study included those between experienced members and less-experienced, as well as between established friendships. Socialization between students promoted a safe, comfortable learning environment in which students were free to create and explore, and aided the students with moving within the community of learning.

Based upon my observations and interviews, experienced members of the fiddle group were not only encouraged to help the newer members, but as insider members of the community they were expected to help and guide the peripheral and inbound members. Teachers may want to consider encouraging returning students to be welcoming to new members of the community and guiding them through that process. Older students appeared to understand that their roles were flexible and would change over time because they had themselves moved from peripheral members to insiders. The guidance that inbound members had received from older students when they were younger and less experienced was a key aspect of the self-perpetuating nature of the community of learners. If teachers can instill the expectation that members roles will change over time, students may in turn establish an ongoing community of practice that is renewed each year.

## **Teacher as Facilitator**

During the course of this study, Mr. Parker's role evolved from that of the sole

dispenser of knowledge to facilitator of the group. Teachers may want to consider initially serving in the role of authoritarian to get the community of learning established, and then be willing to let students take charge, where the teacher becomes more of a facilitator. Over the course of the semester, the group became more student-centered as Mr. Parker allowed students to make informed decisions about their learning, guiding them when needed. Music teachers may find meaningful ways to facilitate in a variety of classroom settings through modeling and student leadership. Teachers must ultimately be willing to give up control, being the sole dispenser of knowledge and making all decisions about learning. Allowing students to collaborate with each other in the learning process is an important aspect of establishing a student-centered community of learners (Hendricks, 2018).

### **The Need for Future Research**

This study was limited to one site for one semester of instruction. In this study I was able to investigate the role of one teacher with how he served as a teacher and facilitator and how he taught alternative styles of string music. I was also able to investigate the interactions and changing roles of members of the group. Additional studies may provide insights for how alternative styles of music can be taught in school music programs within a community of learners. A longitudinal study may provide additional insights for how student members move through the community of learning. For example, a year-long study may help researchers better understand how students move through various roles in the community. A four-year study may provide better insight into the development of student leadership skills. Not all students may move to

the center of learning, though, and studies such as these could help researchers to understand more deeply why some students do move to the center while others may not.

A survey of a broader range of orchestra teachers could illuminate how alternative styles are being taught in school music programs across the country. For example, a national survey of members of the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) could provide insight as to how many teachers incorporate alternative styles, how alternative styles are being taught, where alternative styles are being taught. A national survey could also provide insights on potential regional differences in student preferences for different alternative styles.

A study in which the researcher investigates two or more alternative styles string ensembles and the roles of students within the community of learning may provide opportunities for comparing different learning techniques. Comparative case analysis of different ensembles such as high school and middle school, band and orchestra, or formal and informal may yield greater depth with how learning in communities of practice occur. This could also help practitioners with how they can use these techniques to enhance student-led instruction. An analysis of differences in teaching styles among two or more teachers could offer an inventory of best practices for teachers that wish to incorporate alternative styles and collaborative learning.

A study in which the researcher investigates ensembles other than alternative styles groups could provide insight for teachers of non-string classes. The participants in this study were found to collaborate as a community of practice. Communities of practice may be found in other musical ensembles in which collaborative learning may already be

occurring. For example, a study of collaboration among students in a jazz band or show choir could aid band or chorus teachers in fostering collaborative learning environments and communities of practice.

Finally, throughout this study, it was clear that Mr. Parker served as both teacher and facilitator. However, there are student music groups that operate without a teacher or facilitator. An investigation into the interactions between student musicians in garage bands or other informal learning groups could provide additional insight as to how students collaborate without a teacher or facilitator.

### **Conclusions**

As I mentioned in chapter one, I have always attempted to include alternative styles repertoire in my orchestra programs. I have written arrangements of classic rock songs and performed sheet music arrangements of traditional fiddle tunes on numerous concerts. However, I felt that my arrangements were not authentic, and that reading fiddle songs from sheet music was somehow cheating. After my experience with TJ and his band, I realized that the authenticity of alternative styles comes not from notes on a page, but from the collaborative efforts of the people making the music.

Throughout the course of this study, I learned that perhaps the best way to teach alternative styles is in a collaborative learning environment, with the teacher assuming the role of facilitator. I found that in a student-centered classroom, students can be given opportunities to make decisions about their learning, which can lead to the development of leadership skills, problem solving skills, and learning in ways not available in a traditional orchestra classroom.



As I analyzed the data for this study, and continued to re-read the literature on student collaboration, alternative styles, and communities of practice, I continued to learn about the theoretical aspects of these teaching styles. I found that as students collaborate, they become socialized into a community of practice. Socialization serves as a means by which students interact while learning, and the individual actively participates and influences the group. Students of varying abilities and skills can share their knowledge and experiences with each other and contribute to learning in the community. This in turn can promote confidence, independent thinking and creativity among all members of the community. I found that students who were initially shy and quiet, became confident as members of the community and contributed to the learning that was happening. Perhaps most importantly, students in a community of practice learn how to listen and respond, how to communicate, and ultimately how to become independent musicians.

I learned that the changing role of the teacher in a community of practice is of the utmost importance. Students need leadership from the teacher as they enter a community of practice. In this study, I found that as the students became socialized into the community, and as the community became more student-centered, the role of the teacher changed from leader to facilitator. Although researchers have found that some teachers are uncomfortable teaching non-traditional literature, teaching songs by ear, encouraging improvisation, and teaching in a student-centered classroom, Mr. Parker was quite comfortable teaching in this type of environment from his years of leading the fiddle group. I believe that his encouragement, and his ability to guide the community, while allowing the students to make decisions about their learning was the reason for the

success of the group.

I will continue to program non-traditional music for my orchestra spring concerts . . . my students expect it. However, my approach to teaching non-traditional music has changed since I began this study. Although the Allatoona Fiddlers are an informal, extra-curricular group that meets after school, I have attempted to develop a community of practice in my curricular orchestra classes. I have found that we have more success with collaborative learning in my advanced ensembles with older students. This may be due to the immaturity of my younger students, or maybe because they have not been fully socialized into the community. Regardless, I hope to rekindle the energy and excitement that we experienced when TJ shared his ideas with the orchestra about how to play *Little Wing*.

## APPENDIX A:

### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO CONDUCT HUMAN RESEARCH Prior to Week 1 of study

Dear Albacore High School Orchestra students and parents,

I am presently working toward my Doctorate in Music Education through Boston University. Part of my preparation for my dissertation involves a study that I am conducting as part of Mr. Parker's fiddle group during the fall semester, 2018. The goal of this study is to observe the effects and benefits of student collaborative learning as exhibited and reflected on by selected students participating in the study. The information gathered from this study is to be part of my dissertation research. The results will be presented in my final dissertation.

Data to be collected will be my written observations of students in fiddle group rehearsals, one twenty-five minute interview with participating members during the Fall 2018 semester. All data and interviews will be kept strictly confidential and any names and identities will not be used in the final report.

I sincerely appreciate your willingness to help with this important compliance requirement for Boston University. Please complete and sign the attached authorization form and return it to Mr. Parker by this Friday. Your timely response is important because I have a strict timeline to follow. Thank you in advance for your participation in this study. If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact either myself or Mr. Parker.

David Doke

## APPENDIX B:

### INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions are listed as a semi-structured guide only. The interviewer will be free to pursue any line of questions that may appear appropriate in order to answer the research questions.

1. What grade are you in? What classes are you taking?
2. Do you know what you want to study in college? What is your dream?
3. Tell me about your musical background.
4. What is your goal this year in taking music?
5. Do you have any long-term goals in making music?
6. What kinds of music do you like?
7. Do you engage in any music making (informal or formal) outside of school?
8. Have your parents ever engaged in music making? If so, what kind?
9. What do you enjoy about playing your instrument?
10. How much practice do you do in week? What music do you practice the most?
11. Tell me about the Albacore fiddle group.
12. What kinds of pieces do you like the most?
13. How did your group choose the pieces you are working on for the concert?
14. How is your experience in the fiddle group different than the regular orchestra rehearsal?

15. How would you say the group works together? Can you give me an example?

16. What is your role in the group so far? Has your role changed?

17. What are the roles of other people in the group? Have any of these roles changed?

18. What is the role of the teacher?

19. If you could change the design of this ensemble, what would you change?

## APPENDIX C:

### TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions are listed as a semi-structured guide only. The interviewer will be free to pursue any line of questions that may appear appropriate in order to answer the research questions.

1. Tell me about your musical background.
2. What kinds of music do you like?
3. Do you engage in any music making (informal or formal) outside of school?
4. What do you enjoy about playing your instrument? Do you improvise?
5. Tell me about the Albacore fiddle group.
6. How is your experience in the fiddle group different than in the regular orchestra rehearsal?
7. How would you say the fiddle group students work together? Can you give me an example?
8. What is your role in the group? Has your role changed?
9. Have any students assumed leadership positions in the group? Subordinate roles?
10. Have these roles changed?
11. How would you describe the social relationship between older and younger students?

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