THE EXPERIENCES OF TWO YOUNG CHILDREN IN INFORMAL PIANO SETTINGS:
EXPRESSIONS OF MEANING AND VALUE

A Dissertation in
Music Education
by
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to seek insight into what children found meaningful and valuable when participating in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting. I embraced a qualitative approach to research, using ethnographical techniques and a phenomenological lens. The study was guided by the question “What is the nature of a child’s engagement in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting?”

Two girls were purposefully selected to participate in the study and were given individual informal piano lessons over the course of two semesters by me, the researcher. Data were collected primarily via video recording of the lessons and journaling of my perceptions. The data were considered through the lens of lifeworld existentials: lived space, lived body, lived time, lived other, (Van Manen, 1990) and lived musicality. This resulted in emergence of themes and sub-themes regarding the children’s engagement in the lesson setting.

Findings include the children engaged in the setting by expanding the boundaries of the room, by using their bodies, by directing the time, by participating in multiple relationships, and by musicking. Identified expressions of value and meaning making include movement in relationship to space, with expression and variety; flexibility of time, where ideas can evolve, return, or be abandoned; use of materials as elements for their control; development of complex pretend contexts; rich music making in wide variety; investment in and direction of ideas; and being with the adult.
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In Dedication

When you say, “I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places,”
may my reply always be, “There is none besides you.”
Prelude: Starting Where I Started

Introduction: Stacy\(^1\)

Stacy listens to my rendition of *Hot Cross Buns*\(^2\) with rapt attention. I exaggerate my arm motion as I kneel on the floor in front of the piano, my eyes wide and focused on the group of three black keys. She stands next to me, the keyboard a sea of possibility in front of her, her 5-year-old self radiating an energy restrained only by the understanding that it is my turn to play. “Mi Re Do/Mi Re Do/Do Do Re Re/Mi Re Do”. I finish with a flourish, as she moves in to take her turn: “Mi Re Do/Mi Re Do/Mi Mi Re Re/Mi Re Do.”

I hear the difference in our third phrase and, based on my previous experiences of teaching this song to a number of 7 year old students, I assume that she did not hear the phrase the first time around. I play the song again, gently drawing her attention to the phrase in question, and ask her—again—to play it. To my surprise, she echoes her previous attempt.

“Stacy!” I say, “Did your version sound like my version?” “Yes!” she replies with absolute sincerity, her eyes shining with her success. Her delight is contagious and, from my piano teacher perspective, misplaced. She did, after all, play the song *incorrectly*. To make it worse, she doesn’t even know it!

In a split-second I have a conversation in my head. I ask myself questions such as “Is this something she will never be able to do, or is she just not ready?”, “Do I take the time to correct her, or is it not important right now?”, and “How can I tell her she is wrong when she is so happy to have played the song”? I decide: *Celebrate her achievement. Let the mistake go.* The lesson ends, and Stacy is thrilled. From her perspective? *She is playing the piano! She learned a real song!*

\(^1\) Name has been changed.
\(^2\) Traditional song
I get into my car and drive home, battling the voices in my head that say I have failed Stacy by allowing her to learn the song incorrectly. I didn’t teach her a real song, but instead allowed her to believe that her way of playing *Hot Cross Buns* was accurate. What was her mother thinking about my ability to teach her child as she watched us from the couch? Did I meet her expectations?

Over the course of the next few weeks, my lessons with Stacy result in similar questions and similar battles. I discover that she cannot hear the melodic material that my 7-year-old beginners have never had a problem with, cannot reproduce the songs I model for her, and cannot tell that there is a difference between our playing. She is not able to imitate my beat, nor is she able to keep a steady beat on her own. She is consistently “wrong”. Suddenly I am stuck—what do I teach her if she cannot play what I know how to teach? How can I move her forward, if she cannot achieve the most basic level of what I think she should be able to do?

I consider telling her parents that we should stop lessons. She is either not able or—at the very least—not ready, and I fear I am wasting their money. What kind of piano teacher doesn’t deliver a child playing specific or accurate songs from week to week? “An incompetent one”, I think. And yet—there is something in me that whispers “you can make this work.”

**My history with Stacy.** I first met Stacy in an early childhood music class of 3- to 5-year olds taught by my doctoral advisor during my first semester of doctoral study. The class was structured following a philosophy of informal musical guidance, where children were immersed into an intentional musical environment, but were not expected to participate or respond in any specific way. I participated in this class, entranced with the children’s inherent desire to join in the music making according to their own timeline and comfort level. It was not uncommon for
children who had spent weeks laying on the floor—offering no musical contribution—to suddenly break into sophisticated musical conversation with my advisor, who functioned as a participant as much as a model of the musical material.

Stacy spent much of the class time laying on my leg, watching.

The concept of informal learning environments was new to me. As Stacy lay on my leg, I felt great pressure to make her sit up, make her participate, make her look like a responsible student. I was in a co-teacher role, after all, and the voice in my head says that teachers are responsible for good behavior in their students—right? My advisor, however, seemed unconcerned with the behavior of the children, despite their level of under or over participation. I watched the children’s classroom teachers struggle as well with how to appropriately respond to their children’s behavior in this setting. When the children babbled freely in response to the rhythms being chanted by my advisor, I watched the teachers attempting to discern if they should silence them or not. When the children inched themselves into the center of the circle in response to the song we were singing, I watched the teachers attempt to get them “under control”. What my advisor saw as musical and positive behaviors the teachers saw as negative and unallowable, and it was a struggle I understood. From my participatory yet observational perspective, the confusion in the room was palpable.

The children, however, only appeared to share in the confusion when their classroom teacher reprimanded them for a behavior my advisor was allowing. They seemed to intuitively understand that their participation was encouraged but not expected. They easily adapted to the nature of the class, taking the opportunities afforded to them to participate at will. I watched how they settled into the setting with a lack of self-consciousness, and I became fascinated with
the lack of reservation and even awareness that many of them exhibited as they contributed without concern of being right or wrong.

I observed how my advisor wove music-making throughout the whole class, with rarely a spoken word exchanged between her and the children. I noticed the way the children learned to sing tonal patterns in a variety of tonalities and chant rhythm patterns in a variety of meters simply by “picking them up” from her example. I watched them move from imprecise imitation to exact imitation to patterns of their own creation, without noticeable correction from my advisor. I witnessed the evolution of their incorporation of the beat into their bodies, and their increasing interaction with musical material to the point of thoughtful ownership.

I was intrigued.

My Music Learning Journey

My own musical journey began in my early years, in a different kind of informal setting. When I was a small child, my father’s immediate family gathered most Sunday afternoons for a midday meal and visiting together. The four younger sisters of the family were music lovers, with varying levels of training and ability. These gatherings typically found the sisters making music, assembled around the piano, singing, playing piano and recorder. From the earliest moments of being able to toddle my way over to them, I would. Crawling onto the bench, I would insist that a book be opened before me, and then join them in their music making. My parents, though not particularly musical themselves nor of the means to nonchalantly purchase a large instrument such as a piano, decided early on: get this girl a piano, and see what she does.

Recently a picture surfaced from some lost place to confirm that indeed, this was how my love story with the piano began; a 19-month-old me, in the midst of these aunts in action, my small hands laying on the keyboard, my small face lost in absolute engagement with the task
before me. I was smitten from the start. My love continued as I took lessons from my most proficient piano playing aunt, beginning when I was seven, and “old enough.”

Our lessons together followed a traditional piano lesson model: sit on a bench, open a book, put your hand in this position, and memorize note names. This particular model worked well for me; I learned to read quickly, and understood the musical information on a seemingly intuitive level. I became, however, a note-reading-only musician—if I did not have written music in front of me, I could not navigate my instrument or rely on my ear. As I grew older, I became more and more recognized for my piano playing ability and skill, but I often felt like a musical fraud. Though I could sight-read almost anything, I had no musical ownership, and this bothered me.

The belief that I was a fraud persisted well into my college years as a piano major, when I began to put together the aural and theoretical information I had collected along the way. Gradually I learned to aurally recognize patterns, identify them, play them on my instrument, and to feel like a fully functioning musician. I was left to wonder, however—could there have been a different pathway to my musical ownership? Could I have organically learned to navigate my instrument in a way that integrated aural, notational, and theoretical paradigms, granting me full ownership from the very beginning of my formal training?

**My Music Teaching Journey**

**Before Stacy.** This question followed me into my master’s degree, as I studied piano pedagogy and developed a large studio of beginning piano students. Was there a way to give children ownership over their musicianship from the very first lesson? A way to build musical understanding that did not rely solely on memorizing note names and decoding notation?
My answer was: yes. I developed a program that worked well for me and for my students, a program based on “sound before sight” that had my 6-and 7-year-olds playing songs by ear in all white keys before they were introduced to notation. By the time they were fluently reading, they were able to transpose easily without the limitations of learning five-finger positions one at a time. They understood the concepts behind the music, without relying on the book to show them what to do.

When Stacy’s mother asked me to give piano lessons to 5-year-old Stacy and her 7-year-old brother, I agreed to take Stacy as a piano student, even though my answer to “what is the best age to start piano lessons?” was typically “7, maybe 6 if the child is ready”. Though I had in the past turned away 5-year-old students for not being “ready”, I had developed a nice relationship with Stacy during the early childhood music class and had noticed that her hands—when “painting” on the carpet—took on a very lovely natural piano hand position. Stacy’s actual musical participation during class was rare, and so not a factor in my decision. Due to my experiences in the early childhood class, however, my mindset regarding when and how musical training can begin was shifting. I was curious as to what might happen in a piano lesson setting with this young child, and so I decided to explore some new territory.

I explore informal music guidance. I stepped intentionally into that new territory of informal music experiences, but found myself entrenched in my old ways of teaching. Despite my best efforts to treat my lessons with Stacy as informal experiences, I found old conceptualizations of how a lesson should look difficult to erase. I felt as if I were stumbling in all directions, and learning a new language to boot. Ultimately, though I aimed to incorporate

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4 Many beginning method books teach keys by hand position, introducing C position first, giving experience in C before introducing G position, etc.
informal aspects into my lessons with Stacy, I had difficulty removing myself from a formal mindset.

For instance, I recognized relatively quickly that she was not fully capable of reproducing song material specifically as I had presented—particularly the teaching sequence with which I was accustomed. I accommodated for this by composing new songs that filled in the gaps of complexity, but I neglected to account for the fact that the problem had less to do with complexity and more to do with the fact that she was not ready to replicate specific material. Consequently, even the songs that I created with her in mind did not allow for open and creative contributions from her—I still placed specific expectations on her.

Though I had always included physical movement to a degree in my teaching, I was newly aware of its importance, and decided to incorporate more movement during the lessons with Stacy than I had in the past. What I had observed in the early childhood class was a usage of songs that encouraged movement, but allowed that movement to be determined and directed by the individual children. My incorporation of movement in Stacy’s lessons, however, was very structured. Each movement activity was organized in a way that restricted free movement. For example, we spent a lot of time “running” or “walking” to a steady drumbeat. Though not an invaluable activity, I did not provide opportunity for Stacy to physically respond in her own way.

Even though I struggled, however, over time I stretched my teaching to incorporate more and more of an informal educational paradigm. Before Stacy, I had found it difficult to include opportunity for improvisation during my lessons. I felt limited by the student’s limited harmonic understanding, believing the experience of improvisation was hindered if they did not possess theoretical knowledge. I had observed in the early childhood class, however, that when given a model and the opportunity to freely explore, the children’s improvised responses evolved over
time to match the more-structured model. As a result, I incorporated improvisation into my lessons with Stacy in unstructured and structured ways. Still exploring more or less valuable experiences, sometimes I would have us play simultaneously and sometimes not; sometimes I gave her restrictions on which keys she could use and sometimes not.

I also felt much freer to reinforce concepts without worrying about labeling them, trusting that over time she would build an intuitive understanding. I intentionally used vocabulary such as “Oh, you went all the way up the keyboard!” when she would play “up” the keyboard, without requiring her to understand or verbalize the difference between up and down. In general I felt more comfortable with allowing her concept understanding to evolve over time, and relaxed my expectations of her grasping concepts quickly.

I began to compose songs that had less restriction, though this was also a journey. My first attempt was *The Elephant and The Rabbit*. In two parts, the words were “The elephant walks heavily through the grass; the rabbit hops lightly through the grass”, and the directions were:

*Lay your thumb on D. Line up your fingers and find your pinky key. For this song, play your thumb and pinky together.*

Though the rhythm was not prescribed, there were limitations placed on what she was to play—and not very interesting ones at that!—and which she did not follow. Eventually, the songs became four part stories about animals that matched the key names on the keyboard. Take for example *The Cat and the Dog Get in an Argument!* (see Figure 1). I designed a sheet that clearly depicted the four parts, but left them unstructured:
(1) The Cat is playing with some yarn

(2) The Dog is trying to sleep in his doghouse

(3) The Dog barks at the Cat, and the Cat meows back

(4) Then, the Dog starts to chase the Cat!

Figure 1. Composition guiding sheet for *The Cat and the Dog Get in an Argument!*

My original intent was to limit the playing of each part to the animal/key that it was talking about, but Stacy did not accept this limitation. Instead, her depictions of each part of the story became an open-ended and ever-changing musical creation. From week to week we created stories for all of the key names, and I continued to attempt to limit her usage of the keys under the assumption that my explicit specification of the key names would ensure her learning the names. In the long run she refused to be limited, made up a variety of musical depictions of the parts of the story incorporating the entire keyboard, and still learned the names.
In retrospect, her refusal to be limited most likely reflected characteristics of her age. Stacy is a shy and respectful child, so her behaviors were often restrained, but other indicators of her age emerged from time to time, such as silly and ‘off-task’ behavior when she did not feel she knew how to do what I was asking. I often placed expectations on her, despite my desire for an informal philosophy, giving her directives such as “You need to sit up and tap with me”, or “Did you do what I did, or was that your own? It was your own, wasn’t it? Do what I do!”

Placing expectation on her did not necessarily result in her participation—instead, I observed that her typical response was to disengage.

Stacy had moments of spontaneous behavior, which resembled playfulness and reflected a lack of inhibition. Potentially due to her respectfulness of me as the teacher and the family values of good behavior, these moments did not occur frequently—but they did occur. After our 4th lesson I wrote in my journal “We are truly just playing, and she is eating it up…How does this serve motivation?”

The element of play and the idea of using it in our lessons were not at the top of my resource list. I spent a lot of time explaining activity pages to her with detailed instructions, attempting to teach her accurate replications of what I had played, working to get her to do what I wanted her to do. I did not separate myself from a teacher role in order to function as a mutual participant with her in our lesson setting, but continued to see myself as the director of her learning.

Though I was unsuccessful in fully embracing an informal approach to Stacy’s lessons, my teaching did evolve over time to incorporate what I was learning from her. Stacy taught me the importance of process over product, and the tendency toward play that young children have. She opened my eyes to the futility of placing limitation and expectation on her, and the benefit of
open-ended tasks. She caused me to value her learning, despite the fact that she was young and needed more time to explore than I was initially prepared to give. And, she taught me that exploration has value.

Over time, Stacy’s musicianship evolved as well. Her rhythmic ability, aural understanding, and keyboard knowledge emerged, in a way that appeared intuitive. By the time she was 7, her foundation was far broader than any 7-year-old with whom I had previously worked. Her understanding of musical concepts was deeply ingrained, and not mechanistic or pedantic. Her journey suggested to me there was value in beginning young, and value in exploring the elements that an informal educational philosophy suggested were important. Stacy demonstrated these elements to me as she gently showed me what and how she wanted to learn, and helped me to understand that her role in her learning was important.

I embrace informal music guidance. My experience with Stacy caused me to be interested in exploring informal guidance with a child younger than five. I was curious what would occur if I truly embraced the informal paradigm and interacted with a very young child. My next step, then, was to begin work with a child who was 3 years 11 months, Ruby5 (Kooistra, 2010, 2012). I conceived of the lesson space as a flexible one, where singing, moving, and piano exploration would occur, but without expectation of how these elements would unfold. Armed with a minimal lesson plan, containing possibilities for songs and activities, I set my mind to providing a musical environment for Ruby in which she could explore.

A typical lesson with Ruby6. Ruby greets me with an expectant smile as she stands near the piano, her little hand resting on the keys as if it is merely a piece of furniture within her

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5 Name has been changed.
6 What follows here is a description of a lesson with Ruby. It includes references to my understanding of the things that Ruby did, which should be considered contemporary to the moment with her. For example, when I refer to her
reach. Immediately she moves to the nearby couch and flips herself over it, announcing “babies can’t do this!” As her mother and I talk details, she roams around the room, and suddenly runs toward the couch, throwing herself onto it with her legs over the back. She lies still for a moment, but then begins kicking the couch with alternating legs. There is a definite pattern to her kicking, mostly in a steady duple meter.

We move to the piano, and look at a picture of a plane I had given her the week before. She begins to play her plane sounds on the keys, walking along the piano’s edge and sliding her hand along the keys in a shallow glissando. She is making sound, but then she announces, “I can do it [silently]” and slides her hand down the keys without making a sound. I imitate her, and we take turns making more silent glissandi until she shows me what a “Penn State plane” sounds like: chunks of clusters moving from low to high as she bounces her hand on top of the keys. I imitate her, and we play with this sound until she says, “I can make lots of sounds,” and proceeds to play each white key from top to bottom. By the time she reaches the bottom she skips large chunks, but proceeds to do it again, this time playing each key. She announces that now she can play all of “these” [black] keys, but she gets distracted half way through and begins to play with her whole fist on a variety of white and black keys, without a definable rhythmic pattern.

She turns her back to the piano and lays her arms along the keys as I take out our “animal cards”⁷. As I begin to ask her about them she says, “No! You have to lift me up”, which I do— not having any idea what it is she wants to do. She reaches down to the piano with her hands, but then begins to play the keys with her feet. This lasts briefly; I put her down and place the first card on the piano while she asks me to lift her again. I say no, and she says, “ok!”, turning songs as “noise”, I am speaking out of my journey with coming to terms with the way that children make music, not out of a re-defined thought process of understanding of children’s musical behaviors.

⁷ See Appendix A
to the piano to engage with the sounds. She shows me what she thinks each animal sounds like by using distinctly different registers and patterns for each. Sometimes she enacts the typical actions of the animal with her body, and sometimes she makes vocal sounds to accompany her piano sounds. When we reach the alligator card she looks at me:

Ruby: How do we make a snapping sound?

Lauren: I don’t know, how DO you make a snapping sound?

Ruby: I don’t know, we don’t have a snapping sound on the piano.

I take the opportunity to show her how to lay her hand on the piano and use her arm to snap. She imitates me precisely with slightly less freedom of arm but with her arm nonetheless, and with a look of amazement on her face.

I change direction: “I’ll play some sounds and you match it with your body!” My vision for this activity is that if I make jumping sounds by playing the black keys with a staccato and upward motion, she will jump; if I lay on the keyboard with my arms and make a long sound, she will lay still on the ground. Instead, she copies me on the piano, imitating each exact motion. She says, “I’m copying you!” She changes the activity I had in mind, and it is _better_—she’s using large muscle movements, she’s playing the piano, she’s grinning as she does it.

Suddenly she tells me she wants to play a song she knows. It is complex, using both hands and all of her fingers. It is—by strict definition—noise. There is, however, a seeming structure to it. Rhythmic patterns repeat, certain notes repeat. It does not appear that she is thinking about these elements, but she is engrossed in what she’s doing. Her body is engaged as she hops along to the song, she is looking toward me while her eyes move back and forth from my face to some focus off to the side. She believes in what she is doing, and she is having a
great time. I do not know how to respond. I say I don’t know that song, and ask if it has a name. She says no.

I change the subject, jumping up from the ground where I have been sitting. I say, “Ok, you play some sounds and I’ll do what you do!” She plays all over the keyboard with a consistent rhythm of ‘short long’ that contains an upbeat-downbeat feel. Though her hands are flat, her body is involved as she anticipates her playing, energy filling her approach to the keys. At times her arms are stretched entirely across the keyboard; at other times her elbows are bent. She is using her whole body to govern her orientation to the keyboard, and she seems intentional about the variety of registers she is playing on the keys. Eventually she changes the rhythm, and her playing—though atonal—sounds thoughtful, even soulful. She is watching me intently as I move according to her direction, and she is completely engrossed in what we are doing.

I am the first to get bored, and I switch our roles. I tell her it is her turn to move, and she agrees. I play staccato sounds, lyrical sounds, scampering sounds, Mozart. She participates, moving her body in ways similar to how I was moving mine when I was in her place. In a fraction of the time that we took for her to play, however, we are done. She loses interest and I move us to the next song, Wiggle Song (Bolton, 1999).

It’s a song I’ve sung for her once already, but she doesn’t join me. She watches me as I sing and move along to the song, occasionally starting to speak but stopping herself to listen. Occasionally she plays something on the piano in response to the song. When I finish singing a few verses—during which time she never joins me, but is actively listening to me—we move on.

**Evolution of the Wiggle Song.** The Wiggle song played a large role in our lessons, evolving over time in a variety of ways. The lyrics of the song are:
Touch your nose, bada dum bum bum
Touch your nose, bada dum bum bum
Touch your nose, bada dum bum bum

And wiggle wiggle wiggle wiggle, bum bum bum

During the ‘Touch your nose’ portion, I touched my nose with my fingers in a steady beat, wiggling my whole body on the ‘wiggle’ line. Reiterations of the song changed the body part—head, elbows, knees, etc.

Had I based my decision of whether or not to continue bringing this song into the setting on the episode described above, I might have thrown it out. She did not—after all—participate with me. Maybe she doesn’t like it? Maybe she can’t sing it? What occurred over the following weeks, however, was an evolution of the song and of our interaction with it. It became a game, and chasing each other around the room instead of wiggling became standard. During the process of the game, Ruby physically interacted with the musical elements of the song, jumping off of the couch on the ictus of emphasized words. She interacted with the tonality of the song, contributing body parts (“nose”, for example) on the correct pitch.

Both the game and the song continued to evolve over time. The chasing morphed into my lifting her up and spinning her through the air. The words morphed into “where is Ruby?” when she hid under a chair. On a day when she was focused on playing with her stuffed animals, she changed the words to “touch your kitty” to reflect their participation in the lesson. We incorporated the piano into the game as I accompanied us, or as she took her stuffed animals to the piano to have them play. Her interaction with the song changed over time, as did her confidence in singing the song. At first, she contributed only small pieces of the song;
eventually she sang the entirety of the song, with confidence. At first, I was the director of the song; eventually, she took ownership over using the song as she wanted.

**My teaching continues to change.** Ruby taught me to relax my expectations of young children, to allow for exploration, to trust that value would be found in places I might not think to look. She taught me that co-construction is a valuable piece of the experience, that it just might be the experience. The evolution of material that we engaged in together enabled us to have a shared experience, where we each played specific roles. My role was to bring musical information into the setting, to familiarize her with possibilities, to guide her further in her own music-making. Her role was to introduce innovation to my basic material, to recall the activities that she liked to do and to ask for them continually.

She taught me that if I engaged playfully in the lesson in the same ways that she engaged, I could draw her attention somewhere musical if there was danger of non-musical distractions drawing her away. She taught me that her quick shifts of attention did not need to be moments for teacher-despair, but could simply be indications that she was fully involved in the process. I learned that attention directed haphazardly is still attention directed, that she would engage where she wanted to engage, and that musical material provides information to play with as if it were a tactile toy. I learned that the process of the lesson was more important and more interesting than attempting to have a product to show for it. Attempting to have her play a specified song each week was not the focus because it did not seem necessary. Rich music making happened in the moments of the lessons, in her singing, movement, and exploration on the piano.

My experience with Ruby caused me to think further about what informal piano lessons might be. I was intrigued by the development of the lesson material and wondered what the
evolution of material meant for her and for her musical development and engagement. I wondered if this evolutionary process was one of meaning making, and if so, how did it influence her experience of the piano lesson? I also was aware of my limitations when it came to maintaining an informal attitude. There were many moments when I found myself in a mindset of “I am the teacher”, attempting to make Ruby do what I wanted her to do and not participating in an attitude of musical play partner. When this occurred, her reaction was occasionally to go with me, often with complaint as she asked to do what she wanted to do. Often she would not do what I had asked (or told!) her to do, acting out instead or simply doing something different. When I did follow her lead, I found that our time spent making music was much more meaningful—it evolved into rich music making, as opposed to something more stifled and inhibited. The level of her investment also seemed to increase when I followed her lead, and I wondered how to understand what she deemed to be a valuable use of the time.

**Connecting to the Current Study**

I offer this narrative of my journey into informal piano lesson settings as a prelude to the rationale for this current study, in illustration of a perceived need to understand the children whose musical journeys I am given responsibility to guide, and of the possibilities for exploration into the world of early childhood. The journey has made me aware of my limitations in fully comprehending the culture of childhood, and of the obligation I have to learn about it in order to be responsive to the needs of my students. Exploration of an informal piano setting has been my attempt to meet those needs, based on the research literature of children’s musical and overall development, but I am aware of the need to dig deeper into the children’s perception of the setting.
Ultimately, my work with Stacy and Ruby and with other young children at the piano has led me to wonder how the children would design their own experiences for piano learning at this stage in their musical development. My goal in the flexible nature of the informal setting is to allow the children opportunity to explore as they see fit, and to encourage them along their musical and pianistic journey. The setting is meant to provide them familiarity with a musical vocabulary and with the piano, and I am curious as to how they choose to engage within the setting. What do they find valuable when given the freedom to explore in this space, and how do they make meaning out of their experiences?
Chapter 1: Addressing the Rationale

I approach the understanding of children from a socio-cultural perspective. A socio-cultural perspective frames an individual child’s development within the social and cultural environments surrounding her (Walsh, 2002). In those contexts and the relationships between them, the child has a lived experience that fosters and filters the meanings that she makes (Danaher & Briod, 2005). Her lived experience is active, not passive; social, not solitary (Clark, 2007). Within the contexts within which she is situated, she is a social being with agency who encounters other social beings (Lamont, 2002). Encounters can become interactions; interactions can grow into relationships. Encounters, interactions, and relationships are reciprocal processes, in which the child is involved in negotiations of meaning as she learns and develops according to the norms of her culture (Dissanayake, 2000; Sawyer, 2005).

The quality of the meaning made within contexts and in contact with others can be positive or negative, and have long-term effects on the child’s identity, motivation and engagement within specific domains (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002; Bresler, 2008; Byng-Hall, 1995; Lamont, 2002). As such, the role that adults take when participating with children is crucial for the quality of their long-term being. An adult who respects and values the child as a being with agency within her sociocultural framework will act as a guide, as a more knowledgeable and experienced being within the culture. Adult attitudes that recognize the child as an active maker of meaning within contexts and relationships will provide opportunities for the child to have optimal experiences of self-directed learning (Barrett, 2006; Ellermeyer, 1993; Stinson, 2002; Whitfield, 2009; Young, 2003a).

A child’s development within her culture is expressed in five essential human needs identified by Dissanayake (2000). The five are rooted in and stem from the first: mutuality
between mother and infant. Mutuality is another word for ‘love’, and describes the communicative interactions from the very beginning of the child’s life. Mutuality is a shared intention from one to another, made of imitation and turn-taking, which extends into other intimate relationships in which the child becomes a part. Those relationships reflect the human need of belonging, as reflected in the ways that children move into group settings and look for value, communication, and emotional connection. *Finding and making meaning* is essentially connected to survival, as whatever is valuable resonates with what a human needs in order to exist. Meaning is thus connected to that which “gives life”, “feels right”, or “makes sense” (p. 73). *Hands-on competence* is the process of making active meaning by being a part of something, successfully. *Elaboration* is found in the ways that humans extend basic features of sound, expression, and movement and transfer them to ceremony and the arts. It is an extension beyond basic need that is “an outgrowth, manifestation, and indication to others of strong feeling or care” (p. 130). In a circular kind of process, these expressed human needs indicate the ways that humans *be* in the world.

Boyce-Tillman (2004) offered a similarly useful framework for considering the nature of music in our expression of what it means to be a human. She rejected the legacy of a science-driven society and its obsession with objective, detached, and impersonal understandings of reality. Instead, she called for the inclusion of subjective, belief oriented, and non-causal personal involvement as valid and necessary for understanding humans as beings. Music is not detached or merely cognitive, but within music education we have often come to treat it as such due to a culturally scientific approach to living. Her model of music education is comprised of five dimensions, and combined objective and subjective values in an approach to music education.
Materials are the instruments, sounds, space, and relationship of the individual to the space. Ultimately, “all music consists of organizations of concrete Materials drawn both from the human body and the environment” (Boyce-Tillman, 2004, p. 104). An individual can be proficient in Materials only; conversely the other dimensions can be entered without much Material knowledge. Expression is where the composer, performer, and listener intersect. It is an “evocation of mood, emotion (individual or corporate), images, memories, and atmosphere on the part of all those involved in the musical performance” (p. 106). Construction is concerned with effectiveness, the “right management of repetition and contrast” (p. 108), based in theory and cultural biases. Values have to do with the contextual value systems at play both when the music was created and experienced. Finally, Spirituality is music’s unique potential for the ‘magical’ ability “to transport the audience to a different time/space dimension: to move them from everyday reality to another world” (p. 109).

Dissanayake’s (2000) identified needs of mutuality, belonging, finding and making meaning, hands-on competence, and elaboration are expressions of deeply human ways of being, not easily separated into isolated categories or events. Similarly, Boyce-Tillman’s (2004) conceptualization of music in our lives cannot be separated into discrete categories; neither can our knowledge, our music, or our music education. The essence of both Dissanayake and Boyce-Tillman’s distillations suggest that a music education that honors the full dimension of human needs will incorporate a full range of what it means to be musical, and allow for the processes of musical meaning to be nurtured and challenged.

For young children, nurture and challenge occur in settings that are informal in nature (Stamp, 1993). Informal settings are found in children’s everyday lives, as they make sense of the world around them. Without direct instruction or expectation of immediate results, children
explore, discover, and draw conclusions that lead them to change. Building chains of change, children learn and develop without drama or even acknowledgement. The nature of the change is related to the nature of the needs they face, and as such children are the primary directors of their learning in relation to what they need to know. Adults come alongside as guides through unknown territory, and as participants in the wonder of newness as seen through the children’s eyes. Adults who embrace this way of being with children can be said to have embraced a child-oriented approach to learning and living.

Music Learning for Young Children

From birth, children learn the musical practices and musical structures of their culture when they are immersed within that culture (Trainor & Corrigall, 2010). The extent to which they will achieve their musical capacity depends on factors including environment, biological potential, opportunity to actively participate in the culture, and interactions with peers and adults (Gordon, 2003; Welch, 1998; Young, 2003a). Environments which embrace informal processes of making the unfamiliar familiar and allow children flexibility to direct their own learning are ideal for promoting children’s deep musical understanding. Further, these settings are ideal for developing children’s ability to musically respond out of their understanding (Jambor, 2000; Gluschankof, 2002; Gordon, 2003; Reynolds, 2006; Young, 2003a).

Early childhood music classes. Early childhood music classes are typically led by a music specialist, and involve groups of children accompanied by either classroom teachers, individual parents, or other care-givers (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Gordon, 2003; Hornbach, 2011;

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8 The term *young children* has been defined in a variety of ways. The National Association for Music Education defines young children as prekindergarten age (1991). Levinowitz (1998) and Elkind (2007) suggested children up until age six can be considered in this category, while Gordon (2003) stated the ages of birth to five years old. Bredekamp & Cople (2009) include children through age eight.

9 There are a variety of approaches to early childhood music classes (Nardo, Custodero, Persellin, & Fox, 2006). The type of class that informed this project is discussed in this section.
Koops, 2011; Reynolds, 2006; Valerio, Reynolds, Bolton, Taggart & Gordon, 1998; Young, 2003a). The emphasis is on musical play within the group, as the specialist provides musical material with which the children and the care-givers interact. This material can include singing and chanting with or without words, movement to sung or recorded music, instrumental exploration (particularly with small percussion instruments), and/or age-appropriate props. A variety of tonal and rhythmic elements are appropriate, as is repetition of material from week to week, and inclusion of silences for children to respond within (Gordon, 2003; Valerio et al., 1998).

The classes are designed as sessions of guidance, not instruction (Gordon, 2003; Young, 2003a). More specifically, the term informal structured guidance describes the nature of such a class (Gordon, 2003). Informal refers to the character of the class, which does not “[impose] information or skills on the child. Rather, children are exposed to their culture and encouraged to absorb it” (Gordon, p. 3). The children are not expected to respond in specific ways, but are given opportunities to respond as they choose. Structured differs from unstructured guidance; to structure guidance is to have a specific plan for what will occur, while unstructured occurs naturally without a plan. Differing from teacher-driven instruction—where “teaching is organized into allotted time periods, and children are expected to offer obvious cooperation and to give specific types of responses” (p. 3)—guidance by the specialist occurs “in consequence to the natural sequential activities and responses of the child” (p. 3). As the child interacts with the music provided by the specialist’s plan, the specialist listens for and responds to the child’s ways of making music. Ultimately, “adults affirm a child's vocalizations and movements by offering subsequent informal and playful music interactions to guide his music development” (Reynolds, 2006, p. 36).
The resulting atmosphere is a child-oriented one, where the children’s participation is enabled by the adult (Young, 2003a) but the children have agency in how they choose to participate and respond to musical material. In such a child-oriented space, children’s musical participation is seen as a developmental trajectory, and not an indication of ability (Reynolds, 2006). Given time and space to interact with and respond to musical stimuli, children’s musical understanding and mastery of musical ability emerges (Gordon, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2007; Young, 2003a).

**Traditions of piano pedagogy.** A review of the standard texts and practitioner journals informing piano pedagogy education and practice reveals an emphasis on working with children age seven and above, often referred to as the *average age* or *elementary* child (Agay, 2004; Bastien, 1995; Clark, 1992; Jacobson, 2006; Lyke, Enoch, & Haydon, 1996; Uszler, Gordon, & Smith, 2000). This body of practitioner literature establishes that piano teachers are responsible for developing notation reading skills, rhythmic ability, aural understanding, physical approaches to the piano, and elements of musicality. The majority of the discussion emphasizes how to approach these elements for the average aged child of seven and above.

The texts include a chapter or section on working with younger children, often referred to as the *preschool age* child. The practitioner journals include occasional articles regarding working with young children at the piano as well (Ajero, 2011; Balodis, 2006; Berr, 2011; Briscoe, 2012; Brown, 2006; Campbell, 2005; Clark, 2010; Guilmartin, 2000; Johnson, 2006; Lovison, 2011; Millares, 2012; Zander, 2010). A review of the discussion in these sources regarding young children establishes that it is beneficial to young children to have early musical experiences, and that working with this specific population of children requires attention to

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10 *Clavier, Clavier Companion, Keyboard Companion, American Music Teacher*
additional factors on the part of the teacher. Incorporation of Orff, Kodaly, and/or Dalcroze techniques\textsuperscript{11}, experiential learning of concepts, and group experiences are recommended for working with this sub-group of children in preparation for the formal private lesson setting. One-on-one settings with the preschool child are described as variations of lesson settings for the average age child. Recommendations for the format of these lessons focus on teacher-driven approaches that allow for slower progression of material along standard lines, with inclusion of extra activities for the purposes of concept understanding.

Uszler et al. (2000) referred to methods on the market for working with preschool students as “readiness courses for piano playing” (p. 47), which take into consideration the needs of the younger beginning student. These methods cover a range of musical concepts and elements of piano playing, including posture and hand position; low vs. high and up vs. down; dynamics; keyboard topography; rhythmic notation; pre-staff notation and/or staff notation. The reading approaches vary, including multi-key and middle C; some methods, however, do not present a specific reading approach, opting to prepare the preschool student through the playing of isolated patterns. Some of the methods incorporate active elements of singing and improvisation, while others emphasize listening and ear training skills (Huang, 2009; Thomas-Lee, 2003; Uszler et al., 2000).

Both the recommendations for working with preschool students and the curricula available along the spectrum described above emphasize traditionally teacher-driven approaches. Further, the lesson materials rely to a large extent on visual presentations of concepts, whether or not elements of ear training or singing are included in the approach (Huang, 2009; Thomas-Lee, 2003; Uszler et al., 2000).

\textsuperscript{11} Suzuki and the Yamaha Music Education System are mentioned as well, though less frequently. A discussion of these philosophies and practices is outside of the scope of this current project, given the specific and particular approach defined by each.
2003). Derived from the ways in which lessons with average age children typically occur, these approaches present a difficulty when working with preschoolers. Students must be able to pay attention and follow directions (Bastien, 1995; Jacobson, 2006; Uszler et al., 2000), which are typically difficult tasks for young children.

According to the texts, then, aspects of prerequisites and readiness become deciding factors when considering whether or not to accept a preschool child into a piano lesson situation (Bastien, 1995; Collins, 1996; Jacobson, 2006; Skaggs, 2004; Uszler et al., 2000). Readiness refers to the child’s already acquired skills and knowledge, and a level of maturity indicating she will be able to participate successfully in the expectations of the setting. Prerequisites indicating readiness mentioned in the texts include the following: ability to read/write; awareness of right vs. left hand; recognition of white vs. black keys, high vs. low, up vs. down; ability to clap rhythmic patterns; ability to match pitch/sing in tune; ability to imitate short melodic patterns on the piano; attention span of 10-30 minutes; and small-muscle coordination. These elements of readiness are considered necessary for the lessons to be “enjoyable” (Bastien, 1995, p. 82), “easier” (Jacobson, 2006, p. 313), or successful (Skaggs, 2004).

The traditions of teacher-driven lessons and visual presentations of material described in this section are the traditions in which I was raised, and the traditions in which I was trained as a master’s student in piano performance and pedagogy. They are the traditions I have seen implemented over the course of my career, as I have interacted with my piano pedagogy colleagues and witnessed the performances of the children in their care. They are also the traditions that have informed my own teaching of all ages, as I have sought to provide my students with well-rounded training as musicians and pianists. As illustrated in the Prelude of this document, when I encountered the world of early childhood music I encountered a
philosophy of learning and an age-group unfamiliar to me. My experiences in this new setting began to inform my ways of thinking about working with young children at the piano, and led me to explore a territory previously uncharted for myself: the blending of the research in early childhood music development with elements of piano teaching.

**Readiness Reconsidered**

When comparing the exploratory and developmental musical preparation of young children in the early childhood music classes with the consideration of readiness seen in traditions of piano pedagogy texts, I cannot help but wonder if a dimension of “readiness” is missing in our work with preschool children at the piano and needs to be explored. Is the issue that the children are not ready for lessons, or is the issue that they are not ready for how we have defined the space designed for their learning? The problem that I had run into in my own teaching was that the child was not ready to do what I was expecting of her, and my new experiences in the early childhood music setting caused me to shift my thinking about what I was expecting. Instead of considering a child to be ready when she could do what I expected her to, I began to explore how to build the process of readiness into my work with her, allowing her the time and space she needed to explore the concepts she would ultimately need to master in order to be proficient at the piano.

An investigation into the research literature in early childhood music shaped my philosophical foundation when re-adjusting my teaching approach. The literature suggested that young children need certain elements for their musical development in relation to a musical environment, including time to explore by their own direction, active repetition within a musical environment, and opportunities to succeed at their own pace (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; Gordon, 2003; Hannon & Trainor, 2007; Welch, 1998; Young, 2003a). The early childhood literature
also indicated that children are more musical than we give them credit for, due to a long-standing tendency to define children’s level of musicianship by adult standards (Barrett, 2006; Campbell, 2007; Whitfield, 2009; Young, 2003a). Further, partnership with an experienced adult in the process of doing music is beneficial, as opposed to teacher-driven concepts of instruction (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; McCusker, 2007; Smith, 1996; Whiteman, 2008; Young, 2003a).

**Blending early childhood music and piano pedagogy.** The discussion of the role of early childhood music classes in preparing young children for the piano has been introduced in the practitioner literature (Balodis, 2006; Clark, 2010; Zander, 2010). Seen as a benefit to children before they start lessons, these articles consider the early childhood music class to be separate from the formal piano lesson setting. In these articles, the authors recommended that children partaking in these classes can develop fundamental skills of “melodic and rhythmic awareness, self-exploration, and experimentation” (Zander, p. 25), as well as “fine and gross motor skills, language, cognitive skills, social and emotional interactions, memory, self-esteem and confidence, imagination and creativity, problem-solving skills, coordination, [and] listening skills” (Clark, p. 21). The authors suggested that the piano teacher is an ideal candidate for teaching these classes, feeding her piano studio with the children made ready by experiences in the classes. The readiness defined here is a readiness of musical experience, before encountering the piano.

Other articles in the practitioner journals have called more specifically for change in teaching approaches, arguing for full attention to the musical development of children from an early age (Gingerich, McCullough, & Fox, 2002; Guilmartin, 2000; Richmond, Schmidt, & Guilmartin, 2002). Guilmartin (2000) determined that many children in America are
developmentally delayed in regard to musical development. He discussed the results of such a delay:

No wonder piano lessons and school music can be frustrating and difficult for so many children--and teachers and parents. Rather than learning, with an acceptable amount of effort, a new application--reading, writing, instrumental technique—of what you already know how to "speak" and understand, children get lost in a labyrinth of methods, styles and techniques that try to compensate for their developmental delay. (p. 41)

His call was for teachers to understand that early childhood experiences are crucial for the development of musical understanding and can be the determining factor in a child’s success at the instrument. According to him, children need to learn to speak the “language” of music, to participate in music making rather than music performance, and to develop a “full capacity to use music for personal expression, development and transformation” (p. 41). This begins in early childhood; if it does not, the cultural tendency is to consider children as untalented or unable to succeed in a lesson setting when it is more likely that they have simply not been given opportunity to develop appropriately (Gordon, 2003; Guilmartin, 2000; Richmond et al., 2002; Welch, 2005).

**An informal child-oriented piano lesson setting.** Having seen the benefits for music learning in the early childhood music class, I incorporated elements of informal child-oriented learning into my one-on-one piano teaching of young children. What makes this lesson setting unique is that it blends elements of early childhood music classes with elements of piano lessons, being specifically aimed toward the emergent musical development of children alongside of developing familiarization with the piano. While the emphasis in early childhood settings is typically not on inclusion of the piano or any other specific instrument, the emphasis in
preschool piano (even in methods that incorporate aspects recommended for early childhood such as singing and moving) is on teacher-driven, formal activities. Hence, investigation into the processes of this informal and child-oriented piano lesson setting seeks to serve ongoing conversation in the domains of early childhood and piano pedagogy regarding the teaching and learning of young children.

I consider this setting to be a “piano lesson” setting due to the fact that I am a piano teacher, but the lessons could be considered on a broader spectrum. The setting is a piano setting when viewed from my lens. Viewed from another lens it could just as easily be seen as a ‘percussion pedagogy’ or ‘voice pedagogy’ setting, given that the children participate in a variety of musical ways. Ultimately it could be said that this setting addresses the conversation on ‘music pedagogy’ more than specifically ‘piano pedagogy’. In all of my piano teaching—whether with older or younger students, in formal or informal lessons—I am concerned with training children to be strong musicians as a foundation for being strong pianists. Essentially, then, this setting is a readiness experience that could be applied to other specific music domains¹².

This setting as I conceptualize it is one of preparation for formal piano lessons, as a season of readiness making. It is not meant to replace formal lessons, nor is it meant to be a place where children learn specific piano songs or piano skills. It is a season of exploration that involves the piano, as well as singing, moving, and playing a variety of other instruments. I, however, pay specific attention to the piano. I address it as our focus, and incorporate strategies specifically meant to initiate the children into being at the piano. As the children mature, we

¹² Due to the inclusion of percussion instruments and singing in the lesson settings, I speak specifically to these domains. I am not suggesting that this setting could be adapted for preparation on all types of instruments; there may be some instruments more appropriate for this age of children than others.
evolve into being specifically at the piano in formal lessons, with the learning of specific songs and piano techniques. Hence, I consider these informal lessons to be ‘piano lessons’. It is imperative for the reader to remember, however, that this is a re-framing of the term ‘piano lesson’, in its emphasis on developing emergent musical understanding and the process of making the piano familiar.

The definition of readiness in these settings then becomes one where no matter what the child brings, her interactions with me as a musical partner within a musical environment provide exploratory and developmental experiences that are an active process of ‘making ready’—becoming ready through the process of doing. In order to responsibly guide these children in their musical development, however, I need to understand how they approach their learning in such a setting. How do they indicate their processes of making meaning in their developmental journey, and how do they view the setting in terms of value for learning? We need to know—deeply—how young children make meaning in the settings in which we work with them. As educators entrusted with their learning, we do children a disservice if we do not ask questions regarding whether or not their needs are being met in their lesson experiences. This study seeks to dig deeply into those questions, and to offer a previously unexplored dimension to the conversation in the domains of piano pedagogy and early childhood music.

**Purpose and Guiding Question**

This discussion leads directly to the purpose of this study, which was to seek insight into what children find meaningful and valuable when participating in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting. I aimed to locate the places where the children demonstrated meaning-making, by looking for the ways that they engaged in the lesson setting. The purpose was structured on the foundation that where a child demonstrates interest is where her meaning is
being made, and that meaning-making is essential for deep learning processes to occur (Fink-Jensen, 2007; Hedegaard, 2009; Sokolowski, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). This purpose was rooted in my overall research interest: to understand what is valuable and meaningful for young children in piano lessons, in order to appropriately guide their musical learning. In order to achieve this purpose I embraced a qualitative approach to the study, using ethnographic techniques with a phenomenological lens. I sought insight into what children find to be valuable and meaningful in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting by asking the question: What is the nature of a child’s engagement in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting13?

13 The relationship between the meaning making, value, and engagement is discussed in Chapter 2, and specifically regarding the relation of the purpose statement and guiding question in Chapter 3.
Chapter 2: Understanding Children

Children are born into a specific place and time. They join their breath with a culture already breathing, their heartbeat to the beat of a society surrounding them. With little choice in the matter, they arrive in situations familial in some shape or form (Byng-Hall, 1995). Though positioned to grow as a developing being, their development is contextual, as it interacts with factors all around them. Viewed from a socio-cultural perspective, children are historical creatures, incapable of rising above the historicity of specific situational factors (Walsh, 2002). Positioned in a daily world, children “[grow] into culture” (p. 102). ‘Growing’ is not a passive process, but a process that draws on an individual child’s own agency within the interaction of specific settings (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002; Smith, 1996, 2002). Involved in shared meanings and narratives, children make associations learned through the societal systems in place around them. As such, children’s development occurs on the ‘outside’—“in the interactions between the child and others, in the context of beliefs about and attitudes toward children, and in the many contexts in which children both construct their selves and their selves are constructed” (Walsh, 2002, p. 102).

First and foremost, children are surrounded by the familial situation into which they are born. Though family situations take a variety of forms, ‘family’ can be defined by core characteristics of roles, traditions, values, beliefs, ethnicity, language, and—often—religion (Byng-Hall, 1995; Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2006). The specific nuances of these characteristics are embedded in the worldview of children from the very beginning; hence, the dynamics of the family environment effect children immensely, determining how and to what extent development occurs within specific domains (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005; Kerchner & Abril, 2009). Families acculturate children due to their role as an “enduring form of
interaction” (Johnson et. al, 2005, p. 131) throughout the child’s growth and development, determining children’s expectations, beliefs, desires, and identity formation (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002).

The family, though the most obvious and most prominent influence on the child’s socio-cultural enculturation, is only one of a variety of contexts in which the child will participate. Bronfenbrenner explained the interaction between these contexts in his ecological model of human development (Lamont, 2002). According to the model, children exist inside separate microsystems of home, school, and neighborhood. The relationship between these systems is known as the mesosystem; the mesosystem sits inside of the exosystem (government and media) and the macrosystem (culturally dominant beliefs). Lum (2008) included global effects and technological advances in the systems functioning together to embed children into specific contextual ways of being.

As children make sense of the contexts in which they engage, they form an identity of beliefs regarding their capacities and abilities (Papalia et. al, 2006). Children have the potential to form either positive or negative identities, depending on family histories, the roles performed and/or expected within the family, the explicit and/or implicit messages sent to the child, and the nature of the interactions in the home. Expectations, messages, and interactions in the child’s entire ecology shape what he or she come to believe about his or her self. Positive and negative identities can become self-fulfilling prophecies of how well or how poorly a child engages within certain domains (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002; Byng-Hall, 1995; Lamont, 2002).

Identities that children hold can form the way they interpret the world, as they negotiate meaning in the contexts in which they find themselves. In fact, meaning making and identity are
highly intertwined (Bresler, 2008). Hence, it is useful to explore the role of meaning in the life of children in order to understand motivation to engage in the contexts in which they are situated.

**Meaning, Motivation, Interest, and Engagement**

In its simplest form, *meaning* can be defined as understanding (Fromberg, 2002), as a part of the definition of learning. When we make meaning out of something, we understand it in a way that is larger than mere memorization. Hence, the learning process needs to be *meaningful* in order to provide connections between internal states, and events in the environment (Louis, 2009). Meaningful learning occurs “in nonlinear, unpredictable ways when children engage in focused interactions with others and the physical world. Like music, it is a direct experience” (Fromberg, 2002, p. 5).

That direct experience occurs in the contexts in which children are positioned. Ecologically speaking, children’s lives are comprised of events directed by others, situated within a cultural melee of different but related settings in which children participate on a daily basis (Dunst et al., 2001). The question of where children find meaning within and between those settings is a question of how children find meaning in their everyday lives. Further, it is a question of how children *make* meaning out of the settings in which they find themselves.

*Meaning* is a quality found in significant moments, where events and the objects or people involved in them contribute to the larger life narrative of a child (Fromberg, 2002). Impossible to separate into pieces, meaningful events knit together to form the fabric of a child’s life experience. Getting at the description of the *quality* of specific events is more feasible than getting at the abstract construct of ‘meaning’. The quality of meaningful events can be described by evident interactions, emotional responses, degree of ownership, level of engagement, and the function of the event (Dunst, 2001; Fink-Jensen, 2007).
The making of meaning is an active and not passive process. The making of meaning is driven by the human need to *make sense* out of our surroundings (Jambor, 2000; Walsh, 2002). Making sense is a neurological and immediate response to the variety of settings in which we are situated and/or presented, and the events, people, and objects of which those settings consist. According to Louis (2009), “as children begin to connect objects and ideas between the different parts of their lives, they start to develop an interest in the world in which they live” (p. 12). However, the dependent state of children often dictates the situations that will hold meaning for their life narrative. The remaining question, then, is whether or not a child would actively *choose* to make meaning—actively choosing to engage in the event because of the inherent meaning the event allows her to make.

If meaning is an active process, meaning is made when children are actively engaged in an event. According to Dunst et al. (2001), children engage in events that draw their interest and attention. Events that children find meaningful fluctuate according to where their interest falls in the moment. A child’s interest is determined by a variety of factors, and the duration is maintained by the child, according to the child’s perception. Children’s powers of concentration are limited, unless their attention is drawn (Sommer, Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010). Where their attention is drawn will stand in stark contrast to where it is not; as Bresler (2008) noted, “intensified engagement, that is: shaping, and being shaped by personal, emotional and intellectual connections…becomes most readily defined by its (alas, all too prevalent) absence” (p. 1).

An intrinsic desire to actively engage in an event can be linked to a child’s motivation to learn. According to Fromberg (2002), meaning is more than concepts or ideas; it is also comprised of emotions and motives. Hence, “motivation is both an emotional and cognitive
reaction to meaning, and it influences how much attention we pay to particular experiences” (p. 5). For children, the placement of interest and the resulting motivation is an “unpredictable” (p. 5) development that permeates their lives in manifold ways.

One of those ways is in the child’s learning. According to Dunst et al. (2001), engagement in a task—whether social or non-social—provides children with opportunity to “practice existing skills, explore their environments, and learn and master new abilities” (p. 70). Louis (2009) agreed, and maintained that children develop meaningful knowledge mainly through play and exploration of situations and objects that interest them. Interest and engagement lead to competence and mastery, in ways that both instigate and enhance development within a domain (Dunst et al., 2001).

Meaning making, engagement, interest and motivation are evidence of a child’s capacity for well-being and self-direction. The fulfillment of these capacities and their effects on learning, however, is reliant on the settings in which children are situated. Settings that allow children’s well-being, self-direction, and learning to thrive are described in the following section.

**Settings and Situations for Thriving**

A review of the literature suggests settings that provide children with the opportunity to thrive consist of the following characteristics: 1) *a respect for expression of individuality*, 2) *freedom from restriction and imposed control on creative behavior*, 3) *opportunity for success, not correction*, 4) *encouraging interactions with peers or adults*, 5) *space, tools, and time to explore*, 6) *a focus on process, not product*, 7) *freedom to be mobile and active*, 8) *allowance for domain familiarity to grow*, and 9) *a sense of belonging*.

Children are individuals with agency, not “a collective undifferentiated class of immature beings” (Smith, 2002, p. 73). As such, children make choices and take initiative regarding their
rights, opinions, and desires (Emilson, 2007; Sommer et al., 2010). Their individuality can be seen in the stances that they take in their agency of discovery (Whitfield, 2009), and—when in a setting that respects these stances—they are free to explore, create, connect, and make meaning. A child whose individuality is honored exhibits joy and spontaneity as he or she actively engages with the environment (Ellermeyer, 1993).

According to Whitfield (2009), expression of individuality is fostered in settings that do not rely on inflexibility, competition, reward, or schedules, but instead allow time and space for children to be imaginative and self-directed in their exploration. This allows for expression of self, Whitfield held, as a result of respect for the culture of children and an acquisition of deep understanding regarding their ways of being and making meaning. Though potentially frustrating to an adult’s awareness of time, children’s ways of being are often “messy” (Stinson, 2002, p. 160), improvisatory, and repetitive (Sutton-Smith, 1976). Their interest in an activity often consists of attention to factors that adults tend to miss or consider unimportant, and their capacity for invention serves their need for identifying themselves as creators (Stinson, 2002). When careful to not restrict children’s natural tendencies, adults provide an environment of success that encourages participation and learning. In the end, such an environment values “creative expression rather than conformity to prescribed models” (Tinworth, 1997, p. 24).

An environment that is less restrictive in degree of adult control is more conducive to responses from and motivation of the child, because it is perceived as a safe and encouraging place to explore without consequence (Ellermeyer, 1993). Without danger of judgment, children take risks and make attempts with tools provided in the environment, approximating toward mastery through a process of exploration and discovery (Whitfield, 2009). Providing tools for children’s play is a necessary component of the environment; when children are given
unrestricted time in an environment that provides tools of exploration, they are more likely to engage in the environment creatively and meaningfully (Sheridan, Harding & Meldon-Smith, 2002).

Allowing children to be successful in their learning requires the presence of peers or adults who encourage free exploration, but also provide opportunities for extension of behaviors (Louis, 2009; Walsh, 2002). Functioning as partners in the exploration, adults join the child where he or she is, value the child’s ideas, demonstrate for the child what might occur next in the sequence of events, and engage in a childlike manner with the tools on which the child is concentrating (Sommer et al., 2010; Walsh, 2002). By listening and carefully observing the child’s motivations and interests, adults can respond to children’s engagement in ways that bring intrinsic motivation and subsequent inquiry, fed by curiosity and excitement of the child and the adult (Dunst et al., 2001; Elkind, 2007; Ellermeyer, 1993; Tinworth, 1997). This partnership is not concerned with “right” answers; the purpose instead is to “create situations in which the child should be able to think and ponder” (Sommer et al., 2010, p. 181) freely.

The lack of need for right answers is rooted in the phenomenon of process (Sommer et al., 2010). For young children, the process is more important than the product. Jambor (2000) gave this example: “Children playing with blocks may not know the names for the shapes of those blocks yet, but they are developing an understanding of the blocks’ physical properties and how shapes and sizes work together in making patterns and constructions” (p. 6-7). Adults can refer to the blocks as ‘triangle’ or ‘square’, but expecting the child to know the name is not the point—the experience is. Children’s involvement in the process of experiential learning is crucial for their becoming familiar with domain-specific knowledge, and transformation into higher levels of knowing. As Sutton-Smith (1976) stated, “transformation consists in being in
charge of the routine rather than doing it well. As time progresses however, and familiarity becomes assured, there is usually a transition to increasing variability, and sometimes to nonsense. It is at this point that the traditional educator grows uneasy” (p. 8-9).

Uneasiness can occur on the part of the adult because of the lure of the product over the process. Experiential process is a fundamental occurrence in the lives of all humans, but often the focus is on the result of the process, where the process is seen as a means to an end. Young children’s ways of being are prime examples of what process as a primary goal looks like in everyday life. Children are not concerned with long-term goals, but are instead drawn to the “here-and-now” (Sommer et al., 2010, p. 144). Their “knowledge formation” (p. 144) occurs through concrete, active, and present involvement in the moment of learning as it unfolds. Sommer, Samuelsson, and Hundeide (2010) referred to the work of Lindahl, who found that young children’s process of learning is “characterized by their skill at mastering different activities, by focusing their attention and concentrating, by discerning and evaluating, and by discovering differences” (p. 156). Children’s learning process involves imitation and variation as they make sense of the features of the particular phenomenon on which they are focusing in the moment (Lindahl & Samuelsson, 2002). Ultimately, children transform skills and knowledge as they work, and as they engage in the process (Smith, 1996).

Children’s engagement in process reflects their need to be active in their learning, as it is in the ‘doing’ that learning occurs (Louis, 2009). As such, children’s need to move is inseparable from—and evidence of—their learning. According to Louis, “young children learn about the world through their available movement and all of their senses” (p. 6). They investigate space and the rules of the space physically, in an embodied process of making
meaning and constructing knowledge (Bresler, 2004; Heebert, 2009). As Bresler communicated regarding her own experience,

I have been increasingly aware of the role of my body not only in the ways in which I communicate and project my “self,” but also in the ways that I attend and listen—to music, to other people, to the world; of its centrality to my lived everyday experience, intensified and otherwise. (p. 9)

The role of a child’s body is easily observed, since children bodily engage in their interactions with others and in their play experiences in all of their life (Fromberg, 2002).

Children physically engage in process in a variety of domains, with varying degrees of depth (Walsh, 2002). Having prolonged time to become familiar with a domain is crucial for a child’s long-term development within that domain (Elkind, 2007). More than skill acquisition, children’s development is a “sense-making process” (Walsh, 2002, p. 106). In order for children to develop in a domain, the domain needs to be in their world in a way that makes sense to them, because, “to the extent that what is present to them is distant from or irrelevant to their human sense, it will be minimally available to them” (p. 106). Children communicate their need for time with a concept by their attention to the activity, their choices of where and how to engage, and their choices of where and how not to engage (Stinson, 2002). Listening to the cues children subtly (or not so subtly) demonstrate is important for allowing them the time they need to make sense of and become familiar with the domain and its elements. According to Louis (2009), “repeated play patterns help children to organize their thoughts and experiences thus making meaningful connections with previous knowledge, experience and understanding (p. 12).

Becoming familiar is a contextual process that should be characterized by “social interaction, care, challenge, and play” (Jambor, 2000, p. 6). A sense of belonging is the result
and the means of a thriving environment, where care and learning are inseparable (Sommer et al., 2010). In such an environment, children feel cared for, valued, validated, respected, encouraged, free to hold ownership, and free to explore (Smith, 1996). Belonging occurs through reciprocity of interaction, rooted in listening, acknowledging, and responding. A “shared focus of understanding” (p.56) based in close relationship develops, and learning is enabled as the relationship negotiates meaning (Smith, 1996; Young, 2003a).

Belonging is also demonstrated by the spaces that children choose for themselves (Sommer et al., 2010). Rasmussen (2004) discussed the distinction between “places for children” and “children’s places” (p.161). Places for children are adult created spaces, delineated for use by children; children’s places are places that children create or choose without adult intervention. Identifying the compulsion of adults to define the parameters of children’s daily lives, Rasmussen wrote that children’s places are “places that children relate to, point out and talk about” (p. 165), and indicated that a place takes on “existence and character” when it has meaning. Allowing children to have ownership over their space contributes to their sense of belonging, as does the security of a safe and nurturing relationship. According to Byng-Hall (1995), children are free to improvise within a situation if they believe that they are secure. Ultimately, all of these characteristics can be summed up by Dissanayake’s (2000) five psycho-social needs: mutuality, belonging to, finding and making meaning, competence through handling and making, and elaboration.

Out of this discussion derive three fundamental elements for children’s learning: the importance of play in learning, the necessity of child-oriented learning environments, and the essence of informal learning. Though these three intersect in the lived experience of the child, the following discussion addresses each individually.
Play. According to Elkind (2007), there are four simultaneously occurring types of play: mastery play, innovative play, kinship play, and therapeutic play. Mastery play involves “self-initiated repetitive practice” (p. 108), where children work with fundamental and basic tools as they construct the concepts and skills related to the object of their play. Once they have reached mastery regarding the object children move into innovative play, and create variations of their play, extending what they have mastered through processes of elaboration. Kinship play brings children into social interaction with their peers, as they initiate games and interactive play. Therapeutic play “gives children strategies for dealing with stressful life events” (p. 103) and “with impulses that are socially unacceptable” (p. 114).

Engaging in play with an object or stimulus leads to rational thought, and enables children to make sense of the world around them (Elkind, 2007; Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008). Variable by nature (Marsh & Young, 2006), play initiates children into a world of possibility. Whitfield (2009) suggested “children at play are actually engaged in serious learning. Through play, they reenact real-life or imaginative situations, solve problems, explore and resolve relationships with other, and experiment with new roles” (p. 158). Risk-taking behaviors develop, as children explore situations and create responses without fear of mistake. Often this occurs in interaction with other children as together they take ownership, creating routines for the play and adapting as needed. Their communication in the play space often occurs non-verbally and through movement with “engagement, interest, and joy” (Sommer et al., 2010, p. 155). Overall, play carries with it elements of playfulness, characterized by freedom, spontaneity and joy, which children exhibit without inhibition when given the opportunity (Ellermeyer, 1993). These qualities distinguish play as an important vehicle in the life of a child, making the difference between surviving and thriving (Jambor, 2000).
Play is important because “the world [adults] know is not the world of the infant and young child. During the early years of life the child does not learn by ‘watching,’ ‘absorbing,’ or ‘looking harder.’ The young child does learn by constructing and reconstructing the world through his play-generated learning experiences” (Elkind, 2007, p. 102-103). Exploring in play, children direct themselves and their learning to the places that hold interest and meaning for them in the moment.

**Child-oriented learning experiences.** Elkind (2007) maintained that “children learn best through self-created learning experiences” (p. 7). Many terms are related to this basic principle, such as child-directed, child-centered, self-directed, and child-initiated. At their heart, all of these terms point to the child as being the place to start. In emergent curricula, children’s interests have been found to lead to diverse and complex themes related to a wide array of conceptual topics (Tinworth, 1997). Characterized by concrete observations in the present moment, children’s initiations will engage them in active and imaginative process for as long as the topic provides interest (Sommer et al., 2010). Elkind (2007) suggested, it is vitally important to support and encourage self-directed activities by the infant and young child. Even if those activities appear meaningless to us, they can have great purpose and significance for the child. These activities are not random and have a pattern and organization in keeping with the child’s level of mental ability. (p. 92-93)

Children will repeat activities for as long as they need to in order to continue practicing the material, if the material is relevant to them. Over time, their interactions with the material will change and “evolve in depth and direction” (Tinworth, 1997, p. 28). One area of interest can lead to another, as children make connections and integrate their learning experiences into a meaningful whole.
Allowing the child to lead the learning does not mean that the teacher loses control—it means that the teacher follows the child to where the child wants to go and makes the exploration important within the domain under investigation. According to Sommer et al. (2010), the amount and the character of the adult’s control in the setting determine how the child will influence the direction of the setting:

When the teacher maintains control by coming close to the children’s perspective, responding to them sensitively, and talking to them in a playful voice, the rules are implicit and no reprimands are necessary. In these situations, the children are freer to make choices and take the initiative. (p. 154)

Hence, potentially valuable child-initiated and/or directed learning experiences are dependent on the character of the child and adult interaction and the amount of control the teacher exerts.

**Informal learning.** Teachers who desire to allow for child-oriented learning can take their cue from informal learning situations in everyday life. Informal learning in everyday life occurs in the variety of ways that “values, skills, practices, and knowledge are passed from person to person, culture to culture” (Kerchner & Abril, 2009, p. 8). In everyday situations, children engage in learning as they want and need to, as they become familiar with the environment surrounding them. Informal learning can be conscious or unconscious, but most often occurs spontaneously and organically as the need to know arises. Faced with such a challenge, children investigate innately meaningful contexts through trial and error and draw conclusions before anything is ever explained to them and without fear of correction. Making the unfamiliar familiar is the first step in learning, and is at the core of informal learning. Whether conscious or not, it is never self-conscious, and is most likely voluntary and rewarding.
due to its immediacy, effortlessness, and relevance (Batt-Rawden and DeNora, 2005; Stamp, 1993; Sutton-Smith, 1976).

**Role of the adult.** Play, child-initiated learning, and informal learning are not out of the realm of the adult influence. Adult influence can be either positive or negative to children’s engagement in these phenomena. Children often want adults to be a part of the process of play, and either invite them in or inform them as to what is occurring (Sommer et al., 2010). How the adult responds to the child is crucial, however. Ellermeyer (1993) said that adults inhibit children’s playfulness with rigid and preconceived “attitudes, rules and controls” (p. 59). Instead, adult postures of acceptance, support, respect, inspiration, imagination, challenge, encouragement, spontaneity, demonstration, partnership, and love contribute to children’s ability to play with childlike playfulness (Ellermeyer, 1993; Sommer et al., 2010). According to Whitefield (2009), for adults “to work effectively and compassionately with children, they must first respect children’s cultures and acquire deep learning about them” (p. 157).

More than simply being nearby, adults can be intentional about facilitating children’s self-initiated investigation, exploration, and play (Tinworth, 1997). Adults should “interpret the children’s actions, meet and respond to the children’s initiatives in a manner that they feel furthers development and learning” (Sommer et al., 2010, p. 153). Providing thriving environments, adults can draw children’s attention to “critical features” (p. 178) of the environment and guide children deeper into learning experiences through participation that is interactive and respectful (Tinworth, 1997). Dunst et al. (2001) referred to this as *contingent responsiveness*, where adults “respond contingently to their children’s behavior to maintain engagement, provide support and guidance as needed, and evoke variations and elaborations in children’s behavior” (p. 76).
Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is helpful in clarifying this discussion (Schunk, 2008). The ZPD “represents the amount of learning possible” (p. 245) when a child is working on a task that she “could not perform independently because of the difficulty level” (p. 245). The child brings her own experiences to the task, and—with the help of a more knowledgeable other—“constructs meanings by integrating [her previous experiences] with [her] experiences in the context” (p. 245). Within the ZPD, then, adults and children work together. The adult listens to where the child is, acknowledges her contributions, and sensitively guides the child forward in her understanding of self and the world. This sensitive guiding has been referred to as guided participation, and is also a characteristic of scaffolding processes. In scaffolding, adults provide support, function as a resource, extend the child’s range, enable success in tasks that might be otherwise out of the child’s reach, and watch for when scaffolding can be removed (Schunk, 2008). Whiteman (2008) described the essence of scaffolding as “a collection of techniques employed by a knowledgeable other to assist a novice to internalize cultural signs” (p. 25).

Scaffolding begins with listening to and watching what the child is bringing to the endeavor. According to Dunst et al. (2001), “one of the most important socio-environmental factors associated with children’s learning and development is adult sensitivity and responsiveness to child behavior” (p. 69). Responsiveness is key, in that socio-cultural learning is a reciprocal process according to cultural goals and via communication with others. It is joint involvement, joint attention, within a rich context, extending the skills the child brings through the lens of the adult’s experience (Smith, 2002).

In conclusion, a child learns by interacting with the environment, which includes sensitive adults who make their expertise available as a partner and guide. Far too often,
however, adults believe they hold the key to a child’s learning without ever discerning how that child needs to learn. If adult concern is for the child’s meaningful learning, then the child is where learning needs to start. Ultimately, the child and adult function as collaborators within a setting, negotiating meaning, sharing ideas, and building constructions of knowledge.

**The Musical Child**

**“Music” defined.** In Western culture, the abstract construct of ‘music’ tends to be defined as sound, organized into meaning. Young children also organize their sounds into meaning when they bang on a piano and babble nonsense tones (Young, 2003a). Children are in an active process of changing their meanings to align with what the culture has defined as meaningful (Smith, 1996; Young, 2003a). Music education is about re-organizing the meanings children are making into meanings the culture recognizes as ‘music’. It is not the ‘music’ that pedagogy changes; it is the organizational structures of the sounds that change as children become familiar with the possibilities of their culture. The question is—how do we enculturate the child for lifelong music making?

The first way is to start where the children start, acknowledging their musical contributions as valid, despite whether or not they fit into culturally defined categories of ‘music’ (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Gluschankof, 2002; Young, 2003a). As Walsh (2002) suggested, “the unfamiliar must first be tied to children’s sense of what the world is, how it works, and their part in the whole process” (p. 107); hence, beginning with where the child is and moving forward from there is important for the evolution of familiarity. Young (2003a) called the child’s self-initiated musical activity a “meaningful starting point” (p. 17) with which adults can first interact by listening, responding, commenting in kind before leading the child beyond. She held that
appropriate musical interactions with young children are “fitted around children’s own ways of being musical rather than the other way round” (p. 19).

Small (1998) provided a useful definition for describing the process of music-making in his terminology of *musicking*. Batt-Rawden and DeNora (2005) referred to musicking as “world making” (p. 289), pointing to music as an enculturating process necessary for construction of meaning. Though attributing this definition to all humanity, it is a particularly useful term when working with young children due to its emphasis on process over product. Campbell (2007) clarified that musicking in the lives of young children is more than making music—it is instead referring to the “process of participation” (p. 889). In the same way that we can say a child is ‘playing,’ we can say that a child is ‘musicking’ when they are engaged in the process of making music. In fact, children’s play is often a vehicle for children’s musicking, and the processes are inseparable (Young, 2003a).

Musicking for young children is also inseparable from *movement* (Bartel, 2007; Campbell, 2007; Gordon, 2003; McCusker, 2007; Young, 2003a). According to Whitfield (2009), children incorporate their movement as a coming-to-know process, and music holds “power as a way of knowing” (p. 157). Musical movement is expression of music, which links to a child’s later musical expressivity on an instrument (Davidson, Pitts, & Correia, 2001). For them, “music is given an expression—or perhaps it is better to say an *intention*—if it emerges out of bodily gesture and sensation” (p. 56). As such, music can be defined as movement with intention in early childhood.

**Nature of children’s musicking.** In order to recognize children’s musicking as a valid process, it is important for adults to recognize how children make music. Children’s music making has been noted as unconventional by adult standards in its “original and highly diverse”
use of timbre (Gluschankof, 2002, p. 46), range of rhythmic duration, unconcern with pitch, use of glissandi and micro-intervals, lack of dynamic range, and overall repetitiveness (Barrett, 2006; Gluschankof, 2002). Children’s musicking is bodily, in that their movement is inseparable from the music they make (Campbell, 2007). In fact, Young (2003a) described children’s musicking as being “suffused [throughout their] whole being” (p. 11), as a multi-modal entity: emotional, physical, intellectual, and sensory. The specific musical behaviors that children demonstrate include movement, rhythmicking, chant, and songs.

Children move in time to music they hear, to the music they create vocally or relative to an instrument, and even to silence (Metz, 1989; Young, 2003a, 2003b). They dance, and express music physically in what Campbell (2007) termed *rhythmicking*, “their particular penchant for engagement” (p.889) in rhythmic speech, using objects, surfaces, and movement. Similarly, chant behaviors are evidence of children exploring the relationship of sound to space, another physical property. Children’s chant can be spoken or contain melodic nuances (Gordon, 2003; Welch, 1998; Young, 2003a). Young (2006) clarified that children’s musical chant and song can fall under a broader category of “vocalizations”, which “encompasses all vocal activity: speech, calling, singing, crying” (p. 270).

Chant and song occur when children are playing alone or with others. Chants/songs are most likely related to the task on which the child is focused, and are typically spontaneous. They can range from experimentation with sound, partial imitations of familiar songs, extensions/transformations of familiar songs, to creations of new musical material. The nature of children’s song is improvisatory in that it is fleeting and in the moment (Kartomi, 1980; Kooistra, 2012; Young, 2003a). Often children’s song making is in the form of “snatches” (Young, 2003a, p. 88) or “musical doodlings” (Kartomi, 1980, p. 177). Kartomi referred to the
“quality of childlikeness” (p. 172) found in children’s created song, a quality that separates it from adult song. She suggested that in childlikeness, children have the freedom to “represent the real, unselfconscious, adultless children’s play world” (p. 186).

Barrett (2006) specified that children’s invented song is “foundational in the development of creative thought and activity in music” (p. 202). Children’s inventiveness is seen in generative and playful creation, as they spontaneously, intentionally, and repetitively engage in musicking within their larger context of play. Incorporation and adaptation of familiar songs is also typical of young children’s musicking. Children borrow pieces of familiar songs, and either extend them with original material, or transform them by changing the text to apply to the situation at hand. Children may also combine text from one familiar song with musical material from another, potentially transforming both melody and text in the process (Barrett, 2006; Bjørkvold, 1989; Campbell, 2007; Kooistra, 2012; Young, 2003a). Barrett referred to the process of elaboration in children’s song making as a necessary process of exploration.

**Nature of musical development.** Musical exploration is a process that occurs within a musical culture. Smith (1996) stated “all development begins with social interaction—development consists of the internalization of social processes” (p. 54). Children are immersed into their musical culture from birth, and the definition of what sound groupings are defined as ‘music’ is a socialized, culturally learned phenomenon (Bannan & Woodward, 2009; Welch, 1998). Ultimately, development of musical literacy is the goal of music education, and is defined by Mills and McPherson (2006) as children having developed their capacity to make music, reflect on the music in which they are engaged, express their views on music which they play, hear or create, speak
about and listen to music in order to form judgments, and read, write, comprehend and interpret staff notation. (p. 155)

More than the ability to read notes or articulate didactic theoretical knowledge, musical literacy involves understanding the construction of music as one understands the construction of language, in a way that permits cohesive musical thinking to occur. Just as language literacy requires a developed language vocabulary rooted in syntactical understanding, musical literacy requires a developed musical vocabulary (Gordon, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2007; Sawyer, 2005). A child’s ability to comprehend and organize tonality and meter in meaningful aural patterns influences their ability to engage in higher-order musical thinking (Azzara, 1993).

A musical vocabulary develops contextually; as immersion, exploration, elaboration, and creation occur in the life of the child, the child develops musically. Development of a musical vocabulary is an evolutionary process that requires “many varied opportunities for exploration and self-expression through music before the more abstract skills involved in formal note reading are introduced” (McCusker, 2007, p. 50). The evolution of a developing vocabulary is said to be “emerging” in the years before children begin formal instruction (McCusker, 2007; Welch, 1998), and this emergence is a phenomenon that can be massaged into being by the environments in which children are immersed and the interactions they have there. According to Welch, as the child grows and develops, the actual musical behaviors and capabilities that emerge are the product of a complex interaction between, on the one hand, general intellectual predisposition and potential, the species-wide capacity for musical behaviors, and on the other, particular environmental experiences that, to a greater or lesser extent, ‘match’ and allow such potential to be realized. (p. 29)
As such, each child’s musical journey is specific to his or her innate potential and specific environmental factors.

Innate potential is a biological condition (Bannan & Woodward, 2009; Welch, 1998). Children’s exhibition of spontaneous musical behaviors demonstrates that they have the capacity for musicking early on (Hannon & Trainor, 2007; McCusker, 2007; Trainor, 2005; Young, 2003a). Gordon (2003) referred to innate musical potential as music aptitude, stating that it is “normally distributed among children at birth” (p. 14). Environmental factors, however, play a role in the long-term realization of a child’s innate potential. According to Gordon, a child’s aptitude levels begin to decrease unless stimulated by a rich musical environment. Up until the age of nine, a child’s potential can be manipulated, shaped by immersion into a musical environment and opportunity to interact with the musical material within the environment. Hence, Gordon referred to music aptitude until the age of nine as developmental music aptitude.

Trainor (2005) provided evidence from neurological research that the age of nine or ten is important in the development of brain structures regarding the development of musical expertise. According to Trainor and Corrigall (2010), routine immersion into “the music of one’s culture does lead to implicit knowledge about its pitch and rhythmic structure” (p. 89). Auditory capacity is rearranged due to a child’s exposure to systems of music, bringing awareness of structures, tonalities, and meters.

While immersion into a music environment is important, the nature of the environment is more important. Passive immersion has been shown to be not enough; instead, musical situations that are “behaviorally relevant” (Hannon and Trainor, 2007, p. 470) show greater changes in brain plasticity. Environments that nurture these changes provide 1) rich musical material, 2) opportunity to engage with the musical material, and 3) guidance toward the
elements of the musical material (Hannon and Trainor, 2007; Reynolds et al., 2007; Trainor and Corrigall, 2010).

A rich musical environment is defined by variety of musical material as well as variety of activities (Young, 2003a). Trainor (2005) pointed to temporal/rhythmic structures and spectral/pitch structures as being the two aspects of music, each aspect being multidimensional in complexity. Thus, incorporating elements of rhythmic and tonal aspects in a variety of complexities is important for development of neurological representations. Gordon (2003) concurred, considering variety in richness of tonality, harmony, and meter to be crucial for children’s development of musical understanding. Bartel and Cameron (2007) stated “the type and amount of music a child experiences (is immersed in) influences the child’s potential for later learning. Conversely, a lack of immersion in musical sound and experimental music making inhibits potential for later learning and development” (p. 61). Welch (1998) contended that we “make sense” (p. 28) of music in three ways: 1) psycho-acoustic features of “pitch, loudness, duration, timbre” (p. 28), 2) structures of patterns and regularities, and 3) syntactic and communicative elements defined by “the potential for musical sounds to be characterized by a grammatical function within the musical context” (p. 28). Hence, environments that contain variety within these three categories are appropriate for musical development. Further, Reynolds et al. (2007) suggested that enabling children to recognize the syntactic and communicative elements referred to by Welch involves demonstrating musicking for children in a variety of ways, immersing children “in a regular flood of meaningful music” (p. 224). ‘Meaningful’ music in a syntactical sense is music that is continuously related to a context, where parts of musical meter and tonality are extracted from and presented in conjunction with a whole.
Because children are active constructors of musical knowledge (McCusker, 2007), their musical development is also dependent on their opportunity to actively engage with musical material. For instance, in order to fully incorporate metrical space into their bodies, children need to physically engage with the music (Gordon, 2003; Trainor and Corrigall, 2010). Also, since their musical behaviors change over time (Welch, 1998), opportunity to practice experiences of singing and rhythmicking are necessary. Children engage in these behaviors on their own during their own play time (Young, 2003a; 2006), but providing an environment that encourages them to further practice their skills is beneficial to their development (Reynolds et al., 2007; Whiteman, 2008). Welch (1998) determined that allowing time for children to free-play with music is essential in that it develops internal logic of musical processes and permits internal understanding of patterns to develop over time; Gordon (2003) agreed. Just as children approximate language structures in their development of thought, spoken language, and the ability to read and write, children need time to approximate musical structures in their development of musical thought, musical spoken language, and the ability to read and write music (Reynolds et al., 2007).

In order for this free-play to be beneficial in terms of music development, an adult presence is needed to engage in the music making with the child (Adachi, 1994; Reynolds et al., 2007; Welch, 1998; Young, 2003a). The adult provides guidance as a more knowledgeable other; peers can play this role as well (Whiteman, 2008). According to Bamberger (2006), “musical development is enhanced by continuously evolving interactions among multiple organizing interactions among multiple organizing constraints along with the disequilibrium and sensitivity to growing complexity that these entanglements entrain” (p. 71). In other words,
children organize music according to what makes sense to them, but extend their organizations and actions with the encouragement of a helpful adult.

The evidence of the development is the continued sophistication of the child’s extension and elaboration of musical ideas (Bamberger, 2006; Welch, 1998). This is a process akin to the development of language, where adults scaffold children’s attempts to form words, phrases, and complete sentences. Reynolds et al. (2007) provided the example of a child exploring past tense, saying “I goed to Aunt Tanya’s yesterday”, and suggest that a scaffolding response by a more knowledgeable other could be “So, you went to Aunt Tanya’s yesterday?” (p. 213). Thus, the child is gently led to the rules of language use, and will eventually conform his or her speech to the speech patterns of the culture. The same can be said for development of a musical vocabulary and the ability to ‘speak’ music intelligently.

**Nature of a musical identity.** When a child’s musical approximations are shaped by adults who are respectful of the child and give feedback that is valuable and sensitive, the child is more likely to develop a confidence in his or her own use of the musical vocabulary. Parents expect their child to develop a speaking vocabulary, and so support his or her language development by interacting with the child in the process of sense-making. The risk-taking necessary for such an endeavor on the part of the child is a taken for granted occurrence. Likewise, a musical vocabulary development can be expected and supported within a family atmosphere in ways that contribute to a child’s positive musical identity. What children need is “reason to communicate and the opportunity to interact meaningfully with more knowledgeable language users who scaffold the learning process” (Reynolds et al., 2007, p. 212).

Musical identity formation—whether negative or positive—is a cultural process, as children engage with their surroundings and form understandings based off of those interactions
(Hargreaves et al., 2002). Family contexts are influential in developing a child’s perception of his or her own musicianship, from whether or not music is an expected part of the home to if and how the parents expect the child to engage in music making (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002). School, interactions with other children, and media all contribute to pervasive beliefs regarding musical identity (Lamont, 2002). Lamont found that younger children tend to have more positive musical identities than older children, even when they have less training. Perhaps because they are unaware of how much they are unaware of, younger children believe in themselves as musicians.

This belief can change as children grow and become influenced by other beliefs regarding what musicianship is or isn’t. Western school and music cultures tend to project the belief that the term ‘musician’ is defined by an ability to perform (Lamont, 2002; O’Neill, 2002). This assumption can cause children to categorize themselves as musician or not, a belief that will follow them through their lives and determine their lifelong musicking. For example, children who have no experience with an instrument are more inclined to see musical ability as a fixed entity than those who have had experience (O’Neill, 2002). Lamont (2002) found that children who were not trained but still “described themselves as playing musicians performed at a consistently higher level than children who described themselves as non-musicians” (p. 49-50) on cognitive understanding of music.

Reinforcing a child in his or her music making from an early age may encourage lifelong positive musical identity. As Young (2003a) indicated, the early childhood years may be particularly important years for fostering a positive disposition as an active music-maker: to sing, to play instruments and move. If spontaneous effort and activity
are largely ignored, or at worst closed down because they are ‘noisy’ or ‘boys don’t sing’, then the effects drive deep into the sense of self as musical. (p. 87)

In order to promote positive musical identity formation, adults can listen to the ways that children are musical and acknowledge them as valid. As Campbell (2007) reminded, there is more at stake here than we might think, since “the songs and singing games, melodies, and rhythms that children choose to preserve, create, and recreate in variant forms are key signals of children’s identity” (p. 887).

**Nature of musical meaning.** The music that children choose is also a key signal of the meanings they are making. According to St. John (2006), children demonstrate where they find musical meaning by their self-assignments, deliberate gestures, and expansions of musical material. Kerchner and Abril (2009) suggested:

A natural consequence of musical experience is the construction of personal and social meaning. As activating agents influenced by their culture, humans determine what is and what is not music based on sounds they produce, hear, or imagine. Meaning is not necessarily found in the sounds themselves, but in the ways that people perceive and think about them. Musical meaning is constructed from social, historical, and political contexts; roles valued in a culture; personal associations with music; and people’s abilities to perceive organized relationships of musical sounds. (p. 4)

As such, elements of musical contexts, musical development and literacy, and musical identity all play a role in children’s making of musical meaning. Musical meaning cannot be separated from the ways that music is transmitted, received, and transformed (Kerchner & Abril, 2009).

As music is transmitted, received, and transformed, it cannot be separated from cultural practices, processes, and meanings (Panksepp & Trevarthen, 2009; Whiteman, 2008). During
enculturation into a musical system, children intuit types, values, and meanings of the music based on its role in the culture, and “will determine the role and focus the music will take on, the meaning” for themselves (Bartel & Cameron, 2007, p. 59). In other words, children will interpret the ‘use’ of music based on how it is ‘used’ around them. Questions of whether music is for the doing or whether it is for performing become crucial; if the main interest of the music in a child’s life is performance products separated from the processes of musicking, what will the child think about her own music making?

A specific cultural practice that music cannot be separated from is communicative meaning making. From infancy, children engage in sympathetically rhythmic interactions with caregivers in ways that suggest the importance of music in establishing communication and relationship for survival (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). The turn-taking between child and adult engaged in dialogue is a subtle dance of pulse and quality, where pulse is defined as “the regular succession of discrete behavioural events through time, vocal or gestural” (p. 4) and quality as “the modulated contours of expression moving through time” (p. 4). Both pitch and quality exist within the narrative “of expression and intention” (p. 4).

Music continues to play a communicative role throughout children’s development, according to Young (2005):

In an accumulative, cyclical process, the retrospective inference increasingly sets up anticipation for what is to come. So, in a kind of feedback loop, the engendering of meaning between participants increases the communicative potential of the exchange. As a consequence, the initial motivation to connect with another is satisfied. The outcome of effective communication is a sympathetic contact which is mutually rewarding to both partners. (p. 285)
The reward is the meaning of the moment between two human beings, which promotes motivation for continued participation. Through imitative and elaborative turn-taking, timing is practiced in an elastic back and forth of collaborative activity. The activity “develops creatively around shared ideas” through “rule-guided” but not “rule-bound” relationships (p. 291), where “coordinating and sustaining the game of playing together gives the music-making coherence, and a sense of intention and forward progression” (p. 292).

Ultimately, “the generation of meaning is at the core of musicality” (Gembris, 1997, p. 20). As a generative and elaborative process, music weaves itself in and out of our dynamically changing lived experience as human beings. It changes with us as it changes us; it speaks for us as it speaks to us. According to Gembris, musical meaning within a specific culture cannot be separated from the conceptualization of musical ability. His position is that “understanding musicality as the ability to generate musical meaning is a more promising way to arrive at more valid insights about the nature of musicality” (p. 21), where all possible meanings are respected and sought. If we understand musical meaning-making as the basis for our music-making and vice-versa, we need to look deeply for the ways it makes sense to us and defines our human experience.

Attending to where children demonstrate attunement is one way to look deeply. Attunement is defined as “the phenomenon of intense and self-forgetful concentration and focused attention on music and music activities” (Fink-Jensen, 2007, p. 55). According to Fink-Jensen, musical attunement is an indication as to what is meaningful to a child:

Musically attuned people interrelate with music and articulate meaning in movements, facial expressions, or singing, pictures, drama, and verbal expressions. Meaning may appear in movements coordinated with music, certain shifts in facial expressions,
concentrated attitudes when someone plays an instrument, and so on. Moreover, musical attunement may be reflected in verbal expressions of musical experiences. (p. 58)

In summary, the nature of musical meaning is deeply connected to who we are as human beings. The places that children attune to music, assign themselves musical roles, perform deliberate musical gestures and expand musical material are indications of where meaning is being made. Depending on the ways they perceive sound and its organization, the music around them will determine how they understand the purpose of music in their life and in the culture around them. Engaging in moments of musical meaning will increase the potential for more musical interactions and for deeper satisfaction within those interactions.

**Music Learning in Educational Settings for Young Children**

In light of what has been discussed to this point regarding the sociocultural child’s “growing into culture” (Walsh, 2002, p. 102) in everyday life and musicking, what does music learning look like in educational settings for young children? A sociocultural child’s learning occurs in socially-mediated settings, where collaborative interaction and assisted performance occur out of respect for the child (Dunst et al., 2001). Key players in the social mediation are the family and other influential adults; hence, these adults function as key players in the educational setting as well. The educational setting is one of the microsystems in which the child will engage, and as the child makes sense out of his microsystems in relationship with each other, his identity will take shape. Aiming to develop positive identity formation in children should be the goal of an educational space. Allowing children to engage in self-initiated and directed learning activities is one way to provide for positive identity formation. Self-initiation and direction occurs organically in informal educational settings and in music play.
Informal educational settings. Informal music learning is a “cultural practice: by participating in a practice, one also learns the practice” (Folkestad, 2005, p. 281). Informal education is a term referring to an educational space that uses learning in everyday life as its model. Remembering that children “are creative first in the areas with which they are most familiar” (Sutton-Smith, 1976, p. 9), informal educational settings desire to give children time to make an object and/or a domain familiar through exploration and play. Borrowing the principles of informal learning, informal educational settings do not expect children to arrive at correct answers but allow them to explore the elements of the environment that are interesting and relevant. Formal instructional practices compartmentalize learning, while informal learning emphasizes the holistic, “a natural interdependence and interweaving of practical skills and knowledge” (McCusker, 2007, p. 55).

Informal education works particularly well in the domain of music education, since music is an easily seen cultural process. An informal music education setting focuses on all elements of music-making: playing, listening, moving, and interacting (Folkestad, 2005). In partaking in the process of doing, Folkestad held, “music is experienced and learned, one way or another” (p. 280). Accordingly, drawing on informal learning principles in the educational space has shifted focus from what and how to teach to what and how to learn. Elsewhere Folkestad (2006) suggested:

A distinction between formal and informal ways of learning with respect to intentionality is presented: towards what is the mind directed during the process of the activity? In the formal learning situation, the minds of both the teacher and the students are directed towards learning how to play music (learning how to make music), whereas in the
informal learning practice the mind is directed towards playing music (making music).
(p. 138)

According to Green (2008), a key element of informal everyday music making and learning is music that is relevant to learners—in that “learners always start with music that they know and like” (p. 178). When this principle is incorporated in an educational setting, the music that is explored in the setting is music the child finds interesting. Informal music learning for older children involves “copying recordings of real music by ear” (p. 178), an active process that can be transferred to young children as well in their imitative processes. In fact, according to Green, informal music learning integrates all elements of music making in every stage of the music learning. Though it may appear “chaotic” (p. 179), Green reminded educators that in daily life “learning is not progressively structured from simple to increasingly complex, but [is] holistic, idiosyncratic and haphazard” (p. 178).

It is recommended, however, that informal educational settings not be free-form in design. Instead, informal educational settings can provide a flexible framework that guides but does not dictate the lesson (Folkestad, 2006; Gordon, 2003; Young, 2003a). A framework provides ideas that children can then develop through exploration, what Young (2003a) called “continue and sustain” (p. 72). A framework also makes intention visible, in that it allocates tasks that are valuable for scaffolding and development to occur. Gordon discussed the role of structured informal settings as well:

There is a difference between guidance and instruction in music. Guidance is by definition informal, whereas instruction is at least to some degree always formal. Informal guidance can be structured or unstructured. When guidance is unstructured, the parent or teacher exposes the child to the culture naturally, without specific planning.
When guidance is structured, the parent or teacher plans the lesson specifically. A distinguishing characteristic of both structured and unstructured informal guidance is that neither imposes information or skills on the child. Rather, children are exposed to their culture and encouraged to absorb it. Structured and unstructured informal guidance are based on and operate in consequence to the natural sequential activities and responses of the child. Formal instruction, however, requires that in addition to the parent or teacher specifically planning what will be taught, teaching is organized into allotted time periods, and children are expected to offer obvious cooperation and to give specific types of responses. (p. 3)

The framework is designed with the expectation that the children will respond in ways that lead the lesson into areas of improvisatory reciprocity. In essence, the players in the informal space function as collaborators, as they play with the musical material and transform it through their interactions with each other (St. John, 2006). This type of music making is reflective of music making in everyday life (Campbell, 1998a; Crafts, Cavicchi, & Keil, 1993); it is also reflective of higher order musicking skills (Sawyer, 2005). Sawyer identified higher order musicking skills as four crucial characteristics found in jazz improvisation: process, unpredictability, collaboration, and emergence of a whole from the parts. Sawyer suggested that what the members of a jazz ensemble contribute individually is not as great as what they create together; the same can be said for informal settings that are designed to allow process, unpredictability, collaboration, and emergence to occur.

The benefit of designing a setting in this way is that it allows children to choose where and how they engage. According to Bartel (2007), children need choice in order to take ownership over their musicking. Within the framework, they “adjust their challenge level based
on what they know, or their level of skill” (St. John, 2006, p. 242). Young (2005) agreed, saying that children “possess a range of strategies which they draw upon to guide and direct the interactions in ways which meet their own needs” (p. 293). The setting is defined as one where it has been decided by a knowledgeable adult that learning will take place, and as children are provided opportunities to actively engage in the moment with musical material (Kerchner & Abril, 2009).

**Musical play.** Active engagement is seen most clearly in the ways that children play, and the same is true for the ways that children play with music. Marsh and Young (2006) defined musical play as

the activities that children initiate of their own accord and in which they may choose to participate with others voluntarily. Like other modes of play, these activities are enjoyable, intrinsically motivated, and controlled by the players. They are free of externally imposed rules but may involve rules developed by the children who are playing. (p. 289)

Marsh and Young identified vocal play, instrument play, and movement play as three categories of music play activities in which children engage.

Musical play can occur anywhere there is a child, but the nature of the environment the child is in will either serve to limit or promote children’s musical play behaviors. Marsh and Young (2006) referred to “the constraints imposed by space, the levels of acceptable noise, what might be used to produce a sound, and availability of others with whom to make music” (p. 290) as factors influencing overall music play. Likewise, Berger and Cooper (2003) suggested that a supportive environment for play offers children time, space, and materials with which to explore and create. When given resources, “research on children’s musical play has demonstrated
children’s focused attention over long periods of time, as well as their purposeful and thoughtful music making” (Custodero, 2005, p. 189).

Children’s playful interaction with music making is an engagement with musical process, fostering interest, competence, transformation, and mastery (Custodero, 2005; Dunst et al., 2001; Marsh & Young, 2006; St. John, 2006). As Jambor (2000) indicated, unstructured but serious play activities engage children in discovering “underlying patterns and rules that [enable] them to organize and make sense of their world” (p. 5). Hence, music play should be a staple in the lives of young children.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, settings that draw on informal learning and allow for play encourage a child to be free and flexible. Vocal play, instrumental play, and movement should form the foundation of music education settings for young children, with time, space, and equipment available for exploration and discovery. Musical play occurs in children’s everyday life experience in informal ways; hence, intentionally designing educational spaces to resemble informal learning in everyday life provides children with a free and flexible place to engage in musical play as a part of their music learning journey.

**Musical Guidance in Educational Settings for Young Children**

In this section I address what the discussion thus far means for teachers as they guide young children in music educational settings. Remembering the factors of settings that allow children to thrive, (1) a respect for expression of individuality, 2) freedom from restriction and imposed control on creative behavior, 3) opportunity for success, not correction, 4) encouraging interactions with peers or adults, 5) space, tools, and time to explore, 6) a focus on process, not product, 7) freedom to be mobile and active, 8) allowance for domain familiarity to grow, and 9)
a sense of belonging), teachers of young children can foster musical thriving in their design of learning environments for musical guidance.

An environment built on informal principles, that allows for play and exploration and nurtures caring relationships, requires a teacher who believes in fostering positive musical experiences for children, and who is committed to a role of ‘teacher’ that is re-imagined from traditional models where the teacher’s role is to didactically hand down knowledge. What has been demonstrated up until this point is that didactic teaching is an inappropriate presence in settings for young children’s music learning. What then does music ‘teaching’ look like in this new world? Literature suggests that the role of the adult in musically educational settings for young children is to 1) start with the child, 2) be a participant, 3) be a partner, 4) be a learner, 5) be a model, 6) give informational feedback instead of correcting behaviors, 7) be flexible, and 8) create a culture of belonging.

Starting with the child involves respecting what the child brings into the setting out of her own experiences. It has been established that a child is musical from birth, is a participant in a musical culture, and has the ability and the capacity to direct her own learning. Hence, it is important for adults to be sensitive to where the child is and to what the child needs (Smith, 1996). Young (2003a) hoped that “a heightened awareness of the child’s own music-making will lead to a stronger appreciation of the abilities and potentials which young children bring. This in turn will lead to changes in the ways we work” (p. 121). Those changes will ultimately affect the way the child responds to the musical environment, leading to richer experiences for both teacher and student.

A sensitive teacher becomes a participant in the play. Letting go of the concept of teacher as director requires the teacher to come alongside the child wherever she is playing and
exploring (Berger & Cooper, 2003). Children participate together in play behaviors, influencing each other’s learning (Whiteman, 2008). In the same way, an adult influences a child’s learning by taking on child-likeness and joining the play. As Marsh and Young (2006) pointed out, “competence as musical players is increased by observation of and participation in modeled play behaviors, facilitated by physical proximity to and, physical contact with other players” (p. 300). Participating in the play suggests to children that their play is valuable, a major component in their continuance of musically playful behaviors (Bainger, 2009; Berger & Cooper, 2003; Young, 2003a).

More than simply participating, however, an adult in this type of setting partners with the child. Offering support, the teacher becomes a contributing member of the child’s play. As such, collaboration between the two occurs and construction of new material emerges (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Kooistra, 2012). The interaction inherent in partnership builds reciprocity, making musical communication and musical interactions valid in the life the child (Young, 2006). Partnership results in encouragement of the child’s interactions, affirmation of her contributions and inherent musicianship, freedom for her musical agency, and cultivation of her overall musical identity (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Reynolds, 2006; Young, 2003a, 2005).

Appropriate partnership means that the adult listens to the child and responds to her musicking thoughtfully and meaningfully. This puts the teacher in the role of learner. A teacher-as-learner draws new information into his own way of being, borrows what the child does as a means of validating the child’s contributions, and provides opportunity for continued music making. Young (2003a), observing an adult interact with children, found that “a simple strategy of joining in by playing what the child did—or as near a copy as was possible—developed the play with children in sequences of turn-taking and playing simultaneously” (p.
Bainger (2009) suggested that borrowing what the child does and incorporating it into teaching repertoire is the ultimate goal of a teacher-as-learner.

Intertwined with all of these aspects, however, is the adult’s role as a model. The adult is a more knowledgeable other, having already been enculturated and trained in aspects of playing instruments and tonal and rhythmic structures. As the adult responds to the child, modeling of musical behavior occurs out of the adult’s knowledge of the culturally relevant musical system (Young, 2005). Since the child is still exploring physical approaches to instruments and the elements of rhythmic and tonal structures, the adult is key in providing the child with a picture of how to be musical in these areas. Young (2005) called adult responses to children’s music-making a “source of information for the child” (p. 295). Adult modeling of correct behaviors is crucial, because children imitate the movements and musical contributions of the adults around them (Reynolds, 2006). Ultimately, children appropriate adult musical behaviors in their “independent” musicking (Adachi, 1994, p. 28). Hence, the adult in this setting should model playing the instruments available in the space (Gordon, 2003). Further, adopting the practice of making music out of every possible opportunity is beneficial for demonstrating the logistics of music making. For instance, singing all verbal communication rather than speaking throughout the entire lesson exposes the child to musical structures continuously and organically (Young, 2003a). If singing is the standard mode of verbal communication in the setting, the child will participate accordingly.

Modeling takes the place of correction in this setting, by allowing the child to approximate and eventually achieve the ‘correct’ behavior without drawing overt attention to where the child falls short of the model. Instead of correcting, the adult plays the role of giving informational feedback. Stopping a young child’s contribution in order to direct her in the
‘correct’ way has been found to result in extinguishing the child’s exploration (Bartel, 2007; Berger & Cooper, 2003; Marsh & Young, 2006; Young, 2005). Instead, adults allow the child to continue in the exploration as an appropriate model gives continuous interactive feedback in order to scaffold the child’s behavior within the ZPD (Bartel, 2007; Whiteman, 2008; Young, 2003a). This dialogical process begins with responding to what the child is doing in an interactive and encouraging way that acknowledges the behavior as valid—though it may seem unconventional by adult standards—and leads to elaboration of the behavior toward culturally accepted musical structures. The feedback takes the form of a conversation, where the adult draws on his or her knowledge of culturally accepted musical practices. The child’s musical endeavors, then, begin to shape themselves toward the adult’s presentation in much the same way as children learn language (Reynolds et al., 2007; Young, 2005). According to Marsh and Young (2006), “over intrusive and directive interventions tend to close down children’ play, whereas interactions that the children perceive to be responsive and supportive will foster and creatively extend it” (p. 296). Remembering that children’s exploration is not about the product will help the adult allow the time needed for ‘correct’ behaviors to emerge to match the model. According to Barrett (2006),

‘fixing’ a musical idea through exact repetition is of little interest to children, and not the focus of their music making...Whilst adults might value exact repetition as indicative of musical ‘knowing’, I suggest that for children their focus in invented song making is one of elaboration, of using this practice to explore ideas and possibilities. (p. 218)

Allowing children the time that they need to approximate and approach the model requires that a teacher be flexible in conceptualizing the lesson time (Bainger, 2009). Rigidity in how the time is spent can result in children’s unfinished play, and interruption of the flow of
their exploration and learning (Berger & Cooper, 2003). Flexibility is also required regarding the teacher’s conception of how activities should happen during the lesson time. Spending the entire time on one activity is appropriate if the child is actively engaged and directing the activity. Alternatively, changing activities rapidly is also appropriate if the child’s interests shift quickly. The teacher must also be flexible regarding what the child contributes, as it may not be what the teacher was ‘looking for’. As St. John (2006) pointed out, adults working with young children should welcome “alternative contributions” (p. 255) as valid and important moments in their learning. In fact, when adults welcome the child’s innovations the learning becomes richer in its relativity to the child’s interests (Barrett, 2006; Kooistra, 2012).

Incorporating elements of starting with the child, being a participant, being a partner, being a learner, being a model, giving informational feedback instead correction, being flexible, and creating a culture of belonging, postures the adult in a role of care. Both Young (2003, 2005) and Barrett (2006) referred to improvised musical dialogue between adults and children as indicative of children’s need to make a connection through musical communication. An adult who chooses to care for a child within an educational setting will look for the ways the child finds joy and provide for it, will show affection and ability to nurture physical and emotional needs, and will watch for the child’s sense of competence and self-confidence within the setting (Bartel, 2007; Smith, 1996). A culture of care will also be defined by encouraging interactions that are “free of negative criticism, abusive put downs, silencing behaviours, and non-attention” (Bartel, 2007, p. 66). A culture of care is fostered by personal relationships as the members of the setting collect pleasurable and meaningful shared experiences. As Young (2003a) marked, “a too instrumental view of working with children can bypass how essential it is to share
pleasure” (p. 20). Ultimately, the interest in the interactions between the child and the adult motivates engagement in the music making (Denac, 2008).

**Piano Lesson Settings for Young Children**

According to Thomas-Lee (2003), research in the area of young (preschool) children and the piano have not been an area of investigation. A search of multiple databases and journals for research occurring in the decade since revealed that the situation has not changed. In an important contribution, Huang (2009) reviewed five preschool piano methods in comparison with *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* for young children (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). She found that while some of the methods incorporated more elements appropriate for early childhood than others, in comparison to the standards defined as appropriate practice for young children, the curricula were lacking. She concluded that a persistent “imposition of the next grade curriculum” (p. 304) and/or a “watered down curriculum” (p. 304) in the preschool piano methods encouraged the possibility of “miseducation” (p. 340) of children. Miseducation, according to Huang, is a neglect of children’s developmental needs.

In an earlier research study, Thomas-Lee (2003) reviewed 9 methods available for working with preschool children at the piano. She evaluated them according to the inclusion of five elements: listening, creating, moving, singing, and playing the keyboard. She found that each of the methods contained opportunities for most of these elements, though to a varying degree. Of particular note, she found that newer methods contained fewer opportunities for creativity and movement than older methods. She concluded that none offered a comprehensively appropriate approach to preschool piano learning. Further, she found that some of the methods available for this group of children were difficult to obtain.
The limitation of research notwithstanding, the topic of preschool piano students has been addressed in the practitioner journals. Balodis (2006), Clark (2010), and Zander (2010) discussed the benefits of early childhood experiences in a group exploratory setting before formal piano lessons are begun. These authors recommended that piano teachers consider teaching these types of classes, in order to provide potential piano students with a strong musical foundation. Johnson (2006) reinforced the importance of early childhood music experiences for the development of well-rounded musicians.

Ajero (2011) discussed his early attempts at teaching preschool children at the piano as difficult, with “less-than-stellar results” (p. 40). Based on further experiences with his own child, however, he realized that early exposure to musical processes helps in preparing children for piano training. He recommended singing and movement experiences as preparation for piano training, and maintained that children need to know the songs before they are shown how to play them on the piano. Initial songs on the piano should move by step or involve repeated notes. Another approach is to have the children “fill-in-the-blanks” (p. 40) on more difficult songs, where the adult provides the more complex melodic material and the child plays the accessible parts. He further suggested that teachers play duets with young children, in order to develop their listening and rhythmic skills. Ultimately, Ajero felt that positive early experiences are important for children’s success overall, and suggested teachers provide encouragement. Speaking particularly of the challenge of teaching his own child, he recommended that adults “suppress” (p. 41) frustration over lack of success, and instead work to provide feedback that ultimately enables children to develop their own internal feedback processes.

Brown (2006) maintained that including playful but purposeful activity within a piano lesson setting is important for building children’s overall musical foundation. She incorporated
movement activities that focused on a variety of musical styles, guiding children to physically observe concepts such as loud and soft. The movements she described involved “sweeping arm movements” (p. 10), clapping, head patting, thigh slapping, and knee and shoulder tapping. A variety of physical approaches to beat are also described—stepping, stomping, and jumping. Brown also incorporated songs with action directive texts into her lessons, and offered an example for becoming familiar with left and right hands. Regarding the piano, Brown included a variety of possibilities for playfully coming to know the topography of the keyboard. She further recommended duet playing for the development of the ear, and inclusion of stories and rhymes for the purposes of creativity. Brown encouraged teachers to include “quickly paced activities” (p. 11), but slow introduction of new concepts. Further, she maintained that a variety of approaches to concepts are appropriate for children’s successful learning and for the development of a musical vocabulary.

Briscoe (2012) considered lessons with young children to be beneficial, and described for practitioners how the process of incorporating young children into studio settings might occur. She recommended an interview with both parent and child, and expressed the importance of parents taking on the responsibility of attending lessons and practicing with the child. Readiness in her view was indicated by a child’s ability to “approach the instrument willingly, participate in an action song with parent and teacher, and observe another student's lesson for fifteen minutes while playing quietly” (p. 29). She recommended a combination of group and individual experiences, with individual experiences fifteen to twenty minutes in length and involving activities off the bench. Recommendations for the process of teaching included breaking material into “small teaching points” (p. 29), using rote songs so students could concentrate on hand position and posture and to develop memory skills, incorporating games, and providing
students with awareness of the timeline of the lesson. Briscoe also indicated that students should not be forced to participate within the group setting. Throughout her discussion, Briscoe addressed the level of attention and focus necessary for a young child to successfully participate in a piano lesson.

Millares (2012) addressed the issue of attention span specifically by reviewing research regarding children’s attention span and applying it to piano teaching settings for 5-7 year old children. Her review of research found that when given a task while listening to background music, preschool children were less able than older children to “filter out the musical distraction and focus on given tasks” (p. 21). The research suggested that attention is a developmental process. Earlier in this process, children’s attention is guided by “reflex and undirected exploration of the environment” (p. 22); further in the process, children’s attention is guided by “controlled and directed attention toward a goal” (p. 21). Investigating these processes in a piano lesson setting, Millares found that the greatest inattention occurred when children were asked to follow directions. These children were involved musically, but their approach was to engage in exploration, creation, and the doing of music on their own terms, instead of the specific activity in which the teacher had asked them to participate. Millares also observed children who were distracted by elements of the environment away from the piano. These self-initiated distractions were musically related, but in opposition to the requests of the teacher. Further, Millares found that inattention particularly occurred between the teacher’s activities, and after fifteen minutes of lesson time. Millares recommended that teachers re-conceptualize traditional lesson operations, “with the expectation that we sit still, follow instructions and persist until we get it right” (p. 23), since her observations suggested that children are not trying to be disruptive but are instead following the impulses of their developmental level. Further, she
recommended that teachers provide an environment of dialogue and choice, where students are free to explore and create.

In summary, piano teachers of young children agree that early experiences are beneficial for young children’s overall musical learning, but that children’s attention and ability can be limited. Recommendations to meet children’s limitations include breaking material down into smaller pieces, incorporating playful activities that include singing and movement, and providing elements of creativity and choice. Research regarding preschool piano methods indicated that some of the recommendations for early childhood practice were incorporated into the methods, but that these methods may ultimately neglect children’s developmental needs.

Summary

Meaning making is foundational to learning, as significant moments form connections in the daily environments of children (Dunst et al., 2001; Fromberg, 2002; Louis, 2009). Meaning making is an active process that can be described in terms of its quality, and is found in intentions, interactions, and emotional responses as well as levels of ownership, engagement and function (Dunst et al., 2001; Fink-Jensen, 2007; Jambor, 2000; Walsh, 2002). Meaningful moments are found in the places that children express interest, and lead to motivation for learning and prolonged engagement (Dunst et al., 2001; Fromberg, 2002; Louis, 2009; Sommer et al., 2010).

Meaning is fostered in settings that allow children to thrive. Thriving occurs when children are given freedom to express their individuality and agency (Emilson, 2007; Smith, 2002; Sommer et al., 2010; Whitfield, 2009), and involves allowing children the freedom to direct their own creative behavior (Stinson, 2002; Tinworth, 1997; Whitfield, 2009). Providing children with opportunity for success involves the presence of an adult who encourages free
exploration and demonstrates extensions of behaviors (Louis, 2009; Walsh, 2002). Given the space and time to freely explore, children can focus on the process of their learning over a product (Louis, 2009; Sommer et al., 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1976). More than skill-acquisition, a child engages in prolonged process in ways that make the materials meaningful and grant personal ownership (Elkind, 2007; Stinson, 2002; Walsh, 2002). This occurs as children engage in mobile and active ways of being (Bresler, 2004; Hebert, 2009), which enables their familiarity with the domain to grow (Elkind, 2007). Overall, children thrive when they are able to participate in the above ways and are situated in a context where they are secure in their belonging (Jambor, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004; Sommer et al., 2010).

Play is the means through which children make sense of the world, and is how their learning occurs (Elkind, 2007; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Sommer et al., 2010; Whitfield, 2009). The qualities of fruitful play are freedom, spontaneity, and joy, the demonstration of which indicates the fullness of childhood (Ellermeyer, 2003; Jambor, 2000). Play situations are child driven (Elkind, 2007); hence child-oriented learning experiences are crucial for allowing children to learn (Elkind, 2007; Tinworth, 1997). Teacher control is ideally limited in these settings (Sommer et al., 2010). The model of informal learning out of everyday life is useful when considering how young children learn and how adults function in their learning processes (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005; Kerchner & Abril, 2009; Stamp, 1993; Sutton-Smith, 1976). The role the adult takes in responding to the play of children should be one of participating with the child as they play, and not one of asserting preconceived rules (Ellermeyer, 1993). By encouraging, challenging, supporting, and accepting the contributions of children, adults can draw children’s attention to important elements in contingent responsiveness (Dunst et al., 2001; Ellermeyer, 1993; Sommer et al., 2010).
In music settings with young children, these principles also apply. Acknowledging children’s ways of being musical is crucial to participating with them and responding to them in encouraging ways (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Campbell, 1998a, 2007; Gordon, 2003; Gluschankof, 2002; Young, 2003a). Children’s musical behaviors are bodily (Campbell, 2007; Young, 2003a) and involve ranges of pitch, timbre, dynamics, and rhythm that can be unconventional by adult standards (Barrett, 2006; Gluschankof, 2002, Kooistra, 2012; Young, 2006). Children invent, transform, and incorporate established song into their musical behaviors, often as a part of their play (Barrett, 2006; Bjørkvold, 1989; Campbell, 2007; Kooistra, 2010, 2012; Young, 2003a).

Providing children with time and space to develop their musicianship involves coming alongside of them, responding to them and offering them opportunity to extend their behaviors (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Reynolds et al., 2007; Young, 2003a). Their development involves an interaction of biological conditions (Bannan & Woodward, 2009; Gordon, 2003; Hannon & Trainor, 2007; Trainor, 2005; Welch, 1998) and environment (Bannan & Woodward, 2009; Gordon, 2003; Trainor & Corrigall, 2010). Hence, for children to develop a deep understanding of and ability in the musical language of the culture, they need to be immersed in rich musical environments and be given opportunity to practice musical responses (Gordon, 2003; Mills & McPherson, 2006; Reynolds et al., 2007; Sawyer, 2005). As children participate and grow in a musical culture, they develop a musical identity (Hargreaves et al., 2002; Lamont, 2002; O’Neill, 2002).

Ultimately, children make musical meaning as they participate in a musical culture (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; Kerchner & Abril, 2009; St. John, 2006). Musical meaning cannot be separated from communicative meaning (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Young, 2005). Hence,
attending to where children demonstrate attunement provides insight into how they are making sense of the musical environment they are in and their place in it (Fink-Jensen, 2007). Musical educative experiences for young children, then, can be structured on principles of informal learning (Folkestad, 2005; Green, 2008) with opportunities for musical play (Berger & Cooper, 2003; Marsh & Young, 2006). Such experiences can involve free opportunity for vocal play, instrumental play, and movement (Gordon, 2003; Marsh & Young, 2006; Young, 2003a).

Regarding piano lessons for young children, preschool piano methods have been found to include some of the elements recommended in early childhood research literature (Thomas-Lee, 2003). Overall, however, these methods are influenced by traditions of teaching older children, and may hinder young children having a developmentally appropriate experience of a piano lesson setting (Huang, 2009). The practitioner literature recommended incorporation of playful activity for the learning of concepts, singing and movement experiences, smaller units of information, and inclusion of children’s desire for creativity (Brown, 2006; Briscoe, 2012; Millares, 2012).

**Connecting to the purpose of the study.** The purpose of this study—to seek insight into what children find meaningful and valuable when participating in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting—was derived out of a desire to understand the elements of childhood and of children’s music making discussed in this chapter. Hence, this chapter provides an overview of important elements regarding the nature of musicking, musical development, musical identity, and musical meaning in the life of young children. The chapter further provides insight into how children may thrive for lifelong musicianship at the piano, within this informal and child-oriented space. Finally, the literature reviewed here provides a foundation for the
appropriateness of an informal and child-oriented piano lesson setting, and the purpose of investigating the value the setting may hold for processes of readiness.
Chapter 3: Conducting the Study

Purpose Statement and Guiding Question

The purpose of this study was to seek insight into what children find meaningful and valuable when participating in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting. I aimed to locate the places where the children demonstrated meaning-making, by looking for the ways they engaged in the lesson setting. The purpose was structured on the foundation that a child will demonstrate interest where her meaning is being made, and that meaning-making is essential for deep learning processes to occur (Fink-Jensen, 2007; Hedegaard, 2009; Sokolowski, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). This purpose was rooted in my overall research interest: to understand what is valuable and meaningful for learning from the perspective of young children, in order to appropriately guide their musical learning in piano lesson settings. In order to achieve this purpose I embraced a qualitative approach to the study, adopting ethnographical and phenomenological traditions of method. I sought insight into what children find to be valuable and meaningful in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting by asking the question: What is the nature of a child’s engagement in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting?

The relationship of meaning making and engagement is found in the reality that human beings are driven by a need to make sense out of their environment (Dissanayake, 2000; Jambor, 2000; Walsh, 2002). Since making meaning is an internal and abstract process, meaningful events can only be observed in the places where attention, interest, and engagement are demonstrated (Dunst et al., 2001; Fink-Jensen, 2007; Fromberg, 2002). The quality of interactions, emotions, ownership, and purpose indicate the events that children find to be meaningful (Bresler, 2008; Dunst et al., 2001; Fromberg, 2002; Louis, 2009). Hence, the
guiding question regarding engagement is an observable means of seeking the ways that the children made meaning within the setting.

**Methodological Considerations**

Given the socio-cultural perspective underpinning this study and the purpose of seeking meaning-making, methodological considerations for this study fell in the paradigm of social constructivism (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). As such, the research is specific to the context, and I as the researcher have an established role in the setting, the process of inquiry, and the interpretation of meaning from the collected data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Glesne, 2006). Further, the design of the study was influenced by qualitative traditions of ethnography and phenomenology (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, 2001; Glesne, 2006; Van Manen, 1990). The combination of approaches is deemed appropriate for qualitative work, given the needs of the study (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Maxwell, 2005).

The needs of this particular study were unique in that the setting was contrived. The intention of the setting was to allow the children to participate as naturally as possible within it, but the setting itself was one that I introduced to them. Within this contrived setting, I was interested in a) understanding the culture of children and how it interacted with the setting as the children engaged in it, and b) the meanings the children made within the setting. Hence, ethnographical traditions of inquiry enabled me to gather data from the children as a participant-observer engaging in long-term participation in the setting, and to inductively arrive at the meanings the children made in the setting via a richly descriptive text regarding their engagement (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Emerson et al., 1995, 2001; Glesne 2006). Phenomenological traditions enabled me to dig deeply and rigorously into the meaning of the
children’s *lived experience* of the setting via the use of *anecdote*. Other phenomenological practices adopted for the study were the method of *line-by-line* analysis, and four *lifeworld existentials* used as a lens for identifying themes (Danaher & Briod, 2005; Van Manen, 1990).

**Ethnographical influences on method.** The role of the researcher in ethnographic practice is one of participant-observer (Emerson, et al., 1995). Placing myself closely in the setting, I was given a first-hand view of how the children engaged in the process of the lessons. Further, the ethnographic practice of participant-observation involves the researcher in the role of *scribe*, recording the processes found in the setting (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Having been immersed in the setting, then, I “[produced] written accounts and descriptions” (p. 352) of what occurred there for the purpose of “bringing [this setting] to others” (p. 352).

Due to my heavy participant role in the setting, I utilized video recordings to capture the interactions and attunements that occurred in the setting for my observation (Glesne, 2006). I recorded my observations as transcripts of the video, and supplemented them with journaling that occurred immediately following each lesson, as well as formal and informal interviews with the children and their parents. These ethnographic practices of data collection resulted in a body of what could be termed *fieldnotes*, in both *inscription* (regarding activities and events) and *transcription* (regarding spoken dialogue) (Emerson, et al., 1995, 2001). From this large body of data, the analysis was culled via a process of analytic description and interpretation (Emerson, et al., 1995, 2001; Wolcott, 2009).

Wolcott (2009) recommended a well-balanced approach of systematic analysis and inductive interpretation, where “the basis of symbols and meanings upon which anthropologists derive patterns of cultural behavior…can be described and examined analytically, but discerning the patterns themselves is a matter of interpretation” (p. 30). I adopted analytic practices from
the phenomenological work of Van Manen (1990), which are discussed below. The work of interpretation—the “sense-making” (Wolcott, 2009, p. 30)—was derived out of the themes that emerged via the analysis, and the subsequent description of what occurred in the setting regarding each theme.

**Phenomenological influences on method.** The question that guided the study—What is the nature of a child’s engagement in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting?—was directly influenced by phenomenological thought. Questions regarding the “the nature or essence of the experience of learning (so that I can now better understand what this particular learning experience is like for these children)” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10) are rooted in phenomenological purposes of gaining deep understanding regarding how meaning is structured in human lived experience (Danaher & Briod, 2005; Sokolowski, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). That understanding is garnered by description of and reflection on “the expressions of lived experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 25).

Expressions of lived experience are sought in the actions and events in which that expression occurs. Sokolowski (2000) explained this as a location of the mind:

> Phenomenology shows that the mind is a public thing, that it acts and manifests itself out in the open, not just inside its own confines. Everything is outside…The mind and the world are correlated with another [which leads to] reason, evidence, and truth. (p. 10)

In this understanding, mind interacts with environment through an “intentionality of consciousness” where “appearances” belong to “being” (p. 15). Intentionality can be found in expression, because “every act of consciousness is directed toward an object of some kind” (p. 9). Intentionality is the space where “the split between person and world—between subjective and objective thinking” (Danaher & Briod, 2005, p. 219) is overcome.
The expressions and intentionality of the children were seen in the ways that they engaged with the setting, and explained the places where they were invested in making meaning. Since phenomenology is “the study of what it *means* to be a human being, not just a study of consciousness or knowing” (Danaher & Briod, 2005, p. 220), and since meaning is embedded in the situation and in intentionality of expression (Bresler, 1995; Van Manen, 1990), the *data* in phenomenological research is the lived human experience (Van Manen, 1990). Hence, the lived experience is “both the source and the object” (p. 53) of study. The expressions that occur in the setting are the objects that are designated for description and reflection, as are the actions and events.

In this study, these “objects” were collected with ethnographic techniques of video recording, inscription, and transcription, but the analysis was influenced by phenomenological practices of *anecdote* and the *line-by-line* approach\(^\text{14}\) (Danaher & Briod, 2005; Van Manen, 1990). *Anecdote* makes “comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 116) as experiences are recorded in the writing of descriptive story, and for this study was used to illuminate episodes of the video-recorded lessons. The text then became the object to be interpreted. For this study, the analysis and interpretation was guided by the *line-by-line* approach, which was specified by Van Manen (1990) as a means of “uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of a phenomenon” (p. 92).

The line-by-line approach enabled a transformation of the anecdote from the subjective experience to objective statements of meaning, and enabled me to move from a subjective to an objective perspective. Ultimately, the back and forth movement between subjective and objective, looking from part to whole and back again, provided me with a deep immersion into

\(^{14}\) Detailed description of these aspects of the study can be found in the *Data Analysis* section of this chapter.
the data. This process can be described as a movement from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude, where a natural attitude is the world as we experience it in our everyday lives, and in everyday ways. Conversely, a phenomenological attitude moves us outside our everyday experience, to “look at what we normally look through” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 50).

Further, both the uncovering and the organization of themes was guided by Van Manen’s (1990) fundamental properties of lived experience, “by way of which all human beings experience the world” (p. 102). Van Manen called these properties *Lifeworld Existentials*, of which there are four: 1) lived space, 2) lived body, 3) lived time, and 4) lived other. *Lived space* is more than dimensions of a room; it has to do with the space we feel. Lived space is our embodied understanding of space in ways that shape our experience within the dimensional space. Reflection on lived space has to do with “the nature of the lived space that renders that particular experience its quality of meaning” (p. 103). *Lived body* is the corporeality of encountering our environments and others through our bodies, “the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world” (p. 103). Our bodies both reveal and conceal something about our being in the world. Reflection on lived body has to do with what is revealed and what is concealed in a given experience. *Lived time* is subjective time, unrelated to physical dimensions of clock-oriented time keeping. It is based on a person’s experience of time, the quality of how the time is spent, the interactive landscape of past/present/future, and the individual’s placement on that continuum. *Lived other* involves interactions with others in interpersonal space, and the bodily relational experience of the other that “allows us to transcend our selves” (p. 105). These four elements of experience interact with each other as
“differentiated but not separated”, forming “an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld—our lived world” (p. 105).

The boundaries of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other enabled me to look objectively at the data, turning my lens from one to another. Due to the complexity of the setting, the differentiated dimensions of these fundamental properties of lived experience were crucial in separating out what was occurring for the purposes of description and reflection. Describing and reflecting on the anecdotal episodes via these dimensions of lived experience provided me with a strong foundation for interpreting the data in terms of holistic meanings made by the children.

The Participants

Two children participated in this study. I initially encountered both children in public spaces, and had witnessed their musical engagement first hand. Their selection for the purposes of this research was intentional, in that they were drawn to music making and to the piano. Informed consent was obtained from the parents of each child, and the protocol was approved through the Pennsylvania State University IRB.

Eden. Eden was 4 years 6 months (4.6) at the start of our lessons, and was 5.5 upon completion of the data collection. I first encountered Eden through stories from her mother. Eden’s mother was the professor of a writing class I took at Penn State during my course work. Knowing that I was studying music education, she told stories of Eden’s love for music. One day, Eden came to class with her mother and sat in the back of the room, making an impression on me as she sang to herself while she played. Eden’s mother told me about Eden’s interest in the piano and the music at her church, and I asked if they would be willing to take part in my dissertation research once I was ready to start. She agreed. Approximately four months went
by, when Eden’s mother contacted me to ask if I was still interested in having Eden participate in
my study; if I was not, she was wondering if I would be willing to give Eden piano lessons since
“She is making up songs on a daily basis, and saying things like ‘I wish I could play that [on
piano]’ and ‘I wish I could play accordion in a real band!’ Yes, she has a kiddie accordion.” We
reaffirmed our intention to have Eden be a part of the study.

**Personality characteristics.** Eden was a serious child, but her seriousness was very
sweet. She had a poetic soul, with a touch of melancholy. She was quietly relational; slightly
guarded, she nevertheless tended to cuddle up to me in moments of connection. She was an
introspective child who thought deeply, and was able to articulate her thoughts with clear verbal
language. In her thoughtfulness and articulateness, she demonstrated awareness of broader
contexts than just her own world. This awareness expressed itself in a careful conscientiousness.
She desired to be correct, to the point where she demonstrated wariness of being incorrect. Her
mother shared stories with me of how she refused to walk or to tie her shoes until she was
absolutely ready. Eden herself told me that she did not think she would ever read, and her
mother told me that she had begun refusing to try.

**Home and family situation.** Eden was the oldest child of academic parents. Her mother
was pregnant with their second child during our first semester of lessons, and gave birth to a
baby boy during the summer hiatus. When I returned in the fall, Eden was a new kindergartner
with a new baby brother. Eden’s parents were very calm and self-controlled people, and were
very pleasant in their welcome of me. Eden’s mother helped her to interact with me,
emphasizing manners and appropriate social interactions. Their home exuded a sense of careful
order for the sake of healthy living, but was not overly pristine to the point of discomfort.
Ultimately, it seemed to me that their home prioritized simple organized living, with space for
Eden to freely engage with her toys, and that they were a family who prioritized good relationship with guests.

The piano was in a room at the front of the house. It was the living room area, but it appeared that most of the living occurred in the kitchen and family room parts of the house. The living room contained some couches and many bookshelves. Besides housing the piano, Eden’s art desk was added to the room during the second semester of lessons. The desk kept all of Eden’s art supplies. On the bookshelf closest to the piano there was a CD player (at my request) and Eden’s other musical instruments. These included a child-sized accordion, child-sized guitar, tambourine, a large drum that opened to contain other percussion instruments, and a xylophone.

**Musical background.** Eden’s family valued music. Her mother shared a video on the blog of their family in a moment of “family band.” The mother indicated that this was not a frequent occurrence, but it nicely depicted their family engaging in musicking together. Eden’s father sang and played *Yellow Submarine*\(^\text{15}\), and her mother sang along with creative harmonies. Eden sat on the ottoman in front of her father and next to the music book. She sang along on the melody just slightly behind her parents, attending to the words, straining for the high notes, bouncing up and down as she sang. She then walked over to the shelf to get her own guitar. She brought it back to the ottoman, and played and sang along with her parents, very seriously, her head bowed over the strings as she picked them with her pick, her hair falling forward. When the song ended, she dropped her head entirely down onto the ottoman, in a gesture of complete doneness.

\(^{15}\) Words and music by Lennon-McCartney
One day Eden told me that her father played the guitar, and that he participated in worship band settings. I saw evidence of this on some days when I arrived at their house and moved chord charts of worship music from the piano to the basket of music books that sat on the side of the room. Her mother sang with the local community chorale, and Eden told me about this one day when she showed me a drawing she made one night when her mother was at rehearsal. The drawing of the members of the choir, singing in a U shape, hung on the refrigerator.

Eden herself participated in musical settings outside of her home. She occasionally referred to sophisticated songs from her school as well as some children’s songs. She also participated in the “Angel Choir” at her church. She loved to sing, and created complex compositions, often while driving in the car. Her mother shared these with me; Eden singing at the top of her lungs, about her new little brother, making new friends, God’s love, texting on her phone, carnivals, a house in her neighborhood, that God made the world for us to enjoy, that Jesus still loves us even if we have a runny nose or don’t listen to our parents. On occasion she accompanied her singing with the piano or other the instruments that were kept in her music room. She frequently expressed interest in the process of music making, and of how people know the music that they know.

**Lesson logistics.** My weekly lessons with Eden were mostly consistent throughout the data collection period, with only a few weeks off for travel or sickness. Sometimes Eden would greet me at my car with excitement, but sometimes she would be doing something else that she expressed the desire to continue despite my arrival. Overall, she was very good about transitioning to the lesson time. She had a clear idea of beginning and end, and for the most part remained in the room for that time. When I arrived, she would wait for me in the hallway as I
took off my shoes or coat, and then walk ahead of me into the room. Sometimes at the end of the lesson we would hang out in the room for a while, talking with her mom, but towards the end of the semester she would leave the room when the lesson was over to find her mom in the kitchen or to return to her living room, where her toys were.

Her mother was almost always present and took the primary parental role. The father was present most of the time, and also interacted with me. The mother sat in the lesson during the first lessons, but ultimately was nearby in an adjoining room. Both of the parents were mostly available to become a part of the lesson if Eden called on them. At the end of most lessons, Eden’s mother would join us and comment on something she heard during the lesson, mainly related to the piano or to Eden’s behavior.

**Kathleen.** Kathleen was 4 years 2 month (4.2) at the start of our lessons, and was 5.1 at the end of data collection. Her mother often brought her to social gatherings of which I was also a part. Twice I observed her dance with uncontained joy while music was being made in the environment, inviting others to join her. My first connection with Kathleen occurred at a dinner where she looked at me and said “I know you! You played the piano for Mrs. Whitney Hertz!” I looked back at her with pleasant yet slightly bewildered surprise while her mother explained to me that they had been present for a voice recital on which I had—indeed—played the piano. After that encounter, Kathleen and I had brief encounters, and our rapport developed to the point where she knew me, would say hello with a giant smile, and sometimes request for me to pick her up for a hug. Approximately five months before the study began, her mother contacted me regarding piano lessons, something we had previously talked about together. I agreed to meet with them, and Kathleen and I shared a brief time playing the piano together. I explained my

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16 Name has been changed.
teaching approach to her parents, and asked them if they would be willing to be a part of the dissertation study. They agreed.

**Personality characteristics.** Kathleen was an exuberantly joyful child. “Wahoo!” appeared frequently as a favorite phrase. She had a very direct demeanor, and did not beat around the bush. She was determined, even stubborn, and exhibited a high level of “tough”. Nonetheless, she carried an abundance of warm maturity in her interactions with people, and very simply and sweetly demonstrated love for them. The sparkle in her eye indicated an easy sense of humor and fun. She was a very physical child, with high energy and concise movements. She loved to dance. She also loved the mechanics of the CD player and video camera, and spent quite a bit of our lesson time attending to them.

**Home and family situation.** Kathleen was an only child, and her family situation was complicated during our first semester. Her parents were separated, and for the first semester her lessons took place at her father’s apartment on one of the nights she spent with him. Kathleen’s parents were reserved people, who always greeted me pleasantly and made me feel welcome. A sense of weariness hovered around them as they interacted with me, but their relationship with Kathleen was clearly one of joy and simple love. My observations indicated to me that they were making an active effort to keep the emotional and physical effects of a difficult season apart from their interactions with Kathleen. Her parents reunited over the hiatus between semesters, however, and for the second semester my lessons with Kathleen occurred at their house. The father, however, had taken a job a long distance away, returning home on the weekends. I did not encounter him during the second semester.

**Musical background.** Kathleen’s family valued music. Her father played the piano. Her mother also played the piano, and had been taking voice lessons until just before the lessons
started. Kathleen had been taken to a variety of musical events, including a classical voice recital that I accompanied. It was clear that she sang in her preschool class, as the songs she introduced to me were songs she learned there. The songs were familiar children’s songs, both traditional and Christian.

**Lesson logistics.** Kathleen had fewer lessons than Eden due to family factors and sickness. She typically was eating her snack when I arrived, and so we had time to comfortably chat before we began the lesson. When she was ready, she would run to the piano area in order to begin. Often Kathleen expressed that she did not want me to leave. First, she would not want to stop dancing. Once we had officially finished the lesson, however, she would typically go with me to the door and hang on my leg or want to hug me good-bye. Often I would need to separate myself from her in order to leave.

During the first semester the lessons occurred at her father’s apartment. Her mother would typically arrive shortly after the lesson had begun, however, in order to observe what was occurring. The room was lined with couches, where both of her parents would often sit during the lesson while working on their computers. Sometimes her parents would be interacting with each other and sometimes not. During the second semester, her father was no longer in the apartment, and the lessons took place at their family’s home. The piano was housed in what was officially the dining room, though there was no dining table present. For most of this semester her parents were preparing to sell their home, and so there were often a variety of boxes and random possessions in the room. By the end of the semester the house was on the market, and the house was kept immaculately simple.

During the first semester, Kathleen’s bedroom was down a long hallway from the lesson room. This did not stop her from going to it in the middle of the lesson, though it did limit the
frequency. For the second semester, Kathleen’s bedroom was right next to the area where the piano was, and so she spent considerable time running in and out of it. Her mother was always in the adjoining kitchen during our lessons, making dinner. Kathleen’s parents took a very hands-off approach to the lessons. I never heard them comment to Kathleen regarding what we had done or her behavior during the lesson. They simply let us have the time together.

**The Setting**

**Lesson logistics.** The lessons occurred once a week for 30 minutes in each child’s home. At least one of the parents was present, and was involved to varying degree. During the first semester (January to June), one or more parent was often in the room for most of or the entire lesson. This faded by the end of the semester, and by the second semester (September to December) the children and I were the only occupants of the space, with one or more parent in a nearby room.

**Lesson planning.** Based on my experiences of the early childhood class described in Chapter One, and on recommended principles for music education of young children, I designed the setting to be flexible and to include musical elements posited as necessary for the musical development of young children (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; Gordon, 2003; Hornbach, 2011; Reynolds et al., 2007; Valerio et al., 1998; Velez, 2011; Young, 2003a). I considered my responsibility in the setting as two-fold. First, I was there to familiarize the children with a varied musical vocabulary and with aspects of playing the piano. Second, I was there to be a suggestive guide regarding what could occur during the time.

In order to ensure that these aspects were happening, I felt I needed to come to the lesson prepared with possibilities for our time together. Hence, prior to each lesson I outlined a
framework of possible activities. The outline included songs in a variety of tonalities and meters; movement activities; and piano activities that explored musical concepts of dynamics, tone, tempo, and physical approaches. Repetition of activities from week to week was typical. The framework evolved as the lessons did, incorporating activities that were co-constructed between us and became standard. Activities could also fall to the wayside as the lessons progressed, either for lack of interest or because we had moved on.

The framework was flexible, and was not meant to be a strict director of the time, if used at all. The songs and activities included were intended for me to have ideas at hand, should an idea be needed. More often than not I did not even refer to the outline throughout the lesson, for a variety of reasons. One reason was that the girl’s ideas were plentiful enough that the framework became unnecessary, or that they returned to a previous activity (or activities) I had not included in the outline for the day. Another was that the girl’s contributions often caused me to respond in the moment, extending what they had offered, and spontaneously creating something new. We would often bounce reciprocal ideas off of each other, creating something entirely new in the process. There was the possibility that either they or I would spontaneously incorporate a lesson material such as the beanbags, coming up with an idea in the moment or returning to a previous activity I had not thought to include in the framework for the day. Songs were readily available to my memory without relying on the framework, sometimes inspired by a new stuffed animal or a topic of conversation the girls had introduced. Additionally, the singing and rhythmic chanting frequently occurred as spontaneous improvisation.

Ultimately, the flexibility of the design allowed me to be mindful of where the children were leading and to respond to them appropriately, given my responsibilities as the music

17 See Appendix A
specialist. It was not unusual for the girls to participate in the setting for extended lengths without singing or playing the piano, for example. In these moments, I was mindful to sing to them or to play the piano myself, as a gentle suggestion to respond in kind. The purpose of the framework, then, was to equip me with activity suggestions if there was a gap in the flow of the time, and to incorporate musical elements even if the children were not.

**Lesson materials and activities.** Each child was given a cloth box in which to keep lesson materials. The boxes remained with the children at each child’s home throughout the study. The contents of the box were flexible, depending on what occurred in the lesson time, between lessons, and what the child chose to add or subtract. I contributed the following to the box, based out of my previous experiences with young children and for musical/pianistic purposes:

- Animal cards, for the purpose of creatively exploring high and low sounds, vocally, physically, and on the keyboard
- Scarves, for the purpose of moving to recorded music
- Alphabet cards, for the purpose of becoming familiar with the piano alphabet
- Beanbags, for the purpose of approaching the keys with arm weight, and for rhythmic tossing back and forth between adult and child
- Drums and sticks, for the purpose of rhythmic practice and as a musical instrument
- Stuffed animals (bear and mouse), for the purpose of exploring high and low, and for approaching the keyboard with arm weight
- Bells, for the purpose of musical interest
- Composer Book, for the purpose of inspiring sound stories at the piano

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18 For further description, see Appendix B
• CDs, for the purpose of listening, and for dancing
• Finger Puppets, for the purpose of rhythmic conversation, and for approaching the keyboard with rounded fingers
• Key Sticks, thin columns of construction paper for the purpose of laying out on and playing specific white keys

Though I contributed the materials with specific purposes in mind, I considered their use to be flexible as well. At times I used the materials as I had conceived of them, but the girls did not always follow my example. Sometimes they did, with either covert or overt suggestion from me; sometimes, however, they used the materials for their own purposes or in their own ways.

The songs and activities in the framework were chosen for musical and pianistic purposes. Songs were chosen in major, minor, dorian, and mixolydian tonalities, and in duple, triple, compound, and unusual meters. Rhythmic chants were also chosen in duple, triple, compound, and unusual meters. Movements were incorporated into songs via directive texts (such as “I’m gonna swim”) or through the addition of physical materials (such as the beanbags or scarves) as we sang. Movement activities also included marching to the direction of the drums (steady beat or unsteady beat, loud or soft, fast or slow), and dancing with scarves along to recordings. Possible piano activities included: to create piano sounds for the animal pictures, to play with the stuffed mouse and stuffed bear on the keyboard, to play a favorite song, “1 Dance, 1 Play”—where one of us would play the piano and the other would dance along, to create piano sound stories using the composer book, to play a piano duet or a duet with another instrument, and to place key sticks on the white keys as guides for playing specific keys.

Method
**Data collection.** The data were collected between January 2012 through December 2012, with a break during July and August. These dates reflect typical lesson semesters, and allowed for a long-term observation of the children’s participation in the lesson.

My original plan was to collect data of the child’s experience in a variety of ways. I intended to collect stories of the child’s interaction with our lesson setting from myself as the teacher, the parents, preschool teachers, and potentially other miscellaneous adults identified by the parents as important in the child’s daily life. The modes of collection were to be video recordings of the lesson, video recordings by the parents, journaling, parent/teacher blogging of musical moments between lessons, as well as informal and formal conversational interviews with all the adults involved and with the child.

In reality, however, these various sources did not play out as I had intended. Ultimately, I as the teacher collected data via video recordings and journaling. Eden’s parents contributed somewhat significantly on the blog during the first semester of the study, writing down conversations that occurred with Eden and posting videos of Eden’s musical behaviors. Due to a new baby and other life factors, however, they did not contribute to the blog during the second semester. Eden’s teachers chose not to take part in the blog, and kept a journal instead. The journal, however, was not extensive, and I gained very little information from it. Kathleen’s parents declined to participate in the blog, but did keep a journal of Kathleen’s musical behaviors. These journals, while affirming that musical thought and singing were a part of Kathleen’s everyday life, were not rich enough to contribute insight to the data analysis. I did not gain access to Kathleen’s school and teachers.

Each lesson was video recorded. Immediately following the lesson and before viewing the video I journaled any events that stood out to me, as reflection on the experience. I also
occasionally engaged the children in conversation at the conclusion of the lesson while the video was still running regarding events that stood out to me, in order to capture their perspective. Following the lesson, I watched the video and wrote a transcription describing the activities and events of the lesson and the dialogue that occurred, keeping memos of moments that stood out as particularly demonstrative of engagement or disengagement. As I saw the parents from week to week, I engaged them in spontaneous and informal conversation regarding any interesting happenings related to the lessons or music in general they had noticed through the week, or during the lesson. These conversations were most often recorded on the video and included in the video transcript. On the occasions that the conversations occurred after the camera had been turned off, I made sure to paraphrase them to the best of my memory in my journal. I had a formal interview with Eden’s mother at the end of each semester, and a formal interview with Kathleen’s mother at the beginning of the second\(^{19}\). I listened to and journaled key points of the first interview with each parent\(^{20}\); the second interview with Eden’s mother was transcribed.

**Data analysis.** The use of anecdote in phenomenological research functions as a description of lived experience. Danaher and Briod (2005) recommended the process of anecdotal data analysis for research with children. The aim of this analysis is to make essential themes systematically explicit in each anecdote, also referred to as a *situated structure*. As anecdotes are analyzed and “read in the light” (p. 229) of each other, “a *general structure* will emerge” (p. 220). In order to uncover thematic aspects of the phenomenon being described, Van Manen (1990) suggested the analytic approach of the *line-by-line approach* (p. 93). In such an approach the anecdote is analyzed by breaking the anecdote down sentence by sentence, and asking the question, “what does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or

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\(^{19}\) Due to life events in their family, I was unable to schedule an interview at the end of each semester.

\(^{20}\) Due to technical difficulties, these first interviews were not transcribed.
experience being described?” (p. 93). In this process, the sensitive researcher must “capture not only the words and actions of others, but their intentions, emotions, or other embodied expressions as well” (p. 229).

The techniques of anecdote and line-by-line approach were adopted for this study. At the end of the data collection period, I returned to the transcriptions. I read through them, taking note of occurrences of songs and activities. I isolated moments that were particularly interesting to me; either they particularly demonstrated engagement or disengagement in the lesson, were particularly characteristic of the lesson setting, or were curious to me in that I did not fully understand what had happened during them. I chose 18 of these episodes per child. For each episode, I re-watched the video and re-documented what I saw there as a narrative anecdote. As seen in Figure 2, I attended to fully capturing the situation with descriptive language, including bodily movements, placement in the room, conversation between the adult and the child, musical contributions, tone of voice, inclusion of materials, etc.

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21 Full episode examples of this process can be found in Appendix C.
The next step of the analysis process was to break the anecdote down into numbered statements. This occurred mainly sentence-by-sentence, but on occasion I grouped sentences if the focus did not significantly change, as seen in Figure 3 below.
For each statement (see Figure 3), I then considered the phrase “when looking for the nature of a child’s engagement in a lesson, this sentence shows that…” On a separate document, I created a corresponding numbered list of the completion of this phrase. I called the statements on this new document “meaning statements.” (A side by side comparison of the anecdote statements and the meaning statements are demonstrated in Figure 4.)
As seen in Figure 4, the transformation of anecdote into meaning statements was an important part of the analysis process, as it enabled me to step outside of the situation and to examine the anecdote from an objective lens. This transformation (Figure 5) was governed by specifically considering what the child’s behavior indicated regarding engagement in the lesson.

1. The child is physically free to move around and to express connection to the music
2. The child listens and comments musically in conjunction with her crafting a pretend scenario that stems out of real life.
3. The child accepts adult contributions to her pretend.
4. The child governs the pretend
5. The child is absorbed in her activity, to the point of overtly ignoring the musical stimulus
6. The child is absorbed in her activity, but is aware of the musical stimulus to the point where she joins in and continues on her own

*Figure 5.* Meaning statements, completing the phrase “when looking for the nature of a child’s engagement in a lesson, this sentence shows that…

As seen in Figure 5, the meaning statements uncovered aspects of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other. Using these four *lifeworld existentials* articulated by Van Manen (1990) as a framework, I combed the meaning statements and grouped themes as they emerged, adding a *lived musicality* category when it appeared necessary to deal fully with the data. As themes emerged, I wrote about each one, using thick description of and reflection on the anecdotes to bring to the surface elements of each theme. As I wrote, I looked at other episodes to fill out my reflection on each theme. I moved back and forth between part and whole, returning to the stories, the meaning statements, the transcripts, and the video. I used the blogs posts, journals, informal conversations, and interviews with the parents as a resource for
understanding what I was seeing in the themes. As I spiraled deeper and deeper into the text, I saw the smaller pieces more clearly. Elements I had missed the first time around stood out with new clarity against the backdrop of the whole. The continuation of the back and forth process between part and whole led to more themes (Van Manen, 1990), and ultimately provided for a rich immersion into the data as I described and reflected. This process also provided the study with stronger validity, as a process of triangulation.

Articulating the themes and writing thick descriptions for each out of the data resulted in answers to the question of how the children engaged in the setting, and is found in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, I turned to the discussion of what the children’s engagement indicated regarding the making of meaning within the setting by looking across the themes. Due to the complexity of this task, and in order to be thorough and objective in my discussion, I organized the discussion by what the children did (in terms of action), why they did what they did (in terms of decision-making), and how they were in the setting (in terms of being). I also considered the children’s engagement by looking to the converse, through a filter of disengagement. All of these ways of considering the data work for the purposes of establishing validity of the results. Further validity is provided in Chapter Six, where I compared the findings of the study to existing literature regarding young children.

Addressing Issues of Validity

The constructivist underpinnings of this qualitative study posit that truth is a constructed and context-specific phenomenon. Hence, findings of any qualitative work can only be seen as contributions to a conversation seeking understanding and interpretation, and not as norms held for all (Glesne, 2006). The aim of this study was not to seek empirical truths; nor was it to seek generalizability (Bresler, 1995; Danaher & Briod, 2005; Glesne, 2006). The purpose of the study
was to seek human meaning within the setting, and as such render itself meaningful to readers through resonating language. Language that is vivid, accurate, rich, and elegant is language that is genuine, believable, deep, and simple (Danaher & Briod, 2005). Danaher and Briod quoted Kvale regarding clarity for this important issue:

Ideally, the quality of the craftsmanship results in products with knowledge claims so powerful and convincing in their own right that they, so to say, carry the validation with them, like a strong piece of art. In such cases, the research procedures would be transparent and the results evident, in the conclusions of the study intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful, and good…Valid research would in this sense be research that makes questions of validity superfluous. (pp. 224-225)

Further, Van Manen (1990) pointed to the ways that the dimensions of lived experience exist as a whole, but also work separately in support of each other. Hence, there is an internal consistency inherent in the description and reflective analysis of the data. For instance, as I described an episode in specific support for one theme, the inherent elements of that episode appeared as support for other themes, though not overtly articulated. The document as a whole functions in support of itself.

The interpretive stance I aimed for has its limitations when looking to describe the experiences of these two children. First, I cannot claim ultimate authority regarding how the children experienced their lessons. Further, despite the measures I took to achieve an objective perspective and to consider the data outside of my theoretical knowledge and my experiential expectations and assumptions, I could not fully separate myself from anything I did. As such, I must be transparent regarding my bias in this setting, and do so as follows.
My role in the space was one of belief; I believed in an informal approach to the musical development of these children. I believed that given time and space to explore and play within a musical context, these children would thrive—musically and personally. I was committed to their thriving, and perceived it to occur when the children were granted autonomy in working out their personal agency. This autonomy, however, did not occur without my guidance or my participation; hence, my role was to walk with them and offer my perspective without offering my control.

I found that my deep and somewhat innate commitment to a lack of control was enhanced in this setting, due to my researcher mindset. When the girls were participating in ways I did not understand, I was even more mindful of setting aside my control in an attempt to get out of them what was deeply meaningful and innate to them within the setting. At the same time, I found myself struggling with giving them full space; on occasion, my urge to control was strong and even non-apparent in the moment. It was in watching the video that I saw how easily I attempted to control us, in order to make myself feel better about the usefulness of the time.

Under the surface, it seems, I was haunted by the question of whether or not the broadened boundaries of this setting would be considered legitimate by someone watching, whether parents, colleagues, mentors, or peers. I found that I wrestled with my own understanding of what a piano lesson setting should like, even while allowing the children to fully direct their participation in the setting. Allowing them to direct at times felt like I was falling off a cliff, and was grasping for familiar branches in order to regain my balance. And so, my bias includes elements of me, my own security and/or insecurity in interaction with these children, the setting, and the voices of criticism I imagined to be standing by to judge.
Regardless of the measure of bias inherent in my viewing of the data, ultimately I am the only person able to interpret this data with a deep level of insight. The length of the data collection process contributes to this right, as I spent considerable time with the children over the course of the year. I am the one who lived with these children in this space, and hence, I am the one to stand as an interpretive voice. This is not a careless interpretive voice; what I present here is a thoughtful and loving attempt to be with these children and to speak as their representative.

I have sat with this data, have wrestled with it and chewed on it and talked about it with another set of representatives—the parents. I have pulled it apart and put it back together, have taken it inside of myself, and then set it on the shelf to seek a differing perspective. It is I who know the experience as well as the children, and so I am the one to speak.

I look to Van Manen (1990) for confirmation of my place in this research in terms of objectivity and subjectivity. Both appear in phenomenological writing; both are elements of being oriented in relationship with the matter under view. Objectivity is garnered when “the researcher becomes…a guardian and a defender of the true nature of the object” (p. 20). Subjectivity is achieved when the researcher is “strong in [her] orientation to the object of study in a unique and personal way—while avoiding the danger of becoming arbitrary, self-indulgent, or of getting captivated and carried away by [her] unreflected preconceptions” (p. 20). I experienced these characteristics in myself as I approached the setting and the data. Passionate in my guardianship, I was personally invested in these children and in their story, and as such considered it a great responsibility to keep myself from arbitrary and self-indulgent preconceptions. I genuinely desired to understand what worked for these children and what did not; their pursuit of life-long musicianship was important to me because they were important to
me. And so I set myself on their path, in order to help them to see clearly, and in order to help myself to see them as they would be seen.

It is important to remember that a constructivist approach to research via ethnological and phenomenological techniques is one that seeks only to gain insight, pursuing a deeper understanding of a lived experience for the purposes of being able “to act more thoughtfully and more tactfully in certain situations” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 23). It is not appropriate to apply specific findings of this time and place to suggest effectiveness of a teaching method, or to imagine that all children would have the same experience based on what was found here. Ultimately, the work recorded here is meant to offer insight regarding the nature of children as they engaged in the setting, which can lead to deeper conversation and the possibility for future work.
Chapter 4: Describing and Reflecting on Lifeworld Themes

Introduction

Rapp (2013) described phenomenology as the philosophy that “things become what they are during the process of becoming what they are; in other words, all life forms are forged in the fire of a never-ending, tumbling-forward-and-behind-and-sideways process. They don’t just land at an end point, whole and complete, and they never stop changing. They never arrive” (p. 102). I find this philosophical underpinning useful when considering the experiences of the children within the piano lesson setting. What follows here, then, is not a compendium of all of the ways that the girls participated, engaged, and/or disengaged with me and in our lesson time. That discussion would be practically impossible, and in all ways imperfect. Their experiences could never truly be captured here, and by the time these words are written their experiences have changed, morphed into new understandings and new ways of being. What is found here is a bird’s eye view, moments where my lens focused on the tangible and looked closely—and then from far away, and then closely again—in an effort to gain deeper understanding of what their experience was during the time that I was with them.

To gain insight into the children’s experience I considered the behaviors I observed as the children engaged in the lesson setting. In order to understand their engagement, however, I looked to the four lifeworld existentials posited by Van Manen (1990) to guide my looking and listening. According to Van Manen, lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other “belong to the existential ground by way of which all human beings experience the world” (p. 102). Van Manen considered these four dimensions of lived experience to be fundamental to all lived experience, and hence trustworthy as lynchpins for looking into, “posing, reflecting, and writing” (p. 102) about the experiences of these children. An additional dimension emerged as I
interacted with the data. I have called this category *lived musicality*, by which I mean the ways that children *do* music in the space\(^\text{22}\). These dimensions exist as a unified whole made up of parts, and in this chapter I pull them apart in order to get inside of the ways that the children lived within the lesson setting.

**Organization of the chapter.** Five main themes emerged out of the dimensions of *lived space, lived body, lived time, lived other* and *lived musicality*. With the exception of lived space, the themes contained further sub-themes that appeared as necessary to thoroughly explicate the overall theme. Each theme is listed as a section header, with sub-themes as underlying sections. Many of the themes and sub-themes contain italicized paragraphs directly beneath the heading, as an illustrative vignette of the theme or sub-theme. Each vignette is made up of a collection of moments taken out of the video transcript across the data collection period; each new example within the vignette is marked by ***. The body of the text is made of descriptions of the isolated episodes, as well as descriptions of other moments taken from the video transcript or the parent blog. Further, the description is written in the present tense, as a means of highlighting the action of the engagement, and of the inherent “process of becoming” (Rapp, 2013, p.102) the text describes.

Ultimately, as I combed the data and considered what the lessons looked like through the lens of the *lifeworld existentials*, I engaged in a process of reflecting in order to write, and writing in order to reflect. I read, I watched, I listened, and I wrote, considering what the girl’s behavior indicated regarding their experience in the setting. I took care to describe in detail what I observed, in order to clearly see their engagement in the space. Reflection and description ultimately became the means of seeking, looking, and understanding.

\(^{22}\) More on this in the section on Lived Musicality
Lived Space: The Child Engages in the Lesson by Expanding the Boundaries of the Room

Eden finishes singing an improvised song and jumps off the bench to run in a semi-circle around the room, clapping her hands. ***She leans against a chair as we discuss a musical concept. ***She moves to the bookshelf to get a new instrument when she decides an activity is over. ***She walks back and forth between the piano and her desk, picking up new materials for our play. ***She finishes playing a song and runs to fling herself on the couch. ***She lays her body across the ottoman and watches me as I sing. ***She lies on the floor with her feet in the air and the recorder in the crook of her foot, re-wording the song she is singing to fit the discussion we have just had.

What stands out to me is the difference between my understanding of space and the children’s understanding of it. For me, where I am in the room is where I am oriented until I change my orientation. For the girls, other areas of the room are not off-limits—as valid as where they are in the moment, any area may come into play at any moment. For me, continuity of the moment is served by my being in one place, but for the girls the variation of the place is what makes the activity what it is and serves the continuity of it. For me, if we are playing the piano, then the piano is our purpose and therefore we are at the piano; the girls, however, are uninhibited by such an isolated purpose, and define the space for their broader purpose.

Defining the space entails a delicate balance of awareness of place and a freedom from boundaries. The children assign roles to the room, returning to specific areas for specific tasks. The stuffed animals tend to return to the same place from week to week. The piano becomes an object that exists beyond an instrument, and situates our participation in the room. The central area of the room is where we move and flex our interactions of self and shared space, interactions which flow to and from the piano. Boundaries of separation do not exist as the children weave in and out of ideas and participation. They move fluidly from one place to the next, without hesitation. Often the instigator of their movement is reflexive, an uninhibited response to something they have sung or a movement I have made. Running across the room is
standard for Kathleen; hopping with her hands in a bunny position is typical for Eden. There is no distinction between staying in place and moving across the space, as either can happen at any moment.

The children negotiate the space as they negotiate the content of the lesson. A reciprocal and reflexive cycle, the flexibility of the space allows them to be flexible in their participation, while their inclination to be flexible in their participation and uses the flexibility of the space. The flexibility is further served by the fact that the space holds infinite possibility. The bookshelf in Eden’s piano room holds other instruments—a child-sized guitar, a child-sized accordion, a drum that opens up to hold a variety of other percussion instruments. The couch becomes a place of refuge, when she needs a moment to think, when she is uninterested in what I am doing, or when she is observing me, thoughtfully considering my actions. When Kathleen realizes that our music making could make the fish come out of their hiding place, the fish tank becomes a part of our lesson material. The armchair separates the room into different sections and provides Kathleen with a hiding place, where she can go during hide and seek, or when she needs a dressing room in order to “get ready” for her big debut. The couch is a sanctuary when she wants to take a nap, and a place of work when she decides to write our songs down.

For Kathleen, the space outside of the room is also a valid place for her lesson participation to occur. Her bedroom is a staging area for the lesson space, and is undeniably connected to what we are working on in the lesson room. When she runs out of the room and into her bedroom, she comes back dressed in a dance outfit to dance to the CD, or riding a pretend horse to the song *The Wild Horses*23, or with paper and a pen so we can write our songs down. Often she is in the bedroom for prolonged periods of time, without explanation. When I

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23 See *Music Makers: At The Keyboard*, p. 20
start to lose hope that she will ever return and begin to play the piano quietly to myself, she yells for me to stop playing the piano as I wait for her, calling out indignantly “hee-ey! I’m writing the song down!” In my mind, the song that we had begun is no longer happening due to her absence; in hers, the song is the main event.

The space becomes then a conduit for musicking, given its possibilities for pretend scenarios and the musicking inherent in or inserted into them. It is also, however, a practice field for the musicking itself. As I play the piano, the girls move in and around and through the room; they interact with the texts, the musical phrases, the sounds, their bodies, their breathing. They jump, they spin, they run, they bounce. When we create musical games, the space provides an arena for Eden to direct me to “take giant steps!” as she strikes her instrument with large arm motions. When I am moving in the middle of the room to the chant Popcorn, Kathleen moves all around me, hops to the piano for a few rounds in order to play along, and slides off of the bench to hop across the room halfway through a verse. By the end of the chant she has run to her “dressing room” behind the chair in order to “get ready”, which she chants about in the format of the song. Her participation is fluid, and is directed by her own whim of where she wants to be at any given moment.

The negotiability of the space, however, also allows them to disengage at their choosing, or be drawn to unrelated objects. When Eden does not want to play the piano in the way that I am demonstrating to her, she lays herself on the couch and stares at me, seemingly unimpressed. When she wants to color, the location of her markers and coloring books in the same room hold her attention. When Kathleen discovers something in her bedroom that she wants to show me, she will not take no for an answer until I go see it. Unrelated objects found in the room,

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24 See Music Play, p. 114
however, can also lead to rich experiences, such as when Eden chooses to use one of her dolls as a participant in the lesson, or when Kathleen crafts a song about a recent lost tooth she is keeping in a box. What determines whether or not the unrelated objects become productive or unproductive is difficult to pinpoint, seemingly dependent on attitudes, outside factors, daily moods, or otherwise.

**Summary of lived space.** Balancing awareness of place with freedom from boundaries, the girls engage in negotiation with the space. Holding many possibilities for productive or unproductive engagement, the space can even extend beyond the specified piano lesson room. Ultimately, the flexibility of the space can be a conduit of musicking, as the girls use the items they find there and the broad parameters of the room to participate in musical behaviors.

**Lived Body: The Child Engages in the Lesson by Using Her Body**

*Kathleen leaves the piano bench and dives onto the couch, her legs flying in the air.*** She bounces around the room on her tip-toes, does a jig with complex steps as she walks toward the window, then swings her arms with purpose as she walks away from it. ***She leaps to the middle of the room with a scarf in her hand, and waves it in a circular motion, her eyes half-closed.*** As I improvise on the piano, she walks to the middle of the room and lifts her leg behind her, pirouetting slowly and gracefully. ***She sits on her knees on the piano bench and bounces her whole body as she plays.*** She stands straight up in a position of attention, pulls her arm back high, takes a deep breath, and whacks the drum with her hand as her body takes on stiff sharp angles. ***She falls into a puddle on the floor.***

The first thing that I notice is the way that the girls extend their bodies into the space that they have. Their legs reach out further, to touch invisible corners, to pull their bodies into flexible arches. They are free from the boundaries that exist for me, as they wedge themselves into smaller ways of being and then extend beyond themselves, as they ebb and flow outward and inward. They weave toward me and away from me, leaning close and laying on and rocketing away.
Three sub-themes emerged under this theme. The children use their bodies to communicate, in rhythmic response, and as they approach the piano and the bench. Their bodies seem to holistically enable their relationships with me, the music making, and the piano. Ultimately, their bodies appear to function in the setting as a mindful actor, in simple yet complex relationship to the events in the setting.

**The child uses her body to communicate.** The girls use their bodies to participate in our conversations. They lean on the furniture as they consider a question, their feet lifting off the ground, their knees bending into the air. Eden displays thoughtfulness by lying across the floor, her chin in her hand. Sometimes she curls herself into my body as I show her something, or leans into me to look intently up into my face as we talk. She lies on the floor and watches me, her feet in the air. Or, she folds her body into a tent, her hands and feet on the ground with her bottom in the air, thinking out loud about what comes next in the alphabet cards that we are laying out on the floor. Kathleen crouches behind the chair and bounces from behind it as she replies to my thought. Their bodies demonstrate freedom to move, an unrestrained, uninhibited, and even instinctive response to whatever is happening in the environment.

In their response, they use their body to emphasize their communication. Kathleen flops onto a chair in frustration when I will not do what she wants me to do, and settles into it in defiance as I continue to disagree. She slides dejectedly off of it as she emphasizes her point, and comes close to me to look deeply into my face, putting her hand on my shoulder to convince me that I should agree to her suggestion. Eden points decisively into my face to playfully suggest I swallowed our pretend cuckoo-bird, and puts her hand over my mouth to stop me from saying the piano alphabet out loud. She points affectionately into my face when she tells me she likes the faces I make, and covers her own mouth with her hand when she can’t keep back a
laugh. She pats the back of one hand emphatically into the palm of the other, with weighted arms, as she tells me we need to move quickly, before her stuffed dog turns to stone.

The children use their bodies to non-verbally communicate as well. More than participating in the conversation and emphasizing their communication, at times their bodies are the communication. When Kathleen is ready to dance but I am playing the piano, she comes to stand next to me. After she plays the lowest key multiple times, calling out “pause!” for each, I look at her and ask, “You’re going to dance to that music and not to mine?” Without answering my question verbally, she stands in place and dances, looking purposefully into my face. There I have my answer, so I move my shoulders and arms jauntily back at her, and say, “Ok!”

This bodily communication can be simple in its needs, but at times it is more complex. When Eden and I have completed a verse of *Hot Cross Buns*\(^{25}\), I call out “let’s play it again!” and begin. Eden takes the dog and bounces it aggressively on the keys, before putting him on top of my hand to keep me from playing. When I continue to try, she lifts my arms into the air. “What?!” I say, “You’re not going to let me play my song?!” Instead of answering me, she laughs and continues to push my hands into the air, until she finally takes them and holds them down with her hands, one on each side of her. During the entire exchange she has not spoken a word, and yet she has communicated clearly to me that she does not want me to play.

Kathleen expresses her underlying feelings during a rough week by angrily throwing instruments at me, and putting the piano lid down on my hands. All of my attempts to call her out of her angry state have failed. Her mother—who is sitting nearby—looks at her questioningly, and Kathleen adjusts her behavior, flopping to the floor, her body a sigh. She then approaches me where I sit drumming and ignoring her behavior, a scarf in her hand. I do not

\(^{25}\) Traditional song
look at her, but lean into her as she comes near. She gently covers my head with the scarf, taking time to arrange it. When she is satisfied, she wraps her arms around my neck and squeezes me. I do not move to embrace her, but I lean into her as she pulls me forward. We look into each other’s faces, quietly and thoughtfully. Her bodily approach to me has apologized, and our relationship has been restored, without any verbal acknowledgment of what has occurred.

Eden adjusts her physical behavior as well, during an episode of negative behavior. After throwing a stuffed animal at me, I say we will put them away if she continues to throw them. She changes to hitting, and I again say the animals will go away if she uses them to hit. She does not verbally respond to me, but walks behind me and wipes my back with the animals, gently, singing sweetly but sheepishly “la la la”, as if this was what she had been doing all along. She uses a change in her physical approach to respond to the situation, without ever acknowledging it verbally.

There is a complexity to the ways that non-verbal bodily communications interact with the children’s verbal contributions. On occasion, their verbal comments suggest one thing while their physical way of being suggests another. When Eden and I are putting together the alphabet snake backwards, she throws herself on the ground with a mewling sound when I ask what comes before F, in demonstration of the difficulty of the task. We continue with the task despite its difficulty, weaving in and out of success. Though she has verbally told me to continue with the task, she eventually crawls underneath the tent my legs are making as I sit on the floor. She appears to be avoiding the task by physically removing herself from the moment.

On another occasion, Eden—speaking as the mouse—says “please stop it! I said no music today!” She gets under my arms to lift my hands off the keys as I play, squealing “no no no!” Verbally and physically, one would understand her to be in opposition to me and to the
lesson. At the same time, however, she is leaning on my leg and smiling up into my face as I chant to her with the finger puppets. Her non-verbal behavior suggests that she is pleased, even as she continues to squeal that the finger puppets are not allowed to talk or to play the piano. Her pleasure appears in her physical comfort with me, and in the being there together in the moment. Her verbal and non-verbal communication conflicts, and it is difficult to know which to attend to as I attempt to understand what she is communicating to me.

Complexity between non-verbal and verbal communication for Kathleen occurs as a placement in the room issue. Often she removes herself to a different part of the room or to a different room in what would suggest disengagement, and yet she verbally responds to my conversation or musical stimulus. When we are looking at the picture of popcorn in the composer book, Kathleen makes a gobbling sound and climbs up on the piano bench. She plays a low note, looks at me and says, “pop pop pop.” She then turns back to the piano and plays repeated notes with one finger on the high keys. As she plays, she turns to look at me again, saying, “It’s popping!” As I approach the bench, she climbs off of it and heads to the CD player. I ask, “Do you think that popping sounds more low, medium, or high?” She does not answer me immediately, because she is now preoccupied with the CD player at the edge of the room. After a moment, however, she responds, “high.” “Was that one piece of popcorn popping, or all of the pieces of popcorn popping?” I ask; “one,” she replies. She is still crouching over the CD player, not present with me at the piano. Her responses to my questions are lagging due to her focus on the CD player. “What would it sound like if all of the pieces of popcorn were popping?” I ask, and she walks slowly back over to me. “It would sound like…” she says, and plays one low note. “Boom!” she says, “The popper exploded.” Throughout this interaction, her bodily presence would suggest she is not a part of the popcorn discussion, but her verbal responses are
evidence that she is still participating in my area of focus. Her response at the piano, however, causes me to wonder if she is communicating to me that she is done with my activity; the popper, after all, just exploded.

**The child uses her body in rhythmic response.** The girls use their bodies to emphasize conversations and activities with rhythmic inflections and intentions. Eden finishes her piano song, and wings her mouse through the air as she climbs off the bench. She times his arrival on the bench with a “whoosh!” and moves fluidly beyond the bench to the couch where I am sitting in order to listen to her play. Kathleen throws materials from the box over her shoulder in rhythmically timed cycles. When I ask Eden if we can chant the piano alphabet, she plants her hands and feet on the ground, her bottom raised tent-like in the air, and hops rhythmically down the line of alphabet cards, chanting the piano alphabet as she goes. These responses happen out of an innate inner place, without pretense or discrimination for one way versus another. In other words, they just happen. Yet, this is not to say that the responses are not intentional. There is intention in how the responses deal with the stimulus as the children direct their responses toward the stimulus in intentional ways. What this ‘happening’ speaks of, however, is that there does not appear to be a clarified thoughtful mindfulness of the intention. Instead, the intention is housed bodily; the mindfulness is found in the body.

This bodily mindfulness appears in a predictive context as well. At the end of a rhythmic chant, where Eden has been dancing with abandon, I say “that was so FUN!” and pat the floor with my hand emphatically on “fun”; Eden anticipates me, and stomps her foot in the same manner at the same time, her whole body pulling upward in order to arrive at the floor on the word. It is intuitive—an instinctive response to a stimulus in the environment—that intentionally
predicts the rhythmic placement of her body with a spoken inflection and a forthcoming movement of mine.

Beyond conversational rhythmic responses, there is a level of instinctive rhythmic and bodily participation that occurs without premeditation in response to a musical stimulus during moments of music making as well. The children’s bodily responses occur intuitively, sometimes with predictive subtlety. After Kathleen and I sing *Jeremiah Blow the Fire*\(^\text{26}\) and blow the scarves into the air, Kathleen drops to her knees as the arc of the scarf reaches the ground. She times the arrival of her body with the arrival of the scarf and in one fluid motion lifts her arms in the air and brings them down to pick up the drum laying in front of her. This rhythmical and elegant series of movement occurs without pre-meditation.

Eden engages in instinctive bodily rhythmic response to a musical stimulus as we lay out alphabet cards on the floor. I pat the floor in a rhythmic ostinato to accompany our sung conversation regarding how the letters should go. When she lays the last card, Eden jumps up without any prompting by me or any apparent decision by herself and begins to dance with complete abandon. As I chant, “it goes ABCDEFG, back to ABCDEFG, back to ABCDEFG,” she marches, shakes her rear-end, swings her arms, bobs her head, and slides from side to side. I stop chanting but keep patting the floor as she continues to dance, her body acting in free and total joy; I chant again, and she continues to dance. Our finish happens organically. When we near the end, I make a final pat that signifies “end” and Eden freezes her body in conjunction with the cue.

A rhythmical response may occur to my musical stimulus, but sometimes it is a musical stimulus that the child presents to herself. Eden rocks and bounces the mouse on the keys with

\(^{26}\) See *Music Play*, p. 101
her right hand, chanting “yes I play the piano, aiii! Little mousie plays it with her…hand! The little mousie loves to play on the piano…aaaiiiiiii!” She punctuates her speech by swinging her left hand weightily through the air. The hand sways backward over the bench and then falls forward in elegant emphasis of a syllable in her chant. Attuning her physical participation to her chant, Eden’s body cooperates in the musical moment without apparent cognizance of her action.

This physical participation in the music making is essential to the music making itself. As we sing *Stirring our Brew*[^27], Eden lifts the bear in the air and beats the drum. Though the song is in triple, she begins with duple beats, and gets progressively aggressive in her bringing the bear down onto the drum surface. As the song continues, however, an almost imperceptible shift in the feeling of the moment occurs as Eden gets up on her knees and bounces her whole body slowly through the air, timing her approach elegantly in order to land the bear on the drum on the triple downbeats. In the end, the song has provided a practice space for her to use her body, to rehearse her body’s response to the meter, to adjust and sync her movement without any prompting other than the experience itself.

Kathleen’s physical participation in the *Popcorn*[^28] chant occurs with a variety of movements, either modeled by me or of her own inspiration. She moves her feet in complex steps in relation to the words—“my feet love the rhythm of the popcorn, pop popcorn, pop popcorn; my feet love the rhythm of the popcorn, pop popcorn pop pop POP!”—and jumps up in order to land on the ground on my final “POP!” She has used her body to anticipate the emphasized word of the chant. She extends this, however, speaking a few extra “pops” of her own, and stamping her foot with finality before falling on the floor. By expanding on my stimulus, she presents a stimulus to herself and enacts her agency over her movement. She falls

[^27]: See *Songs for Children*, p. 50
[^28]: See *Music Play*, p. 114
into what she pretends is the popcorn, rolls around in it and then calls out—with a tone that tells me not to worry—“I can get out!” She lifts herself up and charges across the room. During a verse where I have shaken my head to the point of announcing “that makes me kind of dizzy”, Kathleen just stands and watches me before wandering off into the kitchen. For the next verse, however, she runs back into the room in a circle and shakes her head back and forth, even though I have moved on to a different movement. Whenever the phrases naturally pause she pauses her movement as well, her frozen head tilted to whatever side it has landed on. When we finish the verse, she runs to my side and says, “that makes me kind dizzy,” just as I had said after completing the previous verse. She then falls limply to the floor with an, “oomph,” saying drily, “I fell in the popcorn.” The musical stimulus has given her an opportunity to experience her body and to try out new approaches, as she plays creatively with her body in the space in the context of the words and in response to the rhythmic stimulus.

The child uses her body to approach the piano and the bench. The children approach the piano and the bench with a physical inclusiveness that I do not. My physical interactions with the bench involve sitting down on it and getting up off of it, moving it toward the piano, moving it back. The girls, however, appear to consider it as an extension of their bodies. By the nature of its size, the bench does not lend itself to their sitting on it—they climb onto it, they lift themselves, they hop up. They approach it from the back, from the side, leg by leg. But more than this, the bench becomes a vehicle for their physical ‘being with’ me in the space.

As we talk, the length of Eden’s body lies across the bench, and she slides herself back and forth across it. While I sit on the bench and write down some music, Kathleen stands behind and next to me, leaning on the bench and lifting her body up and down. She hovers over it, with one knee up on it, one leg down to the ground. She lifts the leg in the air. Eden uses the bench
to signify a mountain that the mouse falls off of on a regular basis, and crouches next to it, to save him. She calls on me, to get the bear, the bear will help. I hold the bear over the edge, and the mouse climbs up, back to the piano, as Eden slides into the space between the bench and the keyboard and leans her legs backward, the bench supporting her weight.

The bench itself mediates the child’s physical approach to the piano. Settled onto it, Kathleen stretches the length of her body to the right, to play the highest key. Then, she returns to center before leaning the other direction, to play the lowest key. On a different occasion, Kathleen sits in the middle of the bench and leans to the highest key, purposefully pulsing her body as she calls out “1, 2, 3, go!” She returns her body to the middle, and moves alternating arms straight downward and upward for each note she plays, with a pointed emphasis. Soon, however, she changes her approach and wiggles the fingers of both hands on the keys, resulting in a more varied texture of sound. Eden bounces her body on the bench, and lifts her toys in the air with a squealed “eee!” as I play in the upper registers. She drops the toys into the keys in a rhythmical pattern that produces a complex structure as a backdrop for my melody.

Physical variation of approach to the piano is characteristic of the girls’ piano playing. They wiggle their fingers or place their hands with arched intention; they drop from lifted arms into the keys. Holding a stuffed animal in one hand, Eden lifts her arm high before making contact with the piano, key by key. Or, she alternates holding the animal with one hand and holding it with both hands; she alternates the high arm as it bounces the mouse on the keys with a rocking back and forth motion as her left hand and then her right hand push the mouse into the keys. Using the weight and cushion of the bean bag the children glissando on the keys, or wipe the key bed deeply, back to front. When not aided by objects, they use their fingers and hands with sophisticated poise. Without any articulated direction from me regarding how to use their
bodies, the children approach the piano with a completeness of motion, connecting their whole body in support of their hands and fingers. Their arms fly in the air before dropping onto the keys, their bodies lean and bounce. Eden even uses her feet to play a complex pattern, alternating her legs heavily onto the keys with controlled weight. They seem to intuit their bodies in relation to the keyboard and use gravity to mediate their approach.

**Summary of lived body.** The girls use their bodies in small and large ways, in uninhibited ways of being and instinctive responses. Their bodies communicate as they participate in and emphasize their conversation, and in simple and/or complex non-verbal ways. Their rhythmic responses suggest a mindfulness of body in their inflections, intentions, and predictions. They incorporate their bodies into the holistic music making, as well as in their approach to the piano. They use the bench as a mediator in their relationship with the piano and with me, and use their bodies in a variety of ways as they play. Their innate physicality—their rhythmic way of being and interacting—is not separated from their approach to the piano. In fact, their organic approach to the piano is full of weight and intuitive understanding. There is a complexity to their music making that cannot be separated from their bodies and the ways that they use them in conjunction with their verbal or piano musicking.

**Lived Time: The Child Engages in the Lesson by Directing the Time**

*Eden says, “Let’s pretend mousie was in a secret fort, where nobody ever finds him!’”*** *She interrupts us as we play the tambourines along to the CD, and says, “How about we play with my accordion?”* ***After singing This Old Man*29 together, Eden goes to the couch and says, “Wait! I’m going to do something right now. I’m going to do something great. I’m going to make a fort!” as she places blankets over the ottoman and the couch.*** *When I take out the alphabet cards, she says, “how about we think of something different to do with these letters? How about...we line them up...and, we...can, sing the alphabet backwards?!?”*** *Kathleen jumps in the air, banging the drum, and says “Hey! Hey! I know what you can do! You can make a really loud bang on the drum a lot of times, and I’ll play the really loud piano!”***

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29 Traditional song
brings me paper and says, “Write down some music. Write down that song you were [just singing].” *** She shuffles the papers and puts one forward on the rack, saying, “It’s the starting song...ABCD.”

The lessons technically last for 30 minutes, but awareness of the timeframe does not seem to guide our time. The use of the time is fluid, as the lesson morphs and evolves. The children’s direction of the time appears as a significant element of the engagement in the setting. The sub-themes that emerged in this area were that the children direct the time through their conceptualization of time, overtly, covertly through their actions, through their investment in their ideas, and productively or unproductively.

**The child directs the time through her conceptualization of time.** Kathleen and I are in the middle of the room, the fish tank behind us. We are singing Jeremiah Blow the Fire, blowing the scarves in the air. As Kathleen’s scarf falls to the floor, she picks up the drum and says off-handedly, “That wasn’t a very good blow.” Immediately afterward—with barely a breath in between statements—she cries with renewed energy, “I know what will surely make them come out!” In this quick transition she returns to a previous idea: she is referring to the fish hiding in the back of the tank, which she had shown me earlier. The next significant portion of the time is taken up with the development of her idea, as Kathleen counts “1—2—3—go!” as indication that we are to strike the drum and to play the piano, as we sing, and as she jumps excitedly around the room. Even within the context of calling the “fishy” out and all that it involves, Kathleen is interrupting us continuously. Between moments of the activity, she stops to tell me about her choice of clothing and to ask me about mine, to talk about my tan line, our “boo-boos” and how they happen to be in the same place.

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30 Kathleen is referring to *The ABC Song*
31 See *Music Play*, p. 101
The weaving of the idea and the interruptions create a blanket of context that is complex. The ebb and flow is the nature of the time, and the idea and the interruptions cannot be separated. The children often attend to one area of participation for a prolonged period of time, but then transition quickly out of it, with little to no warning. Even within the prolonged periods, however, their attention would appear to be distracted, as they bounce around from thought to thought. Over all of this, however, is a story arc that ties the activity together. Underlying the lesson is what I have come to call a *cycle of memory*, tying things together from beginning to end but also from week to week.

An episode from Kathleen’s lessons is an interesting depiction of the cycle of memory. I was under the impression that we were doing a duet, but she wanders through the room gathering materials and looking for what she needs. She ignores my questions regarding the duet, and responds indignantly to me when I try to sing other musical material. Finally, she says, “we’re going to play a song about the tooth, with the harmonica and the piano.” Kathleen had returned to a previous idea of singing a song about her newly lost tooth, which had come up earlier, but had never occurred. During the lesson I didn’t realize what was happening; I thought that she was all over the map and disengaged in the lesson. On watching the video and going through the aspects of her behaviors, it became clear that she was so invested in her own idea that the thread of the tooth song was underlying the whole time in a way that was unapparent to me. The way that ideas return, inexplicably and long after I have forgotten them, is an indication of how they live under the surface for the girls.

To understand how the elements of lengthy participation, quick transitions, story arc, and the cycle of memory weave together and are used to direct the time, what follows is a description of how these four elements play out over one of Kathleen’s lessons.
One morning, Kathleen comes up with the idea to use her Bibles as music books as her mother cleans the bathroom. She sings and plays a clean-up song for her mother, and her mother tells me about it when I arrive at the lesson. Kathleen goes to get the books and brings them to me to look. She picks one up off of the table and takes it to the piano, yelling out “let’s go!” She then sings “all ready” over and over again as she spins around the piano area, waiting for me. I bring the other Bible with me and place it on the piano. She spends the next eleven minutes playing her songs out of the books, directing me as to my place and my role. Her songs have clear structure, and she has clear ideas about what she is doing as her words tell a story and her melodic ideas repeat. She is excited about her song making, and expresses herself dramatically, looking at me with spirited dismay when the pages of the book fall together, looking sharply at me out of the sides of her eyes to say “count me off!” with a disbelief that she even needs to ask. Her motion slows down as one song comes to a close, and she holds the last cluster for an extended moment before releasing it with a dramatic flourish of her hands and arms into the air. She spins off of the bench and does one twirl around the room before returning to the bench to play the next installment. Each time her songs evolve, covering broader vocal and keyboard ranges and to include the pedals. She is invested and intentional, and enjoying every minute of it.

When she is done, however, she is done. She lays back on the bench, her arms and feet hanging off the edges before rolling herself off and onto the floor. She lays there, arms and legs out, mouth open, eyes closed, sighing loudly. When I wonder out loud if it is naptime, she goes to the box to get the scarves and asks “can you play me a lullaby?” The naptime with lullaby is a tradition begun in one of our earliest lessons, when Kathleen needed a rest. It usually involves the scarves as a blanket. At a recent lesson our roles reversed; instead of me playing the lullaby
and Kathleen napping, Kathleen began referring to herself as the music teacher, directing me to lie down and covering me with the scarves. Today she remembers this, and asks me, “how about it’s naptime for you, and it’s lullaby time for me?” She goes to her bedroom and comes back with her notepad and the scarves. She takes her time to cover me thoroughly, retrieving an animal for me to cuddle with, and then takes the top page of her sticky notepad to the piano. The Bible from the previous activity is there, and she sticks the paper to it, and begins playing and singing. Her song is “Hush Little Birdie”, with her own words and melody. She plays with both hands as she sings, until the paper starts to curl away from the book. Then, without missing a beat, she puts her left hand up to hold it down and plays only with her right hand. She finishes, and gets off of the bench to check on me, before returning to the bench to continue the lullaby. This time she gets quite loud and animated, and then rips the paper off the Bible to set it aside. She turns the pages of the Bible, continuing to sing about the little birdie, but adding Jesus into her lyrics. She finishes with a howl, climbs off of the bench, hovers over me for a moment to touch me gently as she whispers “night-night”. She goes into her room and comes back with her own blanket and stuffed animal, laying down next to me and covering herself and holding the teddy bear under her chin. She is completely silent.

The lullaby phase of our lesson has lasted for about eight minutes, during which Kathleen’s purpose has been singular—napping with lullaby has been our focus. Without ever losing the over-arching thread of the story, however, her specific actions have bounced from place to place and thought to thought. During the eight minutes she has run into her bedroom and back, has forgotten that she brought the scarves with her the first time and runs to the box to find them, talks at length about her process of covering me completely, runs to the CD player and announces it doesn’t have any power, runs back to check my covers, runs to her bedroom to
get me a stuffed animal, goes to the piano and plays it by using the paper, comes to check on me, goes back to the piano and shifts her playing to be out of the book, gets off the bench to check on me again, goes to the video camera and shifts it so that I am fully in view, goes to her bedroom to get her own sleeping supplies, comes back and settles down for her own sleep. The level of action that occurs within the one activity is high and varied, but the overarching purpose is never lost.

The activity changes slightly when Kathleen and I make eye contact and she yells “good morning!”, but we are still participating along the same story arc. She transitions the sleeping to her stuffed animal, saying [for the animal] “I want bed!”, wrapping him up and carrying him into her bedroom. As I wait for her, I ask her what her favorite song is, and she comes back into the room. Without answering me, she twirls, slips, falls to the ground, climbs up on the bench and looks into my face as I sit on the floor nearby. I ask her if there’s a song that she doesn’t like; she nods, but whispers “One I DO like, I LOVE it!” She signs a “C” with her hand, and then rubs her arm and back saying, “It’s a hint!” I soon figure out that she means Two Little Kitty Cats[^32], and begin to sing. She jumps off the bench, says, “Yep, that’s the one!” and then immediately yells, “EXCUSE ME!!!” as I keep singing.

What comes after her “excuse me” is inexplicable to me. In an extremely quick transition, and without a perceptible moment of recall, she remembers material from our previous lesson. She picks up the scarves, puts them over my head, and calls out “this time it’s YOUR birthday!” Two weeks before this lesson we’d sung my Happy Birthday Song[^33] in preparation for her upcoming party; one week before this lesson we had spent significant time talking about what had happened at it, culminating in writing a song about her cake, opening

[^32]: See Songs for Children, p. 59
[^33]: This song is my composition.
presents, the kids who got to run around in her bedroom, and the aprons they’d made. Today, she runs to enlist her mother’s help to bring me a pretend cake, taking the scarf off of my head to reveal it, yelling “surprise!” We blow out the candles as she sings *Happy Birthday to You*[^34], standing on my leg, her arm around my neck. She tells me about the flavor of the cake, before suddenly picking up the drum and breaking out into *Happy Birthday to You* again, marching around me in a circle and throwing the drum in the air when she’s finished with the song.

This transition into a brand new activity feels “quick” to me, in the sense that it has come out of nowhere. There is no apparent pre-meditation, no observed period of deep or even surface thought. Time and again, the children come up with ideas that baffle me in their suddenness. At times, these ideas are brand new. As in this case, sometimes they are returning ideas. I find the new ideas to be baffling—when did they have time to think that up?! I find these returning ideas, however, to be fascinating in their re-appearance. Are they sitting under the surface, just waiting to re-emerge? Sometimes these returning thoughts occur within the context of one lesson, where something that we did at the very beginning will appear to be over, but will suddenly return without warning in the context of a new activity. In this case, the material is returning from a previous week. Due to the nature of how the material returns, I refer to this as a *cycle of memory*; living in their memory, the material cycles through the individual lessons, and from week to week.

When I consider how the children use the lesson time, I am most struck by the way that ideas weave in and out of the time. Elements that occur at the beginning and seem to be finished re-occur at the middle or end, as if they have been present all along. Though the girls have given no indication that they are still thinking of those earlier moments, the memory of them underlies

[^34]: Words and Music by M. J. Hill and P. S. Hill
present actions, and cycles throughout the lesson. What’s more, these transitions seem to come out of nowhere, without pre-meditation. Their ideas, then, direct the use of our time. Uninhibited to announce them and invested in fulfilling them, the children tell me what to do either verbally [overt] or with their actions [covert].

**The child directs the time overtly.** Over and over again, the girls give directions. They articulate very clear ideas that have very specific parts to them. I begin a lesson singing *The Ants Go Marching*[^35], but Kathleen is ignoring me as she searches through the box, taking items out and dropping them on the floor. It turns out that she is looking for a manuscript book that I brought to a lesson a long time ago, and which we only used that once. She says “Guess what. Since we don’t have that book, I have something we can write our songs down on.” She comes back with paper and a pencil and says to me, “Write down some music. Write down that song you were [just singing].” I write down horizontal slash marks in heights corresponding to the direction of the pitches to represent the song. When I finish, she looks at me indignantly and says, “You were supposed to write words!” It is evident that though the relationship of pitches depicted on the paper means something to me, but nothing to her. She then runs to her bedroom, saying, “I’ve got more [paper] in my room!” Hoisting it onto the rack in front of me, she says severely, “here”. She continues on, writing down other songs, telling me which ones are which. When I ask her to play them, she says, “Hey! You’re supposed to play the songs,” as if this had been decided and articulated at some time and place. When I pursue this, asking, “Aren’t you going to play one for me?” She walks away muttering “mm-mm”. She has a clear plan that we do not defer from as we move on. For each song, though I attempt to convince her to play, she

[^35]: See *Wee Sing Silly Songs*, p. 40
points at me. “You”, she says decisively, continuing to write the songs down. There is no diverting her mind here.

During the fish tank episode, where Kathleen is intent on making the fish come out from their hiding place, she has very clear ideas of how our musical participation affects the outcome. Without any evidence of thinking through the problem, she knows what she is doing and what I am supposed to do. The problem involves her desire to see the fish to come out; her solution is that if we play really loudly on the piano and the drum, the fish will do what she wants them to do. “You can make a really loud bang on the drum a lot of times, and I’ll play the really loud piano” she says, and then, as she gets settled, “Wait, I’m gonna count to three and then we’ll GO!” Her arm cuts emphatically through the air on “go”, pointing toward me in clear direction. This cycle occurs over and over again, her counting off, the two of us playing, loudly. It is disrupted only by the moments when she gets off the bench saying, “I mean, make REALLY LOUD SOUNDS”, taking the drum and demonstrating what she means. She watches me over her shoulder to see if I am obeying her, and very quickly decides that I am not, getting off to show me again. She looks fiercely into my face as she beats the drum three times in a row, “even louder”. When she is happy with my performance, she plays the piano with abandon until deciding, “Now it’s MY turn to play the drum!” Taking it from me, she looks into my face with joy, her eyes beaming, as she says “really, really, super, loud.” When I take her place at the piano, I ask if I’m to play the “1-2-3-go”, since she has used the highest key on the piano to do this each time. Without missing a beat, she says no, that she will do it. Her directions lead us into rich moments of music making, as she is completely invested in the task and in her purpose for it.
The directions involve a level of togetherness, as when Eden takes the dog she has been bouncing on the keys and stops suddenly, saying, “Let’s pretend this dog can only speak piano”. The “let’s pretend” narrative is indicative of my “being with” her. Beyond togetherness, however, the directions also display a level of knowing how things are “supposed” to be, and the initiative to control the setting. When the dog plays a two bar pattern and I respond in kind, Eden turns to me and points at my chest, saying “you’re supposed to not play piano because you don’t play piano.” “Oh,” I say, “I can speak but I can’t play piano?” She replies with a decisive “yep,” but allows me to speak with the drum when I ask her if I can. This control goes so far as to keep me from doing the very thing I am there to do, which raises questions of whether or not she has an ulterior motive. Is she maintaining equilibrium between us? Or, is it more likely that she is elevating her position by reducing mine? The purpose of the activity appears to be for her to have the opportunity to play the piano without me, which she does, using the dog to play.

On a day when she is very distracted in her participation by a variety of outside factors, Eden becomes immersed in the lesson again when she suddenly picks up a scarf. She says that it will be our trampoline as we hold either side of it and wave it up and down through the air. She proceeds to pick up materials throughout the room, saying, “everything we touched in piano lessons, we’re allowed to use. The stuff we haven’t touched in piano lessons, we’re not allowed to use.” She is delighted by this activity, and runs all around the room to provide materials for us to bounce. She suggests songs for us to sing36, and we sing together joyfully, laughing as the materials bounce in and out of the scarf. Her clear idea keeps her participating, and re-invigorates her. She has not forgotten her distraction, however; when she is finished with the activity, she immediately returns to asking if the lesson is done so that she can get her juice. Her

36 She chooses songs that just moments earlier she had said she hated
direction has served the need to continue on with the lesson, since her father had laid down the condition that if she behaved she would get juice afterward.

As Eden matures, she begins to use more directive language that indicates her role, making statements such as, “I’ve planned everything I want to do at piano”, and, “I’ve decided that my dolly could be the first today, at piano.” Whether or not she has a literal plan thought out is unclear to me, but she does control the way our lesson unfolds as she decides who will play what instrument and what materials are included. When I ask if the doll is playing the piano, Eden speaks for her, saying, “She does not! She’s never played the piano, and she does not want to learn.” She tells me that the doll is going to play the drum, and the frog only knows how to play the xylophone. Though she has taken control of this scene, when I ask her what she is going to play she walks around the room with a quizzical look on her face. She asks me very genuinely, “what do you think I should play?”, and I sing to her that I like it when she plays the piano. She sings back “you like it when I play the piano—I’m sorry but I gave my kitty piano to my brother.” [Her kitty piano has been a frequent factor in our lessons, and she often chooses to play it over choosing to play the actual piano.] I point to the actual piano and sing “well, what about this piano?” Her response is, “I planned for you to go on it, so…I decided…I guess I’ll do this”, taking the bells for herself. When I reiterate her plan back to her, she replies, “you’ve got it now” in confirmation. This choice of words is interesting, an indication of my understanding of her plan. Throughout this exchange, her directions are specific, and consistently use language that demonstrates she considers herself to be in ownership of the course we take.

The children’s direction indicates their understanding of the environment as a constructed space. Their willingness to offer ideas, as well as the apparent mindset that this is their right, demonstrates a comfort with me and with the possibilities the space offers. It is a place to work
out their knowledge, and so their direction is also an indication of their grasp of the material at the moment. On a day when I suggest we do the alphabet snake, Eden readily agrees. In her mind, however, is a new plan. “How about we think of something different to do with these letters?” she suggests. “Like what?” I ask, and she looks around the room, formulating her thoughts. “How ‘bout…we line them up…and, we…can, sing the alphabet backwards?” As this activity unfolds, Eden continues to suggest how we should approach the laying out and the speaking of the letters. “Now we could [do] a second start of the alphabet!” she cries, and we do as she looks intently at me and explains, “We’ll say them backwards and forwards, over and over again.” The authority she takes over the unfolding of this task is indicative of how she understands the material. In fact, I assume that she understands it the way that I understand it, but I soon realize that she has placed the cards out in distinct rows, not linked from beginning to end. This manipulation of the material indicates to me that she is still in an intermediary step of dealing with the concept, which plays out in a later lesson where the backwards alphabet snake is too difficult for her.

A further example of Eden’s direction demonstrates her attempt to reconcile elements of her everyday life with the piano environment. Her work becomes directing both of us in an activity that comes out of her school day. The activity is designed for a music classroom of children, and so Eden finds herself tasked with adapting it in the moment for just the two of us with our limited resources. The rules seem to be unsettled in her mind throughout the time we spend on this activity, and are presented in flux as she works through them in her own mind. She freezes mid-skip and says with concern, “I don’t know who can play the music for us!” She solves this problem by singing the music for herself, and then by directing me to the piano.

37 See description in Interlude, Description of Activities
When I call out, “ok, here’s your music, are you ready?” she pauses for a brief moment to think, and then calls out to herself, “I have to skip around butterfly!” The butterfly pillow and the stuffed animals become partners in our play, having valid contributions to make—which she directs as well. Her inventive in-the-moment solutions involve directions to both herself and to me, and enable the activity to be what it becomes in this new setting.

Kathleen also incorporates elements of her daily life while taking on a new role. Instead of being a student, Kathleen elects herself the teacher as she helps me to prepare for naptime. She directs me to be quiet, saying “You know my friend Lydia in my class? She is one of the most loudest at lunchtime. Isabella is one of the quietest. Soooo, you’re Isabella.” Then, in a voice slightly higher than her own, Kathleen says “Isabella, this time can you please go to sleep?” After arranging the scarves carefully over me as a blanket, she says “I’m going to play you a lullaby, on our piano…Do you know this song? Two Little Kitty Cats38?” When I say I think I’ve heard it before, she asks me if I’ve played it before; when I make a non-committal sound in reply, she matter-of-factly says “I’m going to play it”, and climbs onto the bench. Without irony, she places herself in an ownership role and directs me, combining the role of her school teachers with my role as the piano “teacher”. These directive moments indicate both an awareness of the differing roles of student and teacher, and a lack of awareness of the inherent impossibility of her being the same as the teacher. There is a rehearsal of responsibility occurring, a trying out of this thing that she is not but sees lived out from day to day. Her placement of herself in this role is so complete that she asks me if I have lost a tooth, putting her fingers on my mouth to look, during a lesson where I had earlier done the same to her.

38 See Songs for Children, p. 59
Beyond directing me, Eden also directs herself. When I bring out the key sticks, Eden takes them from me and says “Eden do it!” She lays the sticks out on the white key between the groups of two, and then stands looking down the keyboard thoughtfully. She mutters to herself “now…now I’m gonna…” before systematically playing each key where she has placed a stick, from high to low. Later, I ask her why she chose to put the key sticks in the middle of the group of two, and she responds “because, that is the place that they go. I might do the group of three, next.” When she does, she runs out of sticks. When I point this out to her, she says, “I have a good idea. I can DO this!” With this self-affirmation, she goes to the box to look for more sticks [that we have used in previous lessons], and—when she cannot find them—searches diligently throughout the room. She finds them on top of the piano, and takes them to the bench, saying, “I’m gonna line them up, and then do them one at a time!” More than indicating to me what she is doing, her dialogue is occurring with herself. She is monitoring her own participation, and is able to articulate her process to herself and to me.

The child directs the time covertly through her actions. While the girls often speak specific directions, their actions also hold directive intent with or without verbal accompaniment. Kathleen often shuts the light off to indicate that I am to be quiet, uses the drum to indicate that it is time for me to start playing, or plays a key on the piano to indicate a pause, a stop, or a start. These actions are symbolic in their direction. Other arenas of covert direction occur as actions that speak of where she is drawn. For example, her great love is the CD player. I call it her “great love” due to the fact that she returns to it continuously throughout the lesson, and spends a lot of time crouching over it as she clicks through the tracks. I do not know what it is about the CD player that draws her—is it the mechanics? She also loves the video camera, so it could be.

39 She tells me that this was my idea, which she remembers from “a couple of days ago of piano, or maybe the first day.”
Is it the music, a rich auditory experience she appreciates? Or is it the opportunity the music affords her to dance, to experience her body in relationship to the sounds?

Rarely does she verbalize her desire to use the CD player; it is mainly an action that she takes that has a clear intention and a clear direction. This affects the course of the lesson with its inherent properties of “we are doing this, now.” When I say that we will use the CD player at the end to dance and attempt to shift her focus, I am rarely successful. For Kathleen, the CD player is a major component of the time, and she insists through her words and/or her actions that it is to be had when she wants it. She is not acting negatively or defiantly; she is not being derisive. She is simply stating where her interest lies, to the point where she cannot be deterred.

Eden’s involvement with the mouse directs what we do, as she ties a pencil to his tail, and hangs him off the edge of the piano. She plays the piano with the mouse, attends to re-attaching the pencil when it comes apart, and helps him when he falls down. Her preoccupation with the mouse causes me to play with my own animals alongside of her. As time goes on, I speak to the mouse in a chanting pattern. My purpose is to engage her musically within the pretend, but Eden runs away to hide behind the couch. Her removal of herself from the shared space requires a response from me, and directs me to change my approach. I sing to her instead, and her response continues to involve the mouse and the mouse’s actions and needs. The mouse responds with negative statements to much of what I do in the context of the play. Eden’s actions are not separate from verbal responses that have directive intent, but these verbal directions are masked as a part of the play. The mouse “hates” the music, she only likes the CD player. Eden does not direct me with a specific statement of “you can only play the CD player”; instead, she tells me that the only music the mouse likes is “radio music” as she turns the CD player on and
bounces the mouse through the air shrieking “I love it, I love it!” These actions have the intent to take and to maintain control over what we are doing in the lesson.

So enamored with what they are doing at the moment, the girls participate in the time to the point where I have no choice but to be with them in it as much as I can be. For Eden, this often occurs with the mouse, who is typically the object of her attention in a way that I do not understand how to be a part of. She wrestles with him, her hands on him, moving him through the air and stuffing him behind the piano rack. She talks to herself, and makes indeterminate sounds on a high pitch as she wiggles him around in the small space. For Kathleen, this happens particularly in relation to her “getting ready”. Time and time again, Kathleen becomes lost in her own world as she wraps herself in the scarves or simply takes refuge in her “getting ready” area. There is no diverting her from this activity, nor is there any real explaining of it. To her, this moment is made to involve her getting ready, and it is an inseparable moment from our lesson time. Our lesson becomes defined by it, becomes centered around it, becomes directed by it. I have no choice but to be in it with her, as it weaves its way into our music making and our activities.

By giving intentional directive via their actions, the children direct the use of the time. They intend an outcome, and direct us toward it by relying on actions rather than words. Whether they are cognizant of their intention or the outcome is unclear to me, but the evolution of our activity is guided by how they actively participate. Mindfulness, then, is participatory rather than an articulated goal. In essence, the girls demonstrate direction in a manner that is intentional by way of being, without overt articulation.

**The child directs the time by investment in her ideas.** What determines how and what a child invests in? As the adult in the room, I have an investment in the child and in what I
perceive to be important musical moments. These two elements are my priority. But what is the priority of the child? How does she choose to spend her time? How does she decide on where her attention is focused, and what does focused attention look like? Choice and decision making play a crucial role in how the lesson time is used, as the child takes ownership over the time and directs the lesson, either overtly [with verbal directions] or covertly [via her choice of attention].

The girls are willing to put in the time for the things they love. Eden loves to color, and many times I find her sitting at her art desk when I arrive for the lesson. The desk was moved into the piano room halfway through our year, and can be a source of distraction for Eden. One day I arrive and she tells me about the colors of music, showing me a sheet of face stickers where each face is a different color, and a coloring book. She draws a line down the middle of the dog that she wants to color, and places markers on the piano bench that we are using as a table. The markers match the colors of the stickers. She directs me as to how to color on my side of the line, and places a sticker the color I choose on the top of the page. As we get into it, she calls out, “we’re coloring, in musical!” We are having a very pleasant moment, as I attempt to understand the usefulness of this activity for musical purposes. I hum a bit as I color, and ask her, “whose idea was this, to color in musical colors?” “Mine!” she says. “How did you come up with this idea?” I ask, and she replies, “I just, I didn’t want to stop coloring, so I decided to change it to something by music so I could do it with you!” Her hands extend sideways in the air, palms up, and her chin tilts to the side as she says this, with honest matter-of-factness.

For weeks, we musically color. We sing while we color, and have musical conversation. In fact, the coloring time is always very peaceful and loving between us, and we have interesting conversation about her thoughts and her understanding of the world. She is patiently invested in
performing the task, because she loves to do it and feels competent in it. In fact, she believes in herself as an artist, and has told me that she is a very good one.

Patience and investment are related; when the girls want something, they are willing to wait for it. Kathleen asks me to build her a tent for her to hide in during our hide and seek. I begin to gather materials while Kathleen gets distracted by a new card game lying on top of the piano. Halfway through my building, however, she leaves the piano and comes bouncing over to me, a smile on her face. She goes around the tent, her lip in her teeth in anticipation, jumping up and down with excitement. She makes a small sound of delight, as a baby might. It takes a while, and our hide and seek is interrupted while we finish, but Kathleen patiently covers the blanket with the scarves, and takes the time to arrange them to her satisfaction. When the tent is finished, she jumps up and down, screaming, “Yay!! The cave!” “Is it ready?!?” I ask; “Yeah!!!!!!” she screams with absolute joy. Then, our game resumes.

The time that the tent building takes might feel like wasted time to me, and unrelated to my piano and musical goals, but her investment in the task leads to fruitful musical practice. I sing our Where Is song while I look for her, and I pause before the resting tone when I find her. She sings it, though slightly higher, on “bum”. I sing it back to her, on the accurate pitch. This opportunity to approximate my pitch occurs in the context of the game that she is invested in. When it is my turn to hide, she counts to twenty using the piano keys. She sings along as she does; her pitch doesn’t match the keys she’s playing, but she does adjust her sung register by dropping down when the piano keys get too high. Even though her pitch is inaccurate, her adjustment suggests a sophisticated musical practice. When she finishes counting, she heads off of the bench to look for me, humming an approximation of the song I always sing when I look for her. The first three notes of the song are Sol-Mi-Do; Kathleen hums High Do-Sol-Mi. Her
attempt is in the key, and is an inversion of the actual melody. Her patient investment in the task has resulted in an opportunity for her to practice her piano and singing skills, as well as the song.

**The child directs the time productively or unproductively.** What does productivity look like for these children? The example of Kathleen and the tent demonstrates a productive moment that was not designed by me, nor would it have been. My goals are for the children to experience their musicianship, at the piano and via singing and moving. Kathleen’s goal seems to be that we play hide and seek, in a tent. By working with her to achieve her goal, however, we have an extended musically productive moment. *Productivity* does not necessarily involve a *product*, though it may. Differing from production of a product, I mean productivity here to refer to a quality of interaction that feels positive in its energy, and its fruitful work. It may or may not involve a shared goal, but it does at least involve a parallel movement between the child and me, where we are not at odds with each other. Unproductive participation feels negative, and can involve negative behaviors. It has to do with the quality of how the child responds to the activity or the suggestion of an activity. Not all disagreement or non-participation is unproductive, as disagreement or non-participation can also mean that the child is invested in something else in which they are more interested, leading to rich experiences. Unproductive participation is a way of being in the space that feels defiant, obnoxious, and perpendicular, as if we keep crashing together again and again.

Some days, Eden happily participates and even takes ownership over activities I introduce. I hold the alphabet cards in the air and suggest we do them, and Eden responds with excitement. She then articulates a desire to change the activity according to her own understanding, and plans the activity thoughtfully, out loud. As the activity unfolds, we work out together the nature of the piano alphabet, and I guide her through the activity by asking
questions to remind her of what she knows. Though the activity is not easy, and though she does not always know the next answer, she is productively participating, guiding herself through it with my help. She is invested in figuring out the answer, as she lays out the cards, and searches for the next. She arrives at the G, and matter-of-factly says “H” as the next letter. When I ask if there is an H in the cards, she immediately responds “no—so it stops at G!” When I ask her what happens next, she responds excitedly “It starts all over again!” She looks through the cards and says “now where is…let’s find the A!” She finds it and says, “Here we go…now we could [do] a second start of the alphabet!” She looks up at me and explains, “We’ll say them backwards and forwards, over and over again.” Her ownership is productive in that—though she approaches the activity differently than I would, and differently than how we have in the past—it serves the purpose of working through her understanding of the concept. There is a sense of competency to achieve her task, even though she is not immediately successful.

Eden demonstrated significant episodes of unproductive participation as well, however, where the lesson felt as if it were at a stand-still due to her verbal and/or physical behaviors. Often these behaviors occurred in a refusal to play the piano. On a day when we are sitting side by side, writing out our own music notes randomly on a blank piece of paper, Eden says, “Want to sing the songs we wrote? It will be really fun, because we wrote these all ourselves.” Though the notes do not represent a song, she is speaking of them as though they do, and she is very willing to interpret them. A bit later I ask her to play her music notes for me on the piano, however, and Eden hangs herself off the bench, turning herself around to lean on the piano cover before answering me. She then says “ne…never.” “Never?” I ask, attempting to lift the cover. She puts the cover down. I ask, “Can I play mine for you?” and she says, babyishly, “You can

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40 This was not manuscript paper, and was not music notation in the traditional sense.
never play your music.” When I say, “Never? Why not?” she rhymes my statement with, “because poo poo wots” in the same babyish tone. I do not respond to this statement, but instead ask her where her drum is. She immediately gets off of the bench to look for it, and becomes invested in using it as we sing *Stirring our Brew*.

The use of potty language returns later on, however. She falls off of the bench as I sing the song, and laughs self-consciously. I move closer to check on her, and she hits me on the leg with the mouse for each word of “tip, toe, tip, toe, boo!” She says, “pooing and pooing and pooing your brew.” “No,” I say gently, “we’re not talking about pooing—let’s pretend we’re stirring.” She joins me, picking up the drumstick, singing and stirring happily along with me. I then suggest that she sing the “woo-oo” parts after I sing the parts that have words, and she emphatically says “No!” She stands up abruptly as I continue to try to engage her in the back and forth—I sing the words and then point to her for the “woo”. She puts her nose in the air and sings “ca-ca-ca, ca-ca-ca.” Her tone of voice is grating, and her demeanor is resistant. Her pattern evolves into “na-na-na-nya-nya, no-no-no-tye-tye” in a sing-song style that is obnoxious in its tone, as she falls on the floor and rolls around in subtle defiance. In an attempt to regain positive energy, I echo her and incorporate her response into my musicking, picking up mouse and bear and bouncing them in front of her. She rolls onto her stomach and says, “Mouse and bear, mouse and bear, play the drums, this instant!” She re-engages then, and a rich musical moment unfolds.

Her unproductive participation here appears to occur in response to her self-consciousness. She is embarrassed to fall off of the bench, and she is unwilling to participate in an activity that consciously draws attention to her participation. It would appear that she has

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41 See *Songs for Children*, p. 50
made a decision to not participate, but expresses it through negative behavior, instead of outright defiance. There is a sense of subversion, under the surface. She is asserting ownership, but through passively negative means.

Her subversive negative behaviors include grabbing objects from me, or putting the animals down my shirt. She closes the piano lid, or talks about “poopie”. When we are preparing to dance, I ask if she’s found the scarves. Her response is that she has an idea—“we can whack kitties.” She takes the stuffed kittens out of the box and proceeds to indeed “whack” them. She aggressively spins as the CD plays, and is not attending to the music. She is obnoxiously squealing a series of “la”, bumps into me, laughs loudly but not with joy. She stands in between my legs so that I cannot move, and almost knocks me over. In an attempt to save the situation, I sit and ask her, “If [your school music teacher] were to ask you if [this music is] fast or slow, what would you say?” She yells, “Boom bottom fast!” “If she asked you if it was loud or soft, what would you say?” “I’d say it was poo poo and fooie,” she replies. She is still participating, in that she is responding to the prompts I put forward, but her participation devalues the potential for productive interaction and participation.

It is important to note that the unproductive negative behaviors weave in and out with productive behaviors. The deciding factors are barely—if at all—discernable. For instance, when we are about to compose a piano song, Eden holds up the turtle and squeals, “never compose!” I ignore this comment, and ask instead what our song is going to be about. She continues in the turtle squeak, squealing, “It’s going to be about smacking people’s faces!” I do not respond directly to her statement, but ask her, “Why are we getting silly?” She squeaks back, “Because turtle’s silly!” “Turtle,” I say, “you seem like a reasonable fellow,” as I lean forward and look at him. Returning to her normal voice, Eden laughs, as if we have just shared a
precious moment. I remove something that I notice in her hair, and then say, “ok, we’re going to compose a piano song!” I stand up with enthusiasm, and so does she; she runs to the bench saying, “Turtle can do it!” We spend the next five minutes productively creating a piano song that incorporates the turtle and a variety of techniques on the piano. Eden is entirely present in this activity, and even plays the song for her mother at the end of the lesson.

While the productive vs. unproductive moments are not mutually exclusive, the unproductive negative behaviors often feel overwhelming to me, and overshadow the productive moments. Her negative and unproductive participation culminates one day when she spends most of a lesson dressing a wooden doll. Historically, I have not resisted the incorporation of the toys in the room, because musically rich moments occur as a result of their inclusion. On this day, however, Eden resists incorporating the music. She is entirely absorbed in the doll for non-musical purposes, and is not incorporating me into her play. I sit off to the side with the alphabet cards, and ask her if she will join me. She says, “I don’t want to play that because it’s not on the list.” “Oh,” I say, “it’s not on the list. Well, I’m not sure what’s on the list, because I’m just sitting over here by myself…”

The “list” is in reference to the plan she had decided to write for the day. Her overt planning of the lesson has increased since she began kindergarten. Her plans have also increasingly held an aura of refusal to participate in the piano lesson activities, as her behaviors have held an increasing amount of passively aggressive frustration. It strikes me that her plan is an indication that she is attempting to control the setting for her purposes, but the problem has arisen that her purposes feel antithetical to productive musical moments. It is as if she has rooted her feet in the ground, and is refusing to move forward in the direction that I am prompting her.
In an attempt to guide her through the process of having ownership while also engaging with me, I introduce the idea that we craft the list together.

The next lesson, then, she and I take turns contributing the activities we want to do, and write them down in my notebook. The list focuses us, helps us to remember what we wanted to have happen during the lesson time, and keeps us from de-railing. After the initial list-crafting lesson, I ask Eden if the list worked and if we should keep doing it. “Yeah, it did, I think we should,” she says, and then looks at her mother and says confidently, “We have a new plan.” The process of making the list itself changes; some weeks we take turns contributing the ideas back and forth, but other weeks we write our ideas down on slips of paper and choose the order. The list tends to encourage clear boundaries between one activity and another, something that previously was more blended and fluid. At times during the lessons Eden will say an activity is done, moving to the notebook to check it off, asking me to read what is next. Other times, she wants to continue with an activity when I say it is time to move on; though she resists a bit, when I remind her of the next thing on the list, she is able to change direction accordingly.

For example, she loves the musical coloring so much that she would spend the entire lesson coloring. It feels to me like an avoidance tactic, a way to be in the space without doing the piano activities. At the suggestion of her mother, we start setting a timer to denote the end of the coloring. Eden doesn’t particularly like this idea, saying “I just think it takes as long as the whole time…” but when the timer does indeed go off and we are not finished, she says, “time’s running out, we can finish this next time.” This is a demonstration of her maturity, and her ability to make a decision that shows awareness of the lesson setting.

It was the realization that she was ready to demonstrate this maturity but was fighting the transition with her subversive behaviors that indicated to me the necessity of moving beyond the
purely “informal” practices with which we had begun. The informality had begun to fuel the unproductivity, and so Eden and I worked toward transitioning into the next phase of her learning. It was not an easy transition, and the transition had only just begun at the completion of the data collection. Even after the list was put in place, there were days Eden refused to contribute, acting out in passive aggressive negative behaviors. Once again, however, the unproductive moments did not happen exclusively; richly productive moments occurred within the same lesson. What the list provided for us, however, was a formal structure in which we could participate informally.

**Summary of lived time.** The girls direct the time through their conceptualization of time, which appears in the form of lengthy participation, quick transitions, an overriding story arc, and an underlying cycle of memory. Their direction is at times overtly spoken, and at times covertly indicated. In their overt direction, they direct both me and themselves, often incorporating elements of daily life. Their investment in their ideas moves the time forward, as they focus and intend. Their direction can be productive in quality, containing a sense of energetic and enthusiastic working toward a fruitful goal. It can also appear as unproductive, holding negative interactions.

**Lived Other: The Child Engages in the Lesson through Multiple Relationships**

While an obvious relationship exists between the girls and me, their relationship with other aspects of the setting defines the lesson as well. Situated within the relationships, each lesson takes shape. Further, it is through the relationships that the lessons unfold. The sub-themes indicate that the child engages in the lesson through relationships with negative behavior, the pretend context, the play objects, and with the adult.

**The child relates to the setting with negative behavior.**
Kathleen’s neighing escalates angrily. I playfully toss the shaker egg to her, and she throws it back at me with force. I toss it back to her, and she throws it away with a decidedly angry, “Neigh!” *** Eden bounces the mouse in the air with her left hand and plays keys with her right hand as she squeals, “I hate it, I hate it!” *** I ask Eden to hand me an A card for our alphabet snake, then a B. She picks cards randomly off of the ground and throws them carelessly into the air, saying, “Here’s an A! Here’s a B!”

To explore negative behavior as a function of lived other, I need to reflect on how the child used negative behavior to relate to me and to the setting. To do so, I consider broad aspects of what might be happening here. Outside factors need to be considered when observing the girl’s behavior. According to Eden’s mother, Eden’s “silly” behavior was happening across all areas of her life. Her parents did not know why she was behaving this way or to what it was connected, but informed me it was not only during piano lessons. Though Kathleen’s negative behavior looked very different than Eden’s, it could also be connected to outside factors.

On two occasions Kathleen completely shuts down, and both times expressing a need for her father. The first time, her father is present, and she clings to him and will not participate with me. We end the lesson early that day, and she runs to me and hugs me tightly as I leave. The second time, her father has been away from home for the week, and after a significant amount of time on her mother’s part attempting to understand why she is curled in a ball on the floor, we realize that she is missing him. She is having an emotional melt-down regarding her father’s absence, but is also very upset at the thought that she might not be able to have her lesson. After she talks to her father on the phone, we agree that I can stay for twenty more minutes, and though she sniffs her way through the first part of our time, by the end she is happily and joyfully back to her typical self. Her behavior in these situations is not negative in a diminutive sense, but the fullness of her emotions interfere with the productivity of our lesson time.
On only one occasion does Kathleen behave truly negatively toward me during the lesson. The lesson starts without problem, and as we get settled, she kicks her legs in the air like a horse. I comment that she looks like a galloping horse, and she crawls around the room, neighing. I sing *The Wild Horses*\(^{42}\), but she crawls to the stereo and flips through the tracks. She chooses one and goes to the couch, continuing to “neigh”, but her neighing takes on much more intensity, and escalates angrily. She throws a shaker at me with force, and I “neigh” back at her with matching but controlled intensity. “Is the horse angry?” I ask, and she screams, “neigh!!!!!” in response. “Why is the horse screaming?” I ask, chanting “horsie, horsie, what’s the problem?” She grumpily says that the horse needs a nap, and so I go to the piano to play her a lullaby. Her neighing becomes more peaceful, even babyish. She gets off the couch, however, continuing to “neigh” with varying intensity, and turns the CD player on even though I am playing the piano. She then runs to the piano, and lifts my arms in the air. When I attempt to continue to play, she shuts the lid. Her angry neighing continues, punctuated by fierce looks but mixed with moments of peaceful neighing. She sees me at the piano and says, “Neigh!” as if she is saying a forceful “NO!” After a while of this back and forth between us—during which I resort to simply watching her as I participate in my own activities—her mother looks at her questioningly and she changes her behavior. For the rest of the lesson, she is content only when she is cleaning the piano or the CD player is on; though her behavior is not fully negative, she is not her usual joyful self.

After we finish the lesson, her mother tells me that Kathleen has been acting like this for several days, and that it shows up particularly during functional moments, such as when they need to get out the door. The day before, they had a little extra “snuggle time” and read a book

\(^{42}\) See *Music Makers: At The Keyboard*, p. 20
together, which seemed to soothe her. I call Kathleen over to me then, and say that I want to say good-bye to her. She jumps up on me and gives me a hug, and chases me to the door, saying that she wants to give me a kiss good-bye. Her mother calls me later to explain certain factors of their family situation at the moment, factors that could potentially explain Kathleen’s angry behavior. It strikes me that Kathleen used the pretend context of the horse and the familiar pretend of the napping to articulate her feelings, and possibly even to exert an element of control in a setting where control was possible.

I find Eden’s behavior to be most perplexing, because behaviors that could be considered “negative” start at the very first lesson. On day one, Eden has the mouse say, “please stop singing those boring songs!” when all other signs point to the fact that she is enjoying herself. What she seems to be disagreeing to, however, is the words of the song Mouse, Mousie⁴³, as they have to do with a cat chasing the mouse. Is she sensitive to the text, and is she subtly indicating to me that she is by calling the song “boring”? In this case it is not her behavior but her language that is negative.

Another incidence of negative language occurs on a day when she is struggling to participate in the lesson. Eden lists all of the songs that she “hates”, but soon after in the same lesson they are the songs that she excitedly chooses to sing as we bounce the scarves in the air as a trampoline for the animals and other materials. This incident happens on an abnormally hot day. When I arrive, Eden is in the kitchen, where her dad tells her they’ll have grape juice after the lesson as a special treat. She wants the grape juice now, during piano. Eden says, “I love piano!” Her dad says he knows she does, but grape juice stains, so it will be a big treat afterwards—“If you are really good and listen really well, I’ll give you the grape juice, ok?” She

⁴³ See Music Makers: At The Keyboard, p. 18
says indignantly, “Daddy—but I don’t know HOW to be good! It’s hard to have fun and be good.” Her father says, “You can do it!” and she says woefully, “It’s hard to Daddy! I cannot.” “Just make me proud, ok, sweetie?” She is quiet for a moment, and then says petulantly, “I don’t wanna make you proud. I want to have it now.” He directs her attention to me and the mouse in the living room, and she runs in with a giant smile, takes the mouse, and pats him excitedly on the bench, squealing on a rhythmic neutral syllable—“rr-rr-rr!”

Again, what are the outside factors at play here? It is an abnormally hot day, her mother has been out of town for four days, she desperately wants her juice, and she has been told to behave. Though at moments she remembers the juice and asks for the lesson to be over, she also participates in very interesting and productive ways. She improvises a tune in a high-pitched voice for the mouse, and allows the bear [me] to play some sad sounds on the piano when the mouse is missing. She continues to insist that the mouse hates “our songs”, but has him play the tambourine along to a track on the CD. She brings in her accordion, and plays it joyfully. She creates the trampoline game and is absolutely delighted by it, as we move our arms through the air in relation to the singing. She lies on the ground, chin in hand, as she watches and listens intently to me as I play a piano improvisation about popcorn. She claps for me when I finish, and I take a bow. We dance to finish the lesson, and she dances elegantly and energetically, twisting back and forth, swinging her arms, making arm circles in front of her face. As the song fades away, she gracefully lets her scarf float to the ground.

In this case her negative language jars me, and her recursive desire to leave the lesson confuses me, but upon retrospection it is not a bad lesson. It is actually a quite productive one. Is her dialogue of “hate” simply expressing an element of the play? And how does her conversation with her father before the lesson grant insight into what was happening that day?
Her comment that it is hard to have fun *and* be good is interesting as well—what does it mean to be good, and what does she consider fun?

The following scenario raises the question of fun again. Eden and I are playing the piano, using the composer book to guide our sound choices, happily. She makes a quick transition and announces she wants to play with mouse and bear. She takes on the mouse voice and announces, “I am not feeling well, I am not feeling well!” I sing a song about a doctor, but she doesn’t like my song, so makes up her own. We are physically connected here, leaning on and toward each other, and we are in the moment together. We are reciprocating off of each other as we create the elements of the time, though I do not always understand what she is doing.

I feel a bit at a loss with how to respond to this cranky mouse, and—desiring to insert music into the play—I attempt to connect to her pretend with my music. I sing a feel-better song—she doesn’t want a feel-better song. She says the mouse just wants to sleep, so I sing a sleeping song. She doesn’t want a sleeping song, saying, “Please no songs!” When I ask why no songs are allowed, the ‘mouse’ says that these are not music lessons—they are “squeaking lessons.”

Clearly this is perpendicular to my purpose. I continue to attempt use of the instruments, taking up a recorder and playing the piano. She takes the recorder away from me, will not let me play, and says in her mouse voice, “You should just leave here if you don’t want to do squeaking lessons!” Though her words and her actions appear to be harsh and negative, it is striking that she is not being ornery—she appears to simply be immersed in the pretend, and in directing it.

I whisper to the mouse as Eden holds him on my shoulder, and ask him why he won’t let Eden play the piano. Eden listens quietly. Speaking as the mouse, she says that he just wants to go to bed—“I’ll have the next music lesson, I’m going home.” She turns toward the mouse’s
“house” behind the rack, but has the mouse actually play a few notes on the piano before he makes it home.

I respond with one more try—I say I will make a bed, but sing *Take a Bath* on “bum”. This is referring to an activity we have created at an earlier lesson—the animals have taken a bath with the scarves, and then we’ve put them to bed. Eden responds by getting off the bench to watch me lay out the scarves, and then refers to these previous pretend moments, saying, “But I need a bath!” She hands me the mouse with a smile, and I scrub him, singing the song. She doesn’t participate in the singing, but sits and watches me, a smile on her face. She calls out “enough enough enough enough!” after a while; I mention the lotion [also from a previous time] and she says “lotion lotion lotion!” She takes over making the bed as I pet the mouse and sing to him. “She fell asleep in your hands,” she whispers gently, and then quietly and urgently says, “Put her to bed, put her to bed!”

As I sing a lullaby for the mouse, Eden lies on the ground, and sings snippets of the song with me. Eventually she climbs up on me, holding the mouse, and wakes up the bear that has been sleeping as well. I ask if we have a wake-up song, and point to the tambourine as being useful for it. She goes to get it, saying, “You play the drum and I play the tambourine.” She shakes the tambourine and makes non-descript vocal sounds as I say “wake up” over and over again. She picks up the bear and says for him, “I had the roughest dream, I dreamed that someone was playing loud drums.”

I hand out the recorders, and she shakes hers in the air, saying that the mouse can’t play it. I say in explanation, “Well mouse, my darling, you are looking in the wrong end of the recorder,” and have the bear and the frog attempt to help him. Eden speaks for the bear this time.

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44 See *Songs for Children*, p. 53
and says, “I see a cuckoo bird⁴⁵ in there, that’s why it doesn’t work!...How do we get it out?...Mysterious!” I suggest that we make a “cuckoo-bird get out of the recorder” song, and go to the piano with the finger puppets [frog and cow]. She runs over to me with the mouse, and the mouse says shrilly, “I said no music today!”

Here we return to the ‘no songs’ theme, which she seemed to have forgotten, but recalls when I return to the piano. She continues to tell me and the cow and frog that we are not allowed to even talk, bouncing the mouse on my hand and squealing, “I said—only mousie can talk!” “This is the bossiest mouse I’ve ever met,” I say to the finger puppets, and Eden laughs. I take the frog, who is perched on my finger, and chant on “ba” in her direction, moving the frog’s head up and down as if he is really speaking. Eden hits him with the mouse, squealing “boo!” When the frog plays the group of three black keys, Eden knocks him off with the mouse, squealing “I said get off the piano!” I am a bit shocked by her behavior, and so use the cow to say, “This is the meanest mouse I’ve ever met!” I proceed to play the group of three with the cow. This time, Eden looks thoughtfully down at the mouse that she has placed in my lap, without responding to my statement or to my playing.

I am wondering what Eden would say about her behavior, because I do not know how to understand it. Her behavior is confusing to me, because though she is directing me and the other animals to not play the piano in a rather aggressive manner, her demeanor is pleasant—gentle even—as she leans on my leg smiling and laughing at our dialogue. Her lack of response to my “meanest mouse” comment is also interesting. I whisper to the puppets, “I wonder what Eden thinks about the mean mouse?” She watches me, and I put the puppets closer to her face and have them say, “Eden? What do YOU think about the mean mouse?” She giggles, leans in

⁴⁵ The cuckoo bird is a recurring character who is imaginary; there is no stuffed animal to represent it, nor do I know where the idea of the cuckoo-bird came from.
deeper on my leg, looks thoughtfully off to the side, and says, “I think that he’s kind of funny too.” I ask the mouse then if he is funny, and Eden lifts him to my face and says with a smile, “Yes yes yes yes yes!”

This explanation is interesting, because the mouse’s behavior feels obnoxious. Does she really think that this is “funny”? If so, it is possible that she is simply so immersed in the pretending that what I am perceiving as confusing and even defiant toward my goals of making music at the piano is actually her way of participating freely, in ways that cannot be separated from the moments of musical activity. This is an interesting social commentary as well, as she practices what it feels like to be funny in an aggressive and defiant manner.

Due to my confusion regarding what is happening here, next I ask her what the mouse thinks about the piano. She again leans on my leg and thoughtfully says, “He likes the piano, he just doesn’t like other people to play on it!” “Why not?!” I ask with amazement, and she responds, “Because! It’s my favorite favorite favorite favorite favorite musical instrument,” pouting a bit as she nears the end of this statement. “Ohhhhh,” I say, matching her tone with compassion.

“Did you hear that guys?” I say to the puppets. “We’d better leave so that the mouse can play the piano.” I turn myself off the bench as Eden turns immediately and without provocation to the keys. She rocks the mouse on the keys, then bounces him up and down. She looks over her shoulder and smiles at me as I sit on the couch. She squeals, “Yes I play the piano, aiiii! Little mousie plays it with her…hand! The little mousie loves to play on the piano…aaaiiiiii!”

When she is finished she comes over to me, where I sit on the couch. She climbs onto it and immediately returns to a previous pretend moment, singing, “cu-coo-coo! Oh I hear that poor
“cuckoo bird!” “Oh, where is the cuckoo bird, cuckoo bird, cuckoo bird?” I sing back, and she squeals “he’s still in the recorder!”

Within the context of her play, Eden offers me a potential glimpse into her thinking. She causes me to wonder if what I perceive as negative and silly behavior is to her a working out of social interactions, a freedom to try out a personality characteristic. Other moments in Eden’s behavior also suggest this to me, such as when she tells me she is “allergic to music...since I was born.” “Well,” I ask, “should I never come again?” “Yes,” she replies, “tell my parents.” Then, she whispers behind her hand to me, “I’m just joking! I’m just joking, I think [lessons] are fun.” Then, out loud again, she sarcastically says, “I don’t like music at all...blah blah.”

It is also interesting to me that the mouse expresses sadness about when other people play the piano—is there a deeper meaning to this? It is possible that she is making a statement for the purposes of her pretend and for no other reason. I am caught by her statement, however, and wonder if there is a relationship between not wanting “other people” to play and her use of the word “hate”—because there are other moments in Eden’s piano story that combine these two thoughts, that I should not ignore.

For instance, the only moment of negative behavior before the episode described above occurred when I asked Eden if I could play her a song after she had played me her “hot soda” song. She says I can, but only if I let her sit on the bench next to me. I agree to this, and she sits looking at me as I play. Eventually, however, she begins to beat on my leg and gets under my arm. She makes snoring sounds, and then gets under the piano. After this, her behavior is very silly. She waves her head in the air and hits herself and the piano bench with the drumstick, laughing in a slightly hysterical kind of way. Is it coincidence that this behavior occurred when I
played for her? Is she comparing herself to me, and acting out in some kind of reaction? It is difficult to say for sure, but other moments could be examined to bring insight.

To explore this further, I need to go into some detail about Eden’s experience with the song *Hot Cross Buns*. *Hot Cross Buns* appears the week after the mouse declares the piano to be his favorite instrument, in an interaction with Eden’s mother. Eden and I are playing with the animals and the princesses at the piano, in a mix of pretend and piano playing. Suddenly, Eden turns to where her mother is on the couch, and starts asking her mother questions. She turns back to me, but is having difficulty forming her thoughts. She keeps saying, “I want to say…”, and I am prompting her, trying to find out what she’s thinking. “I don’t know what I’m…” she says, and her mother interrupts to say, “Hey Eden, you know what I would really like? I wonder if you can let Lauren show you something on the piano?” This statement strikes me as antithetical to my purposes—what exactly does she mean? Eden wonders similarly, saying, “What is show me on the piano?” Her mother says, “I don’t know, but she could show you something and you could show me later.” Eden looks at me and says in a small voice, “Can you show me something on the piano?”

I am not entirely sure what her mother means myself, but I assume she means a song. I decide to try *Hot Cross Buns*, and play each part on the group of three black keys, asking Eden to copy me after each one. She does, struggling only when I combine parts three and four. We finish, and I look at her and say, “Did you just play hot cross buns?!” Her mother says, “You just played a song; that, my dear, is playing a song!” I am uneasy at this interaction, but want to celebrate the moment and so I cry, “Do it again! How does it go?” She plays again, but it is not on the group of three, and is not correct. She laughs and cuddles up to me. I don’t correct her,

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46 Traditional song
47 Traditional song
but say, “Play it down here, on one of the low groups of three!” She does, but she plays it incorrectly again.

At this point I am struggling to know if I should correct her or just let this go. From my experience with other children, I know that when a child is ready to play this song, there is no problem to do it correctly. I take her lack of consistency as a sign that she is not fully ready to play it. Eden herself does not seem to notice the differences, and moves us into a reversal of roles, saying, “Now you have to do what I do!” She plays a pattern and I copy it exactly, but she tells me one of my notes was wrong. I attempt to return to the Mi-Re-Do pattern on the black keys, saying, “Play that! What did I just do?” Instead of playing the black keys, she plays three white keys. When I question her—“Did I do that? Or did I do this?”—she says, “You did this” as she plays the white keys again. Then she says, “Want me to do a song?” I agree to this, and we move on. Seemingly unaware of the differences between our renditions, she participates in this encounter with perfect ease and calm.

The following week, I ask the dog if Eden remembers how to play Hot Cross Buns. I am curious about how this played out for her, expecting from my experiences with other children that if she is ready to play the song she will remember it to a large degree. Eden stands up immediately upon my posing the question, and runs to the piano without speaking. She sits on the edge of the bench and plays three random groups of white keys with confidence. She hops off the bench and says, “That’s hot cross buns!” as she runs back to me, even though it is decidedly not the actual melody. I respond by singing the first phrase, and stand up to go to the piano. I say, “Here, you play your hot cross buns, and I’ll play mine!”

She follows me, but is hitting me with the dog. When I ask why the dog is hitting me, she says he hates me. I remind her that she had gotten all of her sillies out at the beginning of the
lesson, as her mother comes to take the dog away. We move on, peacefully, and have productive piano playing driven by her ideas, but she tells me that I am not allowed to play. Her reaction causes me to wonder what she is communicating—why is it that when I draw attention to her playing in comparison to me, she hits me, says the dog hates me, and directs me specifically to not play the piano? She is still engaged in the lesson, but is demonstrating opposition toward me. This particular opposition does not feel negative, however; it has the feeling of playful fun.

Later in the lesson, I attempt to “teach” the song to her again. I am curious about whether or not she can do this, because she has been able to copy me with some success, though not consistently, and without retention. I am wondering if she would be successful eventually with more direction from me. I play each part for her and ask her to copy me. She copies me with some success, but her rhythm is not grounded and she adds extra repetitions on some keys. I do not point these out, but when we finish, I ask her what song it was. She says, “Hot Cross Buns.” I sing, “Let’s play it again! Ready, go!” Instead of playing it, she plays a string of notes, somewhat wildly, and pushes my hand out of the way with the dog. When I try to play again, she lifts my hand off. I say, “What?! You’re not going to let me play my song?” She continues to keep my hands from playing, finally putting her hands on my wrists and holding them on the bench. The rest of the lesson is mostly a struggle; she continues to say I have no arms and that she hates my songs, though there are some productive moments woven in. Here, her opposition becomes meaner in its underlying intensity, and I do not perceive it as innocent silliness—it is unproductive in its nature.

Toward the end of the lesson, I am at the piano again. I finish playing *Hot Cross Buns* with the dog; the dog asks Eden if she would like to play *Hot Cross Buns*. Eden, who has been lying on the floor in subtle rebellion, says, “I hate that song.” Her mother reprimands her, says
that if that is the case she should talk to me about a song she wants to learn—“Lauren knows all manner of songs.” Eden says she wants to know a song called “Mr. Nobody,” as she rolls around on the floor. How is it that she ran to the piano to play the song at first, but has ended up rolling defiantly on the floor, using the word “hate”? How much of her behavior is related to self-consciousness, or comparison with me? Could I interpret it as simply being a child-like moment of badness? It certainly doesn’t feel this way; Eden is not a “bad” child, and her negative behavior feels like it has darts in it, aiming directly for the interactions between us in relation to the song.

*Hot Cross Buns* comes up again a month and a half later. I ask Eden what her favorite song to play on the piano is, and she sings *Hot Cross Buns*. Her mother asks her to play it, and she goes willingly to the piano. She plays on the white keys, and uses C-D-E, though not in the right order. Her mother tells me that she had shown it to Eden again that week. We ask Eden how she knows where to play, and Eden says that it’s in her brain, that she listens and looks. “I should listen, if it has this sound and this sound…” She plays the sounds she is speaking of, but she plays D and B, which is not where she played the song. Though she remains on the same set of three keys during this playing—three keys that are indeed the place of the song—she does not play them in the order of the melody. When she explains to me her process, she clearly points out different keys. She is willing to play, and seems completely unaware of the distinctions between her melody and the actual melody of the song.

I find this series of interactions to be important in attempting to understand some of her behavior. In an effort to focus her, her mother brought up the idea of having me show her something. I felt pressured to “teach” her, in order to control the moment. What expectations did this communicate to Eden? Her behavior in the lessons itself indicated to me that we did not
need to push this “learning” of a “song”, but it also raised the question of “what is a song?” I had used the word frequently to mean any moment of musical creation; here it was used as a reference to a specific and established piece of repertoire. I wonder if this confused Eden, or set up an expectation she did not understand how to meet.

Some conversations that her mother recorded on the blog further raise this question. Early in the semester, Eden asks her mother how I know all the notes in a song. Her mother explained that “[Lauren] practiced a lot, had learned how to listen and remember what notes [she’d] heard, and also [she] could read notes on a page!” Eden asks the same question about the organist at church, and her mother told her that the organist had taken organ lessons, “just like you are taking piano lessons!” On another occasion, she attempts to play the piano along to the CD. “I was going to try to play along, but I couldn’t choose it right so then I just started dancing instead.” She means she couldn’t choose the right keys, says, “I tried but I couldn’t.” Her mother assures her that she can learn to do this “someday”, that “it takes lots of listening and practice.”

These conversations demonstrate an awareness of her differing ability from me, awareness of what is involved in making music, and mentions what typically occurs in a music “lesson”. The next blog entry occurs when Eden first brings the word “hate” into the lesson in relationship to Hot Cross Buns. Her mother talks to her about how else she might express herself, and encourages her to tell me what she’s thinking. “Lauren is really interested in what you think about things, so instead of just quitting, it helps a lot if you tell her what you are worrying about or not liking. She will listen to you; she’s a good listener, isn’t she?” Eden agrees, and says how much she likes me. This conversation reflects the dichotomy of her
negative language with her feelings toward me, as evidence that when she says she “hates” me she may mean something different, or nothing at all\textsuperscript{48}.

The next blog entry is interesting enough to include in its entirety:

Mom: Do you like doing music with Lauren?

Eden: I love it, it’s great!

Mom: I heard you say you hated the piano. Is that true?

Eden: Well…[nothing more]

Mom: Do you hate it, or you don’t?

Eden: I hate it when I play; I don’t play pretty songs. I love it when Lauren plays. She plays beauuuuutiful songs!

Mom: I like your songs.

Eden: [nothing]

Mom: Lauren can teach you more songs.

Eden: She only taught me one song which is Hot Cross Buns! She didn’t teach me any MORE songs.

Mom: If you ask her, she could teach you more.

Eden: She can?

Mom: She likes teaching kids songs.

Eden: Oh. Can you put this shoe on [to a doll]?

Here is evidence of Eden’s belief in the validity of her own playing, or the lack thereof.

Again as well is the question of what denotes a “song”, and whether or not her songs can compare to the songs that I play for her. My purpose in playing the songs for her is to model for

\textsuperscript{48} It strikes me that this may even be her way of indicating a complicated kind of regard for me, without knowing entirely how to.
her, to encourage her, and to be with her musically in the space. To what extent, however, does this hinder her?

There’s another question raised here as well. What does Eden think about the fact that I do not “teach” her songs? Does this suggest to her that I do not believe in her ability? A later entry furthers my wondering on this question, when Eden plays a song on the piano and then asks her parents if they like it. She says, “Lauren taught me that song.” Her mother says, “She did?” and Eden replies, “Yeah, she taught me with her skills.” This, of course, is not the case—the song was her own. What then does her dialogue suggest about her thoughts regarding how I do or don’t teach her, in relationship to my skills versus hers?

At the beginning of our lesson on a subsequent week, Eden tells me that we can “change the lesson” by putting the animals on the piano more than on the cushion, and that she can play the piano more than last week. She is very serious in her telling me this, and I ask her where she got this idea. “Mommy told me,” she says. The blog offers insight into this conversation. When her mother told her I was coming Eden said, “Great!”

Mom: I hope you’ll play the piano a lot with her, not just the animals.

Eden: Ok. But remind me, ok?

Mom: OK. How come sometimes you don’t play the piano as much when she’s here?

Eden: Well, sometimes I like it when she plays a song, and then I play a song.

Mom: I love that! I love it when you play a song. Plus you’ll learn a lot more the more you are at the piano.

Eden: Yeah, I am learning a lot.

Mom: It’s like, it would be really hard to get good at basketball if you were never even holding the ball.
Eden: Yeah, without even a ball you couldn’t even play!

Mom: It’s like that with piano too; it’s hard to get good at piano if you’re never sitting at the piano. Maybe you could think about staying at the piano more when Lauren comes.

Eden: Yeah! Good idea!

At the end of this lesson, her mother comes into the room and says that she heard more piano this week—“It’s kind of a good idea to play the piano when your piano teacher comes over,” she says, and Eden does not respond. I wonder what is going on in Eden’s head, so decide to interview her a bit. I ask her what the most important part of our lesson is. She says, “Piano.” I ask what the thing she most likes to do is, and she replies, “Play the piano.” She has expressed similar sentiments on other occasions, but here I can’t help but wonder if her answer is influenced by her mother’s emphasis on the piano, and Eden’s desire to say the right answer.

Next, I ask her if there’s anything she does not like about her piano lessons. She replies, “When Lauren teaches me everything. Yeah, and I want to have piano lessons with nobody teaching me, just showing off how good I can do!” This answer strikes me as her very honest thought, as it is not spoken sarcastically, and is not suggesting that the teaching and learning is the most important element. She is expressing her belief in her own musicianship, and a need to know that her playing is valid in and of itself. She is demonstrating a need to just be, to just do, to just play—without interference. Her statement relates to her expression in the blogged conversation that she likes when we take turns playing songs. It could seem to oppose her earlier statement that she hates her own songs, or it could provide insight: if she believes that her songs are good, but hates them in comparison to mine, it is little wonder that she does not want me to play.
All of these conversations speak toward Eden’s belief or unbelief regarding her own musicianship and playing. I will discuss this more in the section on musicking, but here the question of how her beliefs influence her behaviors is raised. Does the passively aggressive negativity come from a struggle to understand what is expected of her? In a setting where I am promoting free and ambiguous exploration, how does she understand the expectations of behavior and learning? The dialogue with her mother places an emphasis on traditional views of teacher and student, which I am not asserting in the space. Was this dichotomy confusing to her?

Ultimately, I wonder if Eden’s behaviors were indicative of a child attempting to figure out how to be herself within a new and specific social and musical culture, in comparison to the other cultures in which she participates. Filtering her own expectations with the expectations of her parents and myself would be one factor with which she needed to wrestle. Understanding her musical role, and the ability that she had to contribute to the setting would be another factor for her to work out. The shifting balance of productive and unproductive behaviors either kept her invested or hindered her full and free participation in the setting. Struggling to understand or to decide on how to fully be herself could explain where her behaviors were rooted.

Given this idea, it strikes me that expression of unproductive and negative behaviors could be necessary in a child’s journey toward full expression of self. When I think of the life-long process that it is to learn how to filter and respond out of appropriate emotions and beliefs, I wonder if the piano lesson space can function as one more practice field for a child to gain ownership over her own way of being. While I am not speaking of rewarding or condoning negative behavior, I am speaking of being with them in it, no matter the cost or discomfort to me. When I consider the reality that life is ambiguous, and that there is mess we sometimes cannot categorize, I wonder if the “lessons” that Eden wrestles out here run deeper than the lessons of
how to play the piano or how to be musical. What if allowing her to “be in” her struggle is equivalent to allowing her to learn to live? Essentially, I consider that this child and I are “in it” together, and ultimately the experience is richer because of the relationship we have. I am not here with this child because she’s productive. I am here because she’s valuable, and because her full expression of self is important. I am here because I am invested in her possibility, and in the working out of it—in any way it comes.

Ultimately, negative behaviors function as an interaction between the children, the setting, and myself. The moments of negative behavior feel uncomfortable, in their inherent unproductivity. When the children act “out” it raises the question of “why,” due to social norms that say negative and unproductive behaviors are unacceptable. How much of this unacceptability is related to our social expectation of productivity, however? Experiencing this setting with these children has caused me to wonder if negative behavior is simply a way of trying out one’s personhood. Seeking to understand the relational aspects of negative behavior under the lens of lived other, these behaviors could be seen as a communicative tool, or simply as a way of being. In a sense, they could be seen as a child’s exploration of her relationship with herself.

The child relates to the pretend context.

“I couldn’t find the pink poodle today! My music teacher must have swallowed her!” Eden says—“I think we need to find a way for you [little froggie] to walk down into her throat and get the doggie!” *** Kathleen sings out “time to get ready!” and disappears behind a chair. *** Eden tucks the mouse and bear under the scarves since it’s bed time, and takes the animal pictures out of the box, saying “let’s pretend these are the dreams.” *** Kathleen comes leaping into the piano room, crying “the music teacher came riding in on a rescue horse!” She neighs, and explains “Fruitloop is a very loud neigher.” *** Eden runs to the couch and calls out, “I’m in music land! Everybody’s singing all the time! The snoring sounds like people singing!”
It strikes me that the pretend context becomes the setting within which the girls relate to me, the music, the play characters, the materials, and the instruments. The pretend context is the unifying and the mediating force. Though the elements of the lesson are separate entities in my mind, they appear to be woven into—and cannot be pulled apart from—the pretend for the children. Hence, the pretend context functions as a lived other to which the child’s relationship needs to be considered.

The pretend is often dramatic, including sickness and even death. Eden is fussing with the mouse as she sits on the piano bench. She declares that the mouse has a “thorn in his bottom”, and hence she is making indefinable sounds in an unhappy tone. I am sitting next to her on the bench, attempting to be a part of what she is invested in, but not entirely sure how to go about that. When Eden sings “hello hello mousie” I echo her, but the mouse cries out, “What are you doing? You are singing? I am trying to sleep!” He is being very emphatic, and I sing that we were trying to help him. The mouse squeals, “All I want is for someone to help me get well!” Eden’s solution is that we take the mouse’s temperature, and so I put a pencil into the mouse’s mouth as Eden holds it open. She reports, “It says 45!” and I ask what 45 means in mouse temperature. I am attempting to be with her in this moment, attempting to follow her mind as it spins out in front of me. She makes whining mouse sounds and says, “It means that mousie will never get well again…unless, unless you kiss me 45 times!” The first part of that statement was made as Eden, but for the second half she slides seamlessly into speaking as the mouse. (Her speaking as the animals within the pretend is a common occurrence. I cry out, “45 times?!?” and ask who has to kiss her—could the piano do it? Eden emphatically says, “Yes.” She takes the mouse to the lowest keys and concentrates as she plays from the low to the high with the

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49 i.e., the musical moments, play characters, instruments, etc.
mouse’s nose. I count to 45, as I play randomly all over the keys with the finger puppets, which have been on my fingers this whole time.

During this exchange, there is a dialogue between us that is fueled by me, in an attempt to join her in what she’s doing. Most of the time the pretend context includes and even incorporates me, but it can also exclude me. Whether we interact together in it, simply exist side by side, or completely misunderstand each other, the pretend context exists as a third person in the room that cannot be ignored. This can prove to be challenging for me, given the fact that I approach the elements separately and the girls weave all of the elements together. If pretend is occurring with little to no music, I sometimes attempt to change the direction of things because I do not understand what is happening. In going over the video episodes, however, I have come to realize that often the threads of the child’s actions are woven together in ways I did not understand in the moment.

For example, Kathleen spends a significant portion of the lesson “getting ready” in her “dressing room”, which is located behind the arm chair and so is separated from the lesson space. She emerges as Tinkerbelle, and I ask if Tinkerbelle wants to dance. She tells me that she’s still in her pajamas—“I’m still needing to get ready.” She disappears again, behind the chair, and for more than ten minutes I wait for her to finish. “Hey Miss Lauren, do you know what I really have to do?...hang my clothes up!” she calls. I get the drum and start to play; “I’m not ready yet!” she cries. I speak rhythm patterns on ‘ba’; “I’m hanging all my clothes up!” she yells. I am being outwardly patient, but in my mind I am trying to figure out how to end this seeming deterrent to our lesson time. I continue on with the rhythm patterns and she begins to speak back to me, from behind the chair. Her first pattern is not quite metrical; the rest are, and are original to her. I add pitch, and she responds likewise for the first few, and then is quiet. “I am still
hanging my clothes up” she informs me. I sit. I sing *The Wild Horses*[^50]. She is quiet. I hum on a neutral syllable, sometimes I add the drum on an important beat. “I’m not ready yet,” she says. I pause, start to sing again. “I’m getting ready now,” she says, and as I sing the phrases of the song on neutral syllables with pauses in between, she says, “I’m putting my dress on.” I get up and go to the piano, and she says “I’m not done yet.” Eventually, after both her mother and I help her tie the scarves around her as she directs us to, she turns and looks at me. “Now what?” I ask, “What do we do?” I have forgotten all about the dancing Tinkerbell, but she says very clearly “You play songs for me to dance to!” as if it is so very obvious.

In this case, Kathleen’s pretend is relatively straightforward and focused on one task. In fact, much of Kathleen’s pretend is focused on one activity—hide and go seek [which could be classified a game as much as a pretend context], lullabies, getting ready, cleaning the piano, having a birthday party. As the year unfolds, her pretend contexts remain focused on one task, but they deepen in their quality.

The first time that Kathleen and I clean the piano, I sing “time to clean up, time to clean up” in the melody of *Are You Sleeping*[^51]. Kathleen responds by echoing the melody, singing, “yes time to scrub, time to scrub.” I improvise on Do-Re-Mi next, singing, “scrub a dub, scrub a dub, scrub scrub scrub.” Kathleen finishes with her own improvisation of a final phrase, ending on high Do. She glissandos down the piano keys with the beanbags, and continues to sing to herself. Her melody is approximating a resting tone, but it is difficult to define. She locks into the phrase “so very shiny” and sings it over and over again, with varying melodic intention. She alternates between keys and the wood. She adds in the words “dusting”, singing repetitively

[^50]: See *Music Makers: At The Keyboard*, p. 20
[^51]: Traditional song
“we’re dusting and scrubbing all day.” I am using my beanbag without incident until she notices it and says, “uh, Miss Lauren? That’s the dryer.” She takes it from me, and dries off the keys.

This cleaning goes on for a while, and I begin to beat the drum as she takes over the task. She sings fractured repetitive phrases. She sings, “I’m scrubbing and scrubbing all day, dusting, I’m scrubbing, scrubbing all day-yea-yea-yea-yea-yea…for my next piano lesson, my next piano lesson, my next piano lesson, I’m scrubbing and cleaning, I’m scrubbing, pictures are clean, now, this one, scrub scrub scrub, dust, dust, scrub scrub all day.” The “all day” tends to appear as an ending to phrases. I am singing with her here and there, echoing some of her phrases, singing some neutral syllables. She also sings some neutral syllables here and there. Eventually we craft a song together; I take her material and provide a structure to it, and she inserts musical comments to what I sing. We diminuendo to an end, and she says “do you have another song about cleaning?” I sing Take a Bath52: “Take a bath, go scrub scrub scrub, in the tub, tub tub tub tub, soon you will be clean clean clean…” I pause, and she finishes on the resting tone, adapting the words for her purposes: “Take a bath you piano.”

The cleaning returns at her last lesson, for the first time in the second semester. I pick up the beanbags and bounce them in the air, saying that we have not used them in a long time. She kneels on the bench, looking down at me, and takes them from me. She turns to the piano and begins to clean it, singing a melody on “ba”. Her melody is not quite Take a Bath53, but is similar to it. As she whisks the key sticks off of the piano with the side of the beanbag, she improvises on her melody and turns it into a mixolydian54 ostinato on the syllable “va”. She sings the pattern for each key stick, hovering over the key with the beanbag until she is finished;

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52 See Songs for Children, p. 53
53 See Songs for Children, p. 53
54 Take a Bath is a mixolydian song.
she waits for me to say “whoosh!” and swipes the stick off the key. At the end of the keyboard she speeds up, moving her body more quickly, laughing as she says “va-va-va-va-va!!!!!” in a rush of sound.

“Rub dub dub!” she says, and then we begin to improvise together, in response to each other, rhythmically bouncing our bodies. She introduces the words “scrub a dub dub,” and we sing it back and forth until she finishes a phrase with “like in the bath.” Her contributions here are interesting; she brings back the phrase “scrub a dub,” she is approximating a mixolydian melody that relates to the song we’d used previously but hadn’t sung in a while, and she refers to that song with the phrase “like in the bath.” Her contributions are structured, in that she has patterns in her mind that she is holding on to. Even the rush to the end is a sophisticated musical moment, signifying a close to the song.

Next, she takes a breath and transitions to a new melody, singing “Washing the piano’s keys! Nice and pretty…nice and pretty!” She changes her bean bag approach, laying the bean bag flat and swiping it to the front of the area it covers as she chants/sings “Washin’ the piano, washin’ the piano, it’s not hard, it’s not hard.” She repeats this, then incorporates the “scrub a dub” again. She continues her improvisation, incorporating all of the textual pieces we had done previously, focusing mainly on “making the piano shine, making the piano shine, making the piano shine, making it clean.” I tap a rhythmic accompaniment on the drum, and she chants over and over again. Once again, as she wraps the song up, she gets fast—her voice rises in hilarity, her words overlap each other, her body shakes quickly. I imitate her on the drum, and we finish with a coordinated moment of my final beat and her final “boom!”

The first thing I notice when comparing the earlier to the latter is the change of focus. Kathleen stays in one place in front of the keyboard in the second example, systematically
moving up the keyboard. This may be influenced by the presence of the key-sticks that she is removing, as she deals with each individual set, though once the sticks are removed she remains systematically focused. The first time she moves energetically and with no clear system all around the piano, even tucking herself behind it. Another clear difference is the melodic material that she creates. The first time it is difficult to latch on to; the second example is much more articulate in its structure and clarity. Her metrical adherence is also much more articulate in structure and clarity in the second example. Her repetition is of both words and melodic/rhythmic in the second example, where in the first it was mainly the words that repeated. Another difference is that in the second example she takes much more ownership, to the point where I am almost unnecessary. I play the drum in order to be a part of the moment, but not to help with the structure. In fact, after she finishes and I sing a snippet of the song, she yells, “Hey! That’s MY song!” Later, when I sing it again, she says, “Hey! I’M supposed to be singing that!”

The pretend contexts that Eden spins are much more complex in their detail. Even though I know that the mouse is on her desk, I ask Eden where the mouse is when she reminds me that she “is” the mouse. She replies, “The mouse is eating his lunch, on Green Island.” I ask her what the music sounds like on Green Island, and she sings in the high-pitched voice she uses for the mouse “la la, I love you, get green all around, oh coo-coo-coo.” I ask if they have pianos on Green Island, and she replies matter-of-factly, “Lots of them.” “But,” she continues, “they play” [and then she breaks into singing] “flower leaves can glide on you and bumble bees too.” She directs me to “try out” what this sounds like on the piano, and so I sit down next to her on the bench. I say, “Hmmm, Green Island…bumble bees, right?” “Yeah,” she says. “And

55 Her singing is structured and tonal, with a clear Sol-Do at the end of the last phrase.
flowers?” “Yeah,” she says, “and, leaves.” “And leaves,” I say. I put my foot on the pedal and lay my hands on the black keys, slowly and thoughtfully. I play impressionistically, longer tones juxtaposed with rapidly moving pentatonic patterns. Eden watches and listens. Then, she turns her body to me and looks abruptly up into my face with a smile. “Yeah!” she says excitedly, “that’s perfect!”

The extensive poetic crafting of this pretend context is typical of Eden’s approach to her pretend. As I continue to play she continues to spin the pretend, re-introducing the “tail hanger” that the mouse had attached to his tail earlier in the lesson as she walks around looking intently for the tail hanger. Eden has taken on the voice of the mouse, and is complaining, whining, and crying about the lost tail hanger, as I continue to play the piano. She is singing and yelling in the mouse voice, “help! Give me my tail hanger! Bird, bird! I need my tail hanger!...” over and over again. After many repetitions of this, she returns to her normal voice, and says rhythmically, “says the mouse.” She is trying to get my attention with this, but I do not realize it.

Taking on the mouse voice once more, she tries again—“I need my tail-hanger! You gave it as a present, remember?! Now, please, bird, bird, I need you! You’re the only one who can fly here!” By the end of this statement, her voice has taken on real desperation and frustration. She grunts, returns to her normal voice, and very pleasantly says, “Remember, you’re the bird?” I stop playing then, and say, “Oh—I’m the bird?” Somehow I had missed this piece of information, and once again we have a situation where I have missed the thread. Early on in the episode she had reminded me that she was the frog and mouse; in her mind, that announcement apparently carried with it the knowledge that I was the bird, that the bird had a relationship to the frog and the mouse, and that I was essential to the situation of the tail-hanger.
When I return to the transcript of the lesson to find out what was going on here, I find that earlier in the lesson the bird did indeed help the mouse learn to fly and gave him a tail hanger as a reward. What follows is the transcript of the conversation surrounding the tail hanger, to demonstrate the complexity of Eden’s pretend:

E: ‘wait one second, today my friend Boppaly the bird is going to teach me how to fly’

LK sings: ‘Boppaly the bird is teaching us how to fly’

[“Us” here refers as well to the bear, which I am holding.]

E: ‘no, he’s not teaching you to fly, you didn’t sign up!’

LK sings: ‘just you?’ with a finger point;

E: ‘mm-hm!’ very emphatically;

LK: ‘poor bear’

E: ‘do you even know where the sign-in center is?’

LK sings: ‘I have no idea where the sign-in center is’

E: ‘we’ll have to take an adventure to find the sign-in center’

[She bounces mouse down the keys. I bounce the bear, singing an improvisation. She gets off the bench, waving the mouse through the air.]

E: ‘I’m flying! I’m flying!’ …

E: ‘yay, I got a new tail hanger!’

[She’s off camera, talking about her fun tail hanger; that she got it for flying so well. She’s talking about what the view was from above.] …

[She’s sitting on the bench, she has the mouse lying on the keys, but she’s transforming the tail hanger into a pen, looking up into my face, explaining it to me.]

LK: ‘Alright pen, show us what you can do. Can you play the piano?’
E: ‘no, no I cannot. All I can do is write.’

[She writes on the key with the pen, and says the X is where mousie lives.]

LK sings: ‘welcome pen, to our piano lesson’.

E (as pen): ‘oh, that’s nice!’ …

E: ‘remember when I showed you on here?’ [pointing to the piano key]

LK sings: ‘this is your house, mouse, this is your house?’

E: ‘yeah!’

LK sings: ‘now mouse, I’m wondering, if you could play a celebration on this piano. Bum.’

E: ‘oh, my tail hanger would be a great person, and watch how he can play the piano!’

[She uses the pen to play specific keys.]

E: “see, he’s great!” Then, ‘I’m not a pen anymore’

LK: ‘what happened?’

E: ‘um, I’m a tail hanger’

[The mouse falls down. We pick him back up and I ask if he can play the piano too.]

E: “no, not unless my tail hanger can help me!”

LK sings: ‘mouse can’t play unless the tail hanger helps him’

E sings on RT: ‘so I am going to put this on my tail and then I will play the piano with my tail’

LK: ‘that’s such a great arrangement’.

[Eden plays the piano with the mouse/tail hanger, chanting ‘nah-na-nah-na-nah-na’.]

E: ‘my tail hanger’s not helping anymore’

LK sings: ‘mouse, you’re gonna have to do it yourself’.

E: makes squealing sounds, ‘I’m swimming! There’s a creek down here and I fell!’

LK sings: ‘mouse is in the creek, mouse is in the creek’
E: ‘bear, come down and save me!’

[I sing on the neutral syllable “bum” as I save her, bouncing the bear.]

E: ‘my tail hurts!’

LK: ‘oh no, better call the doctor’

E: ‘because the pen bit me.’

As the transcript continues, I discover that she did indeed ask me to be the bird, and that she announced, “I’ll be the frog.” There was so much pretend in between, as well as other activities, that I had completely forgotten these decisions. To me these statements were random pronouncements; to her they served as role assignments, and were significant elements of the time.

Her interactions with me in this example demonstrate a typical interaction. She is wrapped up in her pretend, and I am sitting alongside. She invites me into it, and I insert myself as well. I spend the time thinking about where her mind could be going. I also am consistently aware of using the piano in the pretend and setting up musical moments. Sometimes she joins me, singing in reply, agreeing to use the piano. Sometimes she simply speaks in response, and plays with the animals away from the piano. Sometimes she uses the piano as an object—the mouse’s house behind the rack, or the cover as a stage for dancing. Her pretend is the vehicle for her interactions with the materials, the piano, the music making, and with me.

Pretend often reflects elements of everyday life. When I ask Eden where the mouse is, she sings, “he is in his mouse hole.” She has crafted one for him out of a foam door hanger along the baseboard in the hallway. She says, “He’s eating breakfast, so he doesn’t know it’s piano time.” As she goes to get him she says matter-of-factly, “I told him he could finish his lunch at piano lessons.” The eating patterns of breakfast and lunch are daily occurrences that
work their way into our piano narrative, as are naptime, bed time, bath time, cleaning rituals, school routines, and favorite books.

The daily life element that recurs the most in both Eden’s and Kathleen’s lessons is sleeping. Eden puts the animals to bed after we sing *Take a Bath* and bathe them. She arranges the scarves carefully, and places the animals in between the “sheets”. The first time sleeping appears in Kathleen’s lessons, she finishes playing a song, checks on the video camera, and goes to the couch announcing, “I’m tired.” I suggest that I will play her a lullaby, and she requests, “Could you please cover me up?” “Are you really taking a nap during our piano time?” “Yep,” she says, “just resting. For a little tiny time.” Her napping spins out into the lesson, occurring in between moments of other activities when she runs back to the couch and covers herself with the blanket, announcing, “You should play me some night night music…I’m still tired…good-night mousie!” The next lesson she almost immediately goes to the couch, saying, “I just want to sleep!”

Kathleen’s napping evolves over time to include clear references to her school nap experiences. She asks me if I want to take my shoes off as I lie down for my nap, and brings me a stuffed animal, saying, “Since you don’t have an animal to nap with, here’s one.” On another occasion she covers me as she says, “this is one of the school’s blankets, because you don’t have nap stuff, and you don’t have a nap bag.” She introduces complexities to the napping situation, pretending that the radio for “our nap music” is broken because “the things are loose!” She shuts the CD off each time it is “not working again!” and fiddles with it for a bit before turning it on again when it is fixed. Once, she even naps with her horses while I play *The Wild Horses*.

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56 See *Songs for Children*, p. 53
57 See *Music Makers: At the Keyboard*, p. 20
The pretend context situates much of what occurs in the lesson space. The girls direct the pretend, with clear ideas of what should occur. They direct my participation as well, speaking to me out of their vision for what is unfolding. Often, their pretend contexts incorporate elements of daily life, and music is integrated as one part of the pretend.

**The child relates to the play objects.**

*Eden tells me that her plan includes “my little friend froggie here, and he is really nice...”***

*She turns on the CD player and explains for the mouse, “He only likes radio music!” She bounces him through the air, shrieking, “I love it, I love it!”***

*I arrive at the lesson and Eden announces, “I found a new friend for us to meet! Here he is! A giant monarch butterfly!”***

*Kathleen emerges from her dressing room, and tells me she is Tinkerbelle.***

*She wraps herself in the scarves and cries, “I’m going to have a very looong cape, I’m going to be Kathleen with a very looong cape.”***

***Suddenly, Kathleen makes barking sounds. She says, “oh dear, I think puppy woke up!” and runs to get the puppy dog out of her bedroom.***

***She holds the container her recent lost tooth now resides in, and sings, “oh little tooth, we love you.”***

The play objects are very important elements of our lesson time. I think of them as “play”, because they support, encourage, and/or inspire our play. I consider them “objects” because they hold substantive tangible properties. Whether they are physical properties or imaginative properties, the “objects” embody reality to the children. Play objects easily become play “characters” with personalities and significant contributions to our lesson time and to our interactions. Alternatively, play objects may be re-purposed for usage other than their intended design. The play objects function as a lived other, as the children participate in relationship with them and within the lesson setting.

The children relate to the play objects as characters, having real life and value for our time together. They relate to the characters as if they are tangible beings holding valid significance within the space. They use the play characters to direct the lesson; they often speak as the characters, but also direct them by speaking directly to them. Their interactions with the
characters range—there is a level of physical aggressiveness at times, but extreme joy at others. Ultimately, the lessons would not look like our lessons without the play objects in the pretend contexts.

Eden is holding the mouse, who falls from the top of the piano to the keys. The mouse says, “Ow! I fell off of the roof of my house when I was trying to fix the cactus!” I sigh, and remark on how the mouse—who is always engaged in some kind of drama—has the most amazing story. “I think mouse needs to tell us her story. She’s a very interesting mouse,” I say. Eden speaks for the mouse, saying, “The story is, one day, I was in a fairy tale. And this mean witch cast a spell on me to make me sick! So all we do is we need to break the spell, or we will die…or, or, I will die.” Then, returning to her Eden voice, she says, “So, that’s it. So you need to break the spell. The only way to break the spell is with this froggie’s mallet 45 times!” I say, “45 times…alright! You strike the mallet 45 times while I play the magic music.” “Ok,” she replies, simply.

For Eden, the beanbag makes a repeat appearance as a doctor, when the mouse is feeling unwell. Kathleen’s beanbags function as a “washer” and “dryer” or sometimes a “duster” when we clean the piano. The scarves become a blanket, a cape, a dress, a trampoline, a bed, a washcloth. The most obvious objects to become play characters are the stuffed animals. Mouse and bear are the main characters to appear, particularly for Eden. Kathleen is rarely drawn by these characters, though the mouse has become the stuffed animal she takes to school for naptime. For Eden, the stuffed animals are a focal point of nearly every lesson.

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58 She is referring to a wooden percussion instrument that her parents own, that sits on the top of the piano. The back of the frog is ridged, and a mallet is kept perpendicularly through his nose.
59 It strikes me that 45 is the same number of kisses the mouse needed in order to get better.
In Eden’s lessons the mouse and bear are joined by other animals that she incorporates out of her personal collection—a turtle, cat, another bear, a family of puppy dogs, and hello kitty among others. Some of the animals are kept in our music box, while some stay on the piano for prolonged periods before disappearing without explanation. Some appear more than others, and for differing lengths of time. Some of the play characters are imaginary, like Kathleen’s rescue horse True Lou, who is—according to Kathleen—“a very loud horse.” Her Tinkerbelle is another example, while for Eden the cuckoo-bird appears on occasion as an important factor in our play.

The instruments also function as play objects. The recorder becomes the place that the cuckoo-bird gets trapped in, and the wooden frog percussion instrument participates as a character as much as he does an instrument. The piano itself is an object, as it exists to house the mouse, to be a cliff for the mouse to hang from, or the stage on which the bear and mouse dance. Eden sits on the bench while holding the mouse and leans into the keyboard, but she does not play. She places the animal on the keys, but the purpose is not to play the instrument. Kathleen uses the piano as an object to be cleaned, and ties the elastic bands to the piano leg as an anchor for us to pull on them. She also uses the piano as a means of direction, playing the highest key as she counts us off, playing the lowest as a pause button or an ending.

Kathleen interacts with the piano as a tool for her games, as we use it to count when we play hide and seek. The piano is also a tool for the pretend context. Whether we create sounds or craft songs that describe the elements of the pretend, the piano serves to enrich the moments. For instance, when Eden’s puppy is missing, she follows my suggestion to play a magical song on the piano in order to find him. When he is found, we both play a celebration song, which
results in a rich music making moment. Kathleen and I use the piano as a backdrop to her getting ready, and so that “the dancer comes out.”

A variety of play objects are woven into the pretend, re-purposed for whatever the girls’ vision is in the moment. The objects take on characteristics and even personalities, as the child speaks for them and uses them to speak for her. Often engaged in a complex story, the play objects help the girls to express the pretend, often incorporating aspects of daily life as well as creative imagination.

**The child relates to the adult.**

*Eden drops the dog into my lap and laughs, saying, “the dog went down your throat!” as she pushes him underneath my leg.*** She watches me as I play the piano, and approximates what I am doing on her own set of keys.*** She stands up and lays her head on top of mine. “Are you thinking about it in MY head?” I cry; she laughs and leans closer—“Yes!” she says. *** She sits in my lap and colors. Softly, I ask her, “What’s your favorite song from piano?” “All of them,” she replies quietly, “I like all of them, you can just choose any.” I sing a phrase of The Wild Horses60, and she interrupts me, quietly; “but, I would like it better if it’s just Christmas songs,” she says. *** I stand frozen in the middle of the room; Kathleen rolls on the couch and laughs delightedly. Affectionately, she says, “Miss LAUR-en!” *** I begin to march, and Kathleen calls out, “Wait!” She brings me the palm branches and says simply, “you’re gonna swim.” *** I sit at the piano, singing. Kathleen runs back into the room saying, “RAR! That means stop.” She runs around me as I say that I have a question. “Hey!” she cries. She stops and looks at me with indignation and says, “I didn’t say play!”

While the previous forms of lived other considered the girls’ relationship with the elements of the setting, their relationship with me turns me toward myself. How did they view me and my place there with them? What did they consider my role in comparison to theirs? How did they act toward me, and in their acting, what did they demonstrate? When speaking of relationship, I must consider communication in all of its forms and reciprocity, as well as the reciprocity of evolving ideas, and the meaning inherent in my “being with” these children.

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60 See *Music Makers: At the Keyboard*, p. 20
The girls respond to my cues and prompts in a variety of directions. They agree, they disagree, they deflect, they ignore. They freely direct me as to what to do or not to do. Their response and their direction can be verbal, but it can be non-verbal as well, as they use their bodies to indicate their choice. They physically and verbally express affection for me and pleasure with me, and do not hide their frustration or need to vent. They share the space with me; they participate and invest in it and allow me to participate and to invest as well. At times they accept my contributions and allow me to co-construct their ideas; at other times, they flatly refuse to budge.

The wake up song is introduced when Kathleen asks me to “do something” while she’s sleeping, “to wake [her] up.” First, though, she tells me to play the lullaby until she starts snoring, and once she starts snoring I am to “STOP!” I follow these directions; when she begins to snore, I stop playing the piano, go to the floor, and sing “She is snoring, she said to stop playing, what do I do? What do I do? I guess I’ll go over here and pick up my drum—…” I pause, and she calls out in her sleep, “and play it!” So, I do, but she does not wake up. She waits for another sequence and for me to wonder “when will she wake up?” before she cries “boo!” and reveals herself. She returns to the idea of the drum as a tool for waking up at a later lesson, when she has covered me with a blanket as I nap on the floor. Instead of playing a lullaby for me like she had said she was going to, she picks up the drum with a mischievous grin on her face and bangs it to wake me up. When we reverse roles and I bang the drum for her wake-up song, she ignores me. For a significant amount of time I attempt to “wake” her, until finally I give up and go to the piano with the key sticks. All is quiet. Suddenly, she says, “Is it wake up time?” I look at her and say incredulously, “It has been wake up time for a long time!
I’ve been singing wake up stuff like crazy!” “Well,” she says practically, “I wanted to sleep a little bit.” She then joins me at the piano.

I consider these “wake up” examples to demonstrate how the child interacts with me as a part of the pretend, as a directable other—a servant to her whims and decisions. It is also, however, a demonstration of the ways that elements of daily life are re-imagined within the context of the lesson, re-skinned for our being together within the space. The musical elements of drum and lullaby are woven into the context—they do not stand alone, nor could they. The child situates herself within a broader and more complex structure in order to be entirely in the space with me. “In the space”—ness occurs as the child generates, embraces, and evolves the dynamic elements of her participation. She participates freely, without inhibition or self-consciousness, and includes me to the extent that she desires to.

At her very first lesson, Kathleen and I play and sing *Jingle Bells* together. She plays rhythmically, in the rhythm of the text. She plays a low note as an ending flourish after the last note of the song, hesitantly at first, her arm large in its motion through the air. I suggest that we have a piano conversation, and we play patterns back and forth as she stands next to the bench, lifting her leg up and down to straddle it. Her wrists hang down from the keyboard, her fingers extended to play each key. Her legs jump into the air in rhythmic relation to my patterns. She is watching and listening, playing each pattern with intention. She hovers over the keys and chooses one, plays it and says, “I said yes!” with a little hop in the air. I laugh, and play a two note pattern as I say “o-k”. We continue this, her one note for “yes”, my two notes for “ok”, until I extend mine, playing three keys and singing “o-o-k”. She responds by taking my word,

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61 Traditional song
playing two keys for “ok!” and so I take over the “yes” by playing a quickly fluttering Mi-Re-Do. She plays three notes then, saying “o-o-k”.

In this example, Kathleen agrees to my idea, and develops it to include a new aspect by attaching her conversational words to our conversational playing. We work together in reciprocal agreement, and create something larger than what it had been. Eden and I do this as well, in an episode of key sticks. I lay out the sticks in the middle of the groups of two black keys while Eden lies on the floor. She is singing, “Paint with your nothing, it’s fun to do,” since we had just been singing this song and had run out of body parts\(^\text{62}\). She adds, “It’s not fun to do!” and we laugh together. She rolls over and stands up then, climbs up on the bench next to me as I sing the first phrase of her variation—“paint with your nothing…” She responds with the second—“it’s not fun to do!”—laughing. She looks at the key sticks and says curiously, “It’s time for this? …game? Is it a game?”

Here she is referring to the week before, when I had first introduced the sticks. When she asked me what they were for, I explained that I didn’t really know, but that we could make it into a game, and only play the keys that had sticks on them. She had replied that she didn’t want to play it, she wanted to play it the next week, and so we danced instead. Hence, her statement above is indicative of her memory of this exchange between us. Now she says that the game “seems a little bit tricky,” but then immediately introduces a way for us to play it, saying, “Are we taking turns playing the piano song with these?” I say, “Sure!” and ask if she would like to go first. She does, and proceeds to play each marked key from the low to the middle, back down to the low, then up to the high. Each key is played with her left hand, and in a long steady beat. I look at her in wonder and say, “Wow, that didn’t seem tricky for you at all!” She laughs in

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\(^{62}\) This song is typically sung, “paint with your nose”, and other substituted body parts.
agreement, as I take my turn. Eden watches me quietly, observing each key I choose. I follow her example of not going in a straight line, but add some different rhythmic elements to my progression. I play some keys twice, and move from some octaves in half the time than others. I finish and make a face at her. She laughs at me sweetly, reaches up to my face with her pointer finger as she leans into me. “I like what you do when you make a face like that,” she says with a smile in her voice. I make more faces, and she puts her hand over her mouth to cover her laugh. She turns to the piano and calls out, “My turn!” This time she begins with her left hand, but switches to her right hand, playing more adventurously in terms of range. Her rhythm is again long steady beats. She finishes, scoots back on the bench and puts her hands in her lap. I say quietly, “My turn,” and again change my rhythm patterns, repeating some keys three times. On her next turn, she continues to play one note at a time, but changes her rhythm for the last three keys.

This interaction demonstrates the social practice of turn taking, inherent in many games. Without any parameters set by me, she is free to contribute her own ideas for how the task should be accomplished, and her direction essentially makes the game what it is. My lack of direction allows her to participate in the game as she chooses, which provides her with an opportunity to change her responses and to evolve her ideas. In fact, had I gone first I most likely would have modeled playing in a straight line from high to low. Eden’s approach—to play purposefully in a weaving pattern—seems much richer in musicality as well as complexity. There is also found here a mutual care for one another, where we are sharing more than just the piano playing. We are engaged in a moment that speaks of comfort with each other, and deepens our sense of togetherness in the space.
Another moment of comfortable togetherness occurs when Eden “reads” the composer book to me, creating a sentence or two for each picture as she turns through the pages. As she reads, I play the piano with the beanbags to musically express her verbal idea. She closes the book, and I say that I am going to go sit in the audience while she plays me “that big old story.” In my mind, I am thinking of how to get her to play, and not merely speak. She stands and looks at me, one hand on the bench, one hand on the piano. She turns to the book, and opens it to the first page where there is a picture of a policeman. “Ok,” she says, “I think maybe Once There Was a Policeman would be a great story.”

She begins to speak through the pages again, however, and so I interrupt her. I say, “What does it sound like on the piano?” She starts again, adding notes as she speaks, and sliding her hand on the surface of the keys at the end of her sentence. She is attempting to glissando, but the keys are not going down all of the way. She looks to the side and sees the beanbag that is laying by the rack. She picks it up and continues her story as she uses the beanbag to glissando successfully. She then uses it to play heavily on each word of her phrase, “all he had.” She continues to use it with her right hand to articulate each word she says, as she turns the pages with her left. She struggles a bit with a page turn, so she puts the bean bag down to use both hands. She continues with the story then, but looking down swiftly, she finds the beanbag with her right hand as she adjusts the book with her left.

So far in this episode she has followed in my footsteps by using the beanbag to play, though she has incorporated it for her own purposes of wanting to play a glissando and to attach to her words. She also responds positively to my nudging her to play; being a verbal child she is always more inclined to tell a “story” through sung or spoken words than she is by abstractly
representing one on the keyboard, but here she agrees to play without comment. Her piano sounds, however, do not represent her verbal ideas; she is merely accompanying herself.

What occurs next, however, changes the scene. Again, she puts the beanbag down to turn a page, but this time she does not pick it back up. She continues with her story, but without playing. I interrupt her, saying, “What does it sound like?” She takes up the bean bag but plays mainly with her elbow as she wiggles around. She is no longer being intentional as she plays, and is clearly going through the motions. Her song quickly ends. I want, however, for her to continue, and so I prompt her. “Play those happy sounds!” I say, referring to her story. “What do those happy sounds sound like?!” She takes the beanbag and swipes it on the keys, saying, “blah blah blah.” Then she yells, “That’s what the baby sounded like!”

Her demeanor has shifted from happily productive participating to an underlying sense of carelessness. I ask her if babies sound like Mi-Re-Do, as I play each of the three black keys. She tells me, “They didn’t sound like the piano.” The shift in her demeanor occurs without warning, and appears to be precipitated by my insistence that she make the sounds on the piano.

Though she is agreeable to my suggestions at first, she imperceptibly changes her willingness to participate. I am pushing her to respond in the way that I think she should respond, and she is resistant. Her behavior does not recover; the lesson closes as she shakes her head wildly back and forth, shrieking, “blah-blah-blah-blah-blah!!!!” She wipes my head with the beanbags, and then squeezes it between them. Her disagreement here is not direct, but with passive aggressive behavior she actively resists participating any further with me in the lesson. There is clearly a level of physical comfort for her to cross into my personal space in such a way, but there is also a level of disrespecting my space. Disrespect is inherently a statement of self-
versus-other, and in Eden’s disrespect there is an assertion of control over how our time together is spent.

A demonstration of awareness of self-versus-other and controlling behaviors is essentially about ownership. While disrespect is one side of this conversation, the conversation could also focus on more productive expressions of ownership. I think of ownership as a dimension of direction, where the children direct based out of a belief that they hold the key to the situation. Direction has to do with the purpose of the task and its necessary rules. Ownership speaks of responsibility, an awareness of the roles each person holds and the differences between the roles. The difference is a subtle one, with ownership being the slightly more insightful dimension, as in the friend who thinks more deeply than the other. Ultimately, ownership implies an awareness of a relationship with self and with other.

For instance, Kathleen is playing her songs out of her Bible with a complex plan that she has to communicate to me, since it is not transparent. There is a level of play-like frustration in Kathleen’s tone toward me as I ask her questions about the songs, and as she directs me to count her off. None of this implies an elevated sense of ownership; on the contrary, it implies an unawareness of the differences between her understanding and mine. It might also speak of a rehearsal of real-life interactions that she may have witnessed between adults elsewhere. She demonstrates ownership, however, toward the end of the episode, when I ask her if we need to turn the page of the book. Abruptly, Kathleen pushes herself backward on the bench, turns to me with her pointer finger in the air and mischievousness in her eyes, and says authoritatively, “let ME handle that.” She moves the books that are holding her pages open to the side and turns the pages. I say, “I’m so glad you’ve got this under control”, and she says confidently, “Yep, I’ve got the whole thing under control.” This awareness of my role vs. her role—and the awareness
of her control of the situation—suggests a subtle shift beyond mere direction into a realm of taking ownership.

This same subtle shift occurs when Kathleen indicates that our roles have reversed during the naptime activity. When she calls out that it is time for naptime, I assume my typical role and say, “Ok, should I play you a lullaby?” “Not my naptime,” she mumbles, almost grumpily—“yours.” Calling for naptime speaks of her giving direction; dictating the shift of our roles demonstrates taking ownership. This shift also occurs at the piano. She has played the piano from the first day, but not with an articulated level of ownership. Her initial approaches were out of her choice, demonstrating her belief that she was competent. This belief, however, was not indicative of ownership because it did not consider me as an ‘other’. Over time, her approach became one of dictated ownership when she took responsibility for the piano, saying “I will show you” during a key stick moment. She shows me, saying, “See? Red, yellow. Can you do that?...You got to keep doing red, yellow. Until all of the keys are done. Just go red, yellow,” and leaving me on my own to finish the pattern she had begun.

In some ways this taking ownership is an issue of language—having the tools to say, “I will do this.” In some ways, however, taking ownership is also an issue of awareness of self and other, a recognizing that there is a negotiable relationship between the two regarding who is responsible for what. Articulating ownership, then, brings a fuller experience, a completeness to the inclination to direct.

In fact, Eden demonstrated ownership at her very first lesson, before she began to overtly direct me. While telling me about a dance that she had learned in another setting, she told me “It’s a little hard for grown-ups because you can only learn it if you’re in a kids ballet class but I learned this on TV in a kids ballet class.” She speaks very knowledgeably about the dance, and
the kind of music it needs, and how to hold the scarf and why in order to achieve the right effect.
Later in the lesson, she brings up a song she knows from school. “I know a very good love
song,” she says to me; when I reply, “You do? What’s it called?” she says matter-of-factly to her
mother and me, “You guys might not know it.” When I say I have never heard of it, she says
simply, “Want me to teach you it?” She then breaks out into passionate singing, accompanying
herself by playing all over the piano.

**Summary of lived other.** The children engage in the setting through multiple
relationships. Negative behavior functions as a relationship with the setting, between the child
and me, and even between the child and herself as she works out her ways of being in the space.
It can be related to outside factors, an exploration of feelings stemming from circumstances of
her life. Negative behavior can involve negative language, but at times the verbal contributions
of the child contradict her physical participation. It appears as a practice of social interactions,
and at times seems to indicate comparison of ability or even self-consciousness.

The children relate to the setting within the pretend context as well, which can involve
aspects of real-life scenarios. Their behavior within these contexts can appear off-task to me, but
often have a unifying thread for them. The play objects within the pretend context become
characters which speak and are spoken for. The physical materials are used as play objects and
characters, but these can also be imaginary. At times, the physical objects are re-purposed for
the purposes of the pretend. The instruments can also function as characters within the pretend.

Finally, the children relate to me by responding agreeably or disagreeably, at times
deflecting my suggestions or ignoring them. They can relate to me verbally or non-verbally,
giving clear and specific direction as to what we are doing and/or what I should do. They
sometimes work with me to co-construct and evolve ideas. Ultimately, the children exhibit ownership within the space.

**Lived Musicality: The Child Engages in the Lesson by Musicking**

Christopher Small (1998) defines the term *musicking* as taking part—“in any capacity”—in a musical performance (p.9). He suggested that musicking is a way of knowing, “an activity by means of which we bring into existence a set of relationships that model the relationships of our world…Through musicking we learn about and explore those relationships” (p. 50). In the process of taking part in real-world practices of music-making, we come to know our world and “to live well in it” (p. 50). The origin of this way of being is “an aspect of the language of biological communication, [and] it is part of the survival equipment of every human being” (p. 210). To be a participant in the musical narrative of the world is to know oneself in a relation to a further dimension of that world. Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) help us understand this way of knowing and being with their definition of *music* versus *musicality*; where music is “moulded by the forces of culture,” musicality is “the innate human abilities that make music production and appreciation possible” (p. 4). The three definitions of *musicking*, *music*, and *musicality* work together to describe what the act of music-making essentially is, by providing us with an understanding of the musical narrative we exist within.

In this section I discuss the ways that the girls participated in that overall music narrative, expressing their beliefs in their role within a musical society, expressing their innate musicality. Though I do not consider “performance” to be the ultimate goal of the doing of the music as Small (1998) might define it, I use the term “musicking” for the purposes of the verb that Small introduced it as—a “descriptive, not prescriptive” (p. 9) word that helps us to see all ways of being musical as valid. In my view, the “performance” is the setting, the space where we have
set the parameters of “music lesson”, and where we “do” music—where we turn music into a verb. I use the term to help expand the understanding of what being musical looks like as well, since the children participated in the setting in musical ways beyond merely playing the piano.

**The child musicks with a variety of intentions.** The children musick by 1) being there with me, 2) responding to musical stimuli in imitation or improvisation, 3) initiating musical moments, 4) enacting musicality, and 5) practicing their musicality. At times these ways of musicking occur discretely, in clearly distinct categories. At times, however, the categories weave together to provide a fabric of musicking. The children’s beliefs about their own musicianship in relationship to their daily life and to real-life musical practices become evident as well, as they draw outside musical experiences into our lesson space and direct the musical components of the environment.

If I consider the setting to be one of music-making, and define musicking as being an active or passive participant in the musical setting, then I am saying that the children are musicking just by being in the lesson space. This definition is important, as there were numerous moments where the children did not enact their own musicality, but were instead experiencing my musicality as I played the piano, sang, or moved without them. And so, on an initial level, the children musicked just by being there with me.

My musical stimulus presented an opportunity to the girls to respond in imitation, to engage with me in a musical conversation or in improvised [non-conversational] song. The girls sang my musical material back to me as it was, or played the piano following my example. For instance, I play a rhythmic pattern with the bear on the keys, and Eden tilts her head to watch me, using the mouse to imitate me in rhythm and in direction on the keys. She is very purposeful in her actions, and—though she is slightly behind me—is playing the same rhythmic pattern. The
result is a complex overlapping metrical relationship, though she does not appear to be aware of it. What she does seem to be aware of is how to do what I am doing. In the same episode, I am playing *Two Little Kitty Cats*. Eden chants “strike strike strike strike” in response, using her arm to strike the mouse on the head with a drum mallet. She watches my left hand as it plays the beat, and looks at her own hands thoughtfully, appearing to assess whether or not we are matching up. Sometimes we do and sometimes we do not, but she actively adjusts her striking in approximation of my beat.

Their responses also came as moments of improvisation in response to and relationship with my original material, or in response to material we had been crafting together. Kathleen and I are tossing the ball back and forth. I sing Do-low Sol-Do-Mi-Do; she responds with Do-high Sol-high Do-low Do. I echo her, and she throws the ball to the ceiling as she sings high Do. Eden and I are having a conversation about the tent she is building. I am using a lot of Mi-Do as I sing to her, which she ignores for most of the conversation as she speaks her responses. Suddenly, her final statement blooms into melody and is far more sophisticated than my repetitive Mi-Do statements. She ends her phrase, however, by incorporating my Mi-Do.

The imitative and improvisational components of response can occur as a part of the same musical moment. Eden and I are playing a song of celebration on the piano. I play a chromatic pattern in contrary motion and then transition into *Hot Cross Buns*. She bounces her body on the bench and plays rhythmically on the keys with the toys she is holding in improvisatory response to my playing. The second time that I play the tune, she turns to watch me. She plays some of her own keys still, but sparsely, as she attends to me more than to herself. On the third time through she drops her toys and imitates what I am doing by playing with the

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63 See *Songs for Children*, p. 59
64 Traditional song
fingers on the keys. She is not attempting to imitate the exact keys, but it is clear that she is
imitating by intention. During my fourth time through the melody, she picks her toys back up
and sings an improvised melody in a high-pitched “doo doo doo” as she spins them through the
air. This fluid moment between us served her an opportunity to respond as she wanted to, in a
variety of ways. Even her improvisation looks different each time, as it is once on the piano and
once in sung song.

The children also initiate, enact, and practice musical material. Eden and I have been
chanting as we put together the alphabet snake, but she shifts into singing on a Major chord
“after A comes B!” I respond to her on a neutral syllable, and we continue to sing as we put the
snake together. She enacts, then, a prolonged participation in the singing as we perform our task.
Her melodic responses are not always centered on the resting tone and her words do not always
fit into the meter, but she is invested in the activity. Enacting occurs in the way that she
continues us in the music, investing in it and driving the forward motion of it. The singing also
functions as time for her to practice her melodic and metrical understanding, in real time. This
activity ends in an improvisatory physical response, as she hops up and dances without
prompting and with a variety of movements.

Another example of combining categories occurs when Kathleen and I have been
chanting and moving to *Go and Stop.*65 The majority of the text is driven by me, but she
contributes words here and there to indicate what movement we should do, and on occasion
contributes a full verse. The chant winds to a close as she returns to the pretend context of
getting ready, but she threads the contexts together when she runs to her dressing room chanting,
“I’m gonna get ready get ready, get ready get ready, get ready get ready and stop!” Her

65 See *Music Play,* p. 115
participation in the chant first appears as a response to my stimulus in imitative and improvisatory ways, as well as a practicing of the material as she weaves in and out of participation. By the end of the activity, however, she has incorporated the material for her own purposes, enacting it with improvisatory text.

Again, given the broadened understanding of what it means to participate in the musical space, “when did the children musick?” becomes an interesting question. In essence, we could say that their very presence in the room defines their musicking. But to look at their active musicality, and how they chose to respond, initiate, enact, and practice musically in the musical space and to the musical stimuli found within the space gives us a picture of how the children define their way of being musical in the world. Perhaps the most striking element of the girls’ way of being musical is what I have mentioned already—the weaving in and out of making active music. The parameters of “when” do not necessarily apply.

The child musicks by singing, chanting, moving and/or playing instruments other than the piano.

I am singing patterns in Dorian, but Eden is quietly cutting something out at her desk, and does not respond. Speaking conversationally as I wait for her, I tell Eden about how when I was little my aunts would throw me in the air in a blanket, but that I got too big and we had to stop doing it. There is a pause, and then she sings, “Too bad” in Dorian. Then she continues in Dorian to tell me, “Now the mousie’s one is ready.” *** Eden is strumming her guitar, and breaks out singing This Old Man. “Doesn’t my guitar sound different?” she says. “Guess what, let’s do another version of that, but this time my guitar is going to sound differenter.” *** I sing Jeremiah Blow the Fire, and Kathleen jumps toward me with a delighted smile on her face. She puts down the drum, picks up the scarf, and says, “I think I can sing it!” *** Kathleen shakes the eggs and jumps around the room singing Two Little Kitty Cats on “bum”. She comes up to me and says, “You know what song I’m singing, don’t you?”

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66 Traditional song
67 See Music Play, p. 101
68 See Songs for Children, p. 59
From their first lessons, the girls sing. Eden improvises a melody about her flute; Kathleen shows me her marbles, and tells me about them by singing on Sol-Mi-Do. As we move forward over the course of the year, the girls sing in overt or covert response to me for conversational or musical purpose, by making up songs, or by singing established songs they have learned with me or in other settings.

I make a decisive effort to sing the majority of our conversation instead of to speak it, in hopes that the girls will respond to me by singing as well. Their sung response is inconsistent; often they sing back to me, but mostly they speak. When they do sing, the impetus for why they choose to is not clear to me—it appears as a matter of whim. The weaving in and out occurs during conversation where some of their participation is sung while some is spoken. Sometimes the sung response is one statement; sometimes it becomes a song, with phrase structure and metrical and/or melodic intention. Sometimes it is somewhere in between.

When the girls blatantly respond in song to something I have sung to them, I consider this an overt sung response. Overt responses can be either for conversational purposes or for musical purposes. Conversational responses serve the purpose of communication between us, where we are engaging in a dialogue. Conversations can occur regarding logistics—as in how to complete the alphabet snake, or where a certain material is, or when preparing the mouse for our play. Conversations can also occur within the pretend context. When Kathleen brings me a finger puppet I sing, “We’re tying the panda up!” to the melody of *High Ho the Dairy-o*™. I sing this text for the first two phrases, and Kathleen takes over for the rest of the tune, singing, “Three cheers for the pa-anda, we’re tying the panda up!”

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69 Traditional song
While established tunes are available for our conversational singing, we also improvise tunes. On a day when the mouse is not feeling well in Eden’s lesson, I improvise a melody to sing, “The doctor says, have the mouse play the piano and all will be well.” Eden begins by speaking back to me, saying, “I want to explain why she’s so-o sick,” but sings “so-o sick” on Do-Mi-Sol. She explains to me that the mouse bounced too many times on her head, “…and now she’s a little bit hurt.”

We continue the conversation by singing:

Lauren: She’s a little bit hurt [La La La La Do Mi]
Eden: doo doo doo [Do Re Mi]
Lauren: Oh my goodness [La Do Mi]
Eden: yes yes yes [La Do Mi]
Lauren: What’ll we do? [La Do Mi]
Eden: I don’t know [La Do Mi]
Lauren: We need to help her [La Do Mi]
Eden: [moans] [La]

While episodes of singing occur conversationally as a means of dialogue, they can also occur simply as a musical moment. I am singing a song about building a tent, not as dialogue, but as a commentary on what we’re doing. I am using the melody I typically use to sing “Where is Kathleen/where did she go/I just don’t know,” but sing only the first phrase, changing the words to “build your tent.” Kathleen replaces the words of the second phrase with “dun-da-dun.” Her response is musical, a response to the elements of the song as opposed to textual elements. Eden has hidden the mouse, saying, “Let’s pretend mousie was in a secret fort, where nobody ever finds him. Let’s pretend that I say to bear I don’t know where mousie is, but let’s
pretend I was serious.” I am at the piano, and play and sing “where is mousie?” to the melody of Are You Sleeping? The phrase repeats; as Eden sits on the couch, she joins me on the word “mousie.” This is a musical moment, again not for the purposes of the conversation, but as a musical response.

On occasion, the girls respond covertly, as if practicing my musical material to themselves. As I sing, they respond quietly, under their breath or to the side, tentatively. They are trying it out, sotto voce. I sing Hot Cross Buns to Eden on a day when she is being particularly ornery. She has disagreed to everything I’ve tried to do, and this last moment has included telling me that I am singing “too much like a lady” as the bear. I adjust my voice to be low, as she has demonstrated to me; she says, “Perfect, perfect, perfect!” I continue to sing and play the song, low, on “bum.” When I reach the final note, Eden—standing off to the side and keeping herself somewhat separate from me—sings the pitch quietly and tentatively on “bum,” slightly after mine. It is not meant for anyone to hear. The first time that I introduce neutral syllable rhythm patterns on “ba” to Kathleen, we use the finger puppets to have a conversation using the chant My Mother, Your Mother. The chant says, “My mother, your mother, lives across the way. Every night they have a chat and this is what they say.” The finger puppets then speak rhythm patterns to each other. Kathleen participates in the patterns, speaking “ba” back to me. She appears, however, to not be completely sold on the idea. She takes her puppet to the table at the side of the room, and makes a furrowed face at me. I have my puppet say, “ba ba, where’s my friend?” Kathleen responds, “boo!” I sing “boo” back to her on a pitch [Do]. She sings “there you are” on Mi-Mi-Do as she plays around with the puppet under the table. She

70 Traditional song
71 Traditional song
72 See Music Play, p. 113
then says “ba” to me, turns around to face the table and says “ba” again, under her breath. It is as if she is taking a moment to reflect on what she has just said, to test it out in the privacy of her own space.

Covert responses also occur when acquiring new song knowledge. For instance, when I do *Go and Stop!*73 for the first time with Kathleen, she does not jump right into participating. At first, she is focused on her getting ready. After a while, she jumps onto the couch and watches me as I chant and move to the text. I invite her into the chant by leaving a pause in the first phrase. I chant “I’m gonna--” and freeze my body mid-motion. She rolls over and laughs delightedly, saying, “Miss Lauren!” Out of the side of my mouth I say, “I think I need you to tell me what to do.” She laughingly replies, “go!” She continues to watch me as I chant, “I’m gonna go go go, I’m gonna go go go, I’m gonna go go go and stop!” She joins me on “stop”, but quietly, and slightly after me. This snippet of musical material is evidence of her trying out the new information. Eventually, she participates fully in the chant, even incorporating her own text for new movement. Even in her full participation, however, her chanting mainly involves contributing only a part of the phrase—I am the one who carries the chant in its completeness.

Here, then, is a demonstration of another characteristic of their singing and chanting. The girls often sing in “snippets”, small fragments of what I am singing/chanting, interspersed throughout verses or repetitions. Singing the song in its entirety depends on the song, and on their mastery of the song. It can also depend on what they are distracted by in the moment. Distraction, however, does not imply that they are not listening, as they reply with a word on the resting tone or begin to sing at a delayed point.

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73 See *Music Play*, p. 115
Established songs are often incorporated into our time, both the songs that I introduce, and the songs that they introduce. Both girls teach me songs out of their daily lives. Eden’s include songs from school and from her choir at church, songs such as *He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*[^74], *Love is Something*[^75], *Take Me Out to the Ballgame*[^76], and *Bow Wow Wow*[^77]. Her songs do not often return; sung once, they tend to be left behind in the coming weeks. Kathleen teaches me songs from her school as well, but these songs come back over and over, including *Jesus Loves the Little Children*[^78], *The B-I-B-L-E*[^79], *Jingle Bells*[^80], and *The ABC Song*[^81]. For the most part, the songs that the girls introduce remain intact. We do not use them for sung conversation, or to change the words to reflect what’s happening in the moment.

I use standard tunes with new words frequently, tunes like *Are You Sleeping?*[^82], *Hello*[^83], and *Mouse, Mousie*[^84]. On occasion the girls join me in the changing text, as Kathleen did with *High Ho the Dairy-o*[^85]. On a different occasion, she and I are cleaning the piano while I sing, “Time to clean up, time to clean up” to the tune of *Are You Sleeping?* She sings the next phrase as, “Yes time to scrub, time to scrub!” On occasion, Eden changes the text on her own, without my prompting or model. I am playing *Mary had a Little Lamb*[^86] on the piano, and Eden walks around the room, looking for something. On the final phrase, she sings “Here’s my tambourine.” She continues to sing the melody, but changes the text to say, “It’s time for music.”

[^74]: Traditional African American spiritual
[^75]: The source of this song is unknown to me as Eden taught it to me out of her experience.
[^76]: Music by Albert von Tilzer, Words by Jack Norworth
[^77]: The source of this song is unknown to me as Eden taught it to me out of her experience.
[^78]: Music by George Root, Words by Clare Herbert Woolston
[^79]: Traditional song
[^80]: Traditional song
[^81]: Traditional song
[^82]: Traditional song
[^83]: See *Child Song*
[^84]: See *Music Makers: At The Keyboard*, p. 18
[^85]: Traditional song
[^86]: Traditional song
The children create sung responses, but they also musick by creating songs with clear structure. More than snippets or phrases, the girls put together musical and textual ideas to form a unified whole. During her third lesson, Eden takes the mouse to the piano and sings a song with four phrases. The phrase structures are not consistent, in that the text and the rhythmic structure changes from phrase to phrase. The meter is duple, with a feeling of four beats per phrase. The inner beats, however, are swung, so that on phrases two and four there is a compound feel. Though she is singing in a Major tonality, her first two phrases are in the key of D-flat major, while the last two phrases shift to D Major.

1) Mous-ie [Db: Mi Do--]

2) Mous-ie Mous-ie Mo [Db: Do-Do La-La Sol-]

3) Mous-ie loves you [D: Do La Ti Sol]

4) Mous-ie’s hang-ing by the tail [D: Do-Do La-La La-La Sol]

Eden makes up songs frequently, about many different pretend moments, and also about the activities we’re doing. Some of her songs are akin to rambling in their words and musical phrase, and sometimes the meter and tonality is difficult to discern, if not indiscernible. At her sixteenth lesson, however, her song has taken on a more sophisticated structure. There are four phrases, with a solid resting tone and meter. The tonality is discernible, and is improvisation on the major chord that I have been using to sing to her. Even the pitches that do not fit into the chord are solidly sung—these are not under or over sung pitches, they are precise musical decisions. She is locked into a meter, and her rhythms are advanced, in that they include pick-ups and subdivide the beats to match her words. The harmonic movement is also advanced, in that the first and third phrases end on a dominant, while the second and fourth end on the tonic. In fact, she makes sophisticated structural choices, where the first and third phrases are built
from the same melodic material with a slight variation on the third, and the final statement holds out a longer note to end.

1) I think we’ve got one [Do lowSol Re Do lowSol --]

2) But I’m not sure where it is [Do Do Do Mi Do lowLa Do. --]

3) Oh no, I think I don’t see one, [Do Do lowSol Do Do Mi Do lowSol --]

4) Uh-ohhhhhh! [Do Do]

Overall, fluctuation in the girl’s adherence to meter and tonality was typical. While not incapable of adhering to a meter, they were not consistently capable of adhering to a meter either. I hold the frog and the bear, and have them chant back and forth to each other on a neutral syllable in triple. Eden holds the cow, and echoes me, but slightly out of center of the measure, pulling toward duple. Next, I hold out two dotted half notes; she echoes me but is securely in duple. I accede to her, and also chant in duple for the next few rounds, but eventually I move back to triple. She speaks back to me in duple for a while, but eventually moves to triple with an extra beat thrown in. This demonstrates a security in the placement of the duple downbeat, but obscurity regarding where the downbeat falls in a triple pattern. I do not correct her, and she is obliviously participating, swinging the mouse through the air and smiling from ear to ear as she looks into my face.

When Kathleen is playing her songs out of her Bible, it seems that what drives her is not a chosen meter or tonality, but the words she’s singing. For much of the singing, she has clear long versus short notes that match the words, but the words do not fall in metrical patterns. For some of the singing, however, her words are metrical, and her song becomes a solid duple. The change is not precipitated by any outside event—she simply moves herself into duple. The fluctuation has to do with governance—while she is clearly able to sing in duple, she does not
govern herself to do so at all times. Whether this is a matter of listening, of awareness, of attention, a combination or none of these things, the reality is that the deciding factor is Kathleen.

**The child musicks by playing the piano.**

*Eden and I use the composer book to make sounds in connection with the pictures. We glissando for rain, we stick our hands to the keys with big arms for spider webs, we make frantic sounds for the fire truck.*** Eden singsongs that it is “night time for mousie!” I offer to play the lullaby, but she says emphatically, “No! Let ME play it for him!” She runs around collecting what she needs to put the mouse to bed, and then runs to the piano. “Now I’m gonna play it!” she says. She plays high, soft sounds, deliberately placing her arm on each key. *** Kathleen and I pretend we are at the park. My hands get stuck in a “muddy puddle” on the keys, and she lifts them out for me. We play celebratory sounds, and then I play a scale for a slide while she glissandos “down the hill.” *** Kathleen sits at the piano, watching the fish tank as she plays. “It’s working!” she yells, and shifts into playing with abandonment, her body jiggling up and down on the bench.

Though the girls often use the piano as an object rather than an instrument, they also use it to musick. Their musicking can be improvisatory exploration, as depicted in the paragraph above. At times they create their own songs, or complex patterns on the piano for the purposes of their tasks. They might accompany themselves as they sing, with passionate abandon. Sometimes their playing of the piano happens in the rhythms of the text they are singing or thinking. Their piano musicking is sophisticated, without overt guidance. They include the furthest reaches of the keyboard, and they experience the piano as a full musical instrument.

Kathleen has written down a song about the umbrella. On very tiny paper, she has written a variety of letters, and shows them to me with pride. I ask her to show me how the song goes on the piano; she climbs on the bench, and immediately begins to play. She stares very intently at the paper as her source, and plays animatedly in the middle of the keyboard, using many keys and wiggling fingers. The sound is rich and full, and there is a complex rhythmical
structure. She then shifts to an intentional pattern of high, low, and middle notes. Here the texture is thin, one note at a time, with rests between them. As I sit next to her, she leans over me to play the highest key on the keyboard, leans to the left to play the bottom key twice in a row, and then—looking at them intently—clearly chooses which middle keys she wants to use. As the song finishes, she uses her whole body to show that it is getting slower and softer. She holds the final key for a moment, her body frozen in place, and then releases the key as she releases her body. “That song’s all done,” she says.

What strikes me is the structure of this song, and the intention with which she plays it. It is not a tonal song; the relationship of tonality to the keys has not been formed in her as of yet. It is, however, a complex song, in its contrasting sections. In its complexity, it stands on its own for her. She is not interested in tonal correctness. She is, however, planful and purposeful in how she carries out her task, and she makes sophisticated musical choices. Her musical cues and physical connection to the music suggest inherent musical wisdom. Finally, her investment in the song is indication that she believes it to be valid.

Eden plays for me *The Eensy Weensy Spider*\(^{87}\), singing along as she plays with both hands. Her key choices appear to be random as her arms fly all over the range of the keyboard. Her rhythm is somewhat guided by the text, but is not locked into a meter beat. She plays with abandon, her body bouncing on the bench, though not in coordination with her singing or playing. Her hands approach the keys flatly, some fingers bent inward in a collapsed position. She decisively matches two keys, however, to the last word—“again.” I ask her to play me a song that she doesn’t know as well as this one; she takes a moment to think, and then says—shaking her head back and forth—“I’m going to play…ok, it’s a song from my choir, that you

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\(^{87}\) Traditional song
might know, and it has all these moves for kids to do, and in my choir all the kids love to do it.” The song is *He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands*[^88], and again she plays with passionate abandon, singing at the top of her lungs with her chin extended into the air, looking back and forth between me and the piano. Once again, her body and her singing are not coordinated; her playing is not connected to the rhythm of the text, nor is it in a meter. Towards the end of the song, however, she lifts her arms with graceful heanness in between placement of her hands on the keys. She does this a few times, making a circle with her arms through the air, or lifting her hands toward the ceiling with her palms up. It is as if she is exploring the space between beats and between herself and the piano. It is elegant and free.

This example of musicking at the piano occurs as Eden accompanies her own singing. She is free to play as she chooses, and engages according to her own standard. Eden also musicks at the piano in relationship to a specified activity. When we are using the key sticks, Eden plays individual keys that are marked with the sticks, but she plays them with musical intention. She chooses the keys she wants to use, and plays each one with long steady beats. She changes the rhythm for her final pattern, cutting the beat in half for the last three keys. Though the activity dictates the moment, she approaches it musically.

The girls also musick on the piano for the purposes of their tasks. The example of Kathleen calling the fish out of the fish tank is a perfect picture of this. Her vision included a “very loud piano” in combination with a “very loud drum.” She uses the highest piano key to count us off, calling “1, 2, 3, go!” as she plays it. Her playing incorporates a variety of technique; she drops her arms pointedly into the keys on the sides of her body, she wiggles her fingers while keeping her hands in front of her body. She plays with abandonment, her body

[^88]: Traditional African American spiritual
jiggling up and down, incorporating the far reaches of the keyboard. It is impossible to separate out the source of her joy—is it the fish? The music? The piano? The shared goal between her and me? Essentially it is all of these working together that make the moment magical.

Eden is teaching me the “Music Change” game, where the changing music indicates that we are to stop skipping and sit down. She has learned this game in school, and is adapting it by using the piano. She tells me to listen. I skip in a circle while she plays low keys, and sit down when she changes to high keys. She is invested in this activity, and uses the piano in a variety of ways. Long clusters, quickly repetitive clusters, glissandi, patterns with alternating hands, wiggling fingers on low keys, ascending patterns on the middle to high keys—she musicks on the piano in all of these ways in order to achieve the purpose of her game. The easy flow of the activity infuses a sense of consistency throughout, and productivity of the moment is enjoyed by us both. I do not need to ask her to play, nor show her how—she uses her piano tools for the purposes of the game.

Another way that the girls musick on the piano is in relation to textual rhythm. Kathleen is pretending to be the teacher and prepares me for a nap. As she covers me with the scarves, she says, “I’m going to play you a lullaby, on our piano. Do you know this song? Two Little Kitty Cats?“ She climbs on the bench and sits on her knees, playing to the rhythm of the text as she sings. Once again, she is playing the piano for the purposes of her task, and she is doing so in a musically sophisticated way. Though she is not equipped to play the melody, she is experiencing the piano and the physical manipulation of it through her connection to the song.

Kathleen does this in her own composition as well. We are composing a four part song about her birthday party. After playing a glissando to demonstrate the ripping open of packages

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89 See Songs for Children, p. 59
for part one, she tells me that part two will be about her cake. “What about the cake?” I ask, and she replies, “That I love the chocolate inside it.” I write this fact down on the paper, and ask her, “How are we going to make sounds about _that_ on the piano?!” She walks directly over to the high keys and plays a pattern of five notes, using first her right and then her left hand. She backs up and says, “Doesn’t that sound like--?” She then sings in imitation of what she had just played: “I love chocolate cake?” Her melodic imitation is clear, and her verbal rhythmic thought is what drove her piano pattern. When I ask for the subject of part three she doesn’t respond, but plays the pattern from part two again. She plays the same rhythm and number of keys as she did the first time, with approximately the same shape on the piano, but not exactly the same pitches. Here it is not the melody that she is imagining in her mind—it is the words, and the attending rhythm. She then attaches this rhythm to the piano, thoughtfully. She does this for the third and fourth phrases as well, matching her keys to the phrase “the kids go to run around in my bedroom” and then, “everyone made beautiful aprons.” Her approach to the piano regarding register and key choices is different each time, but her playing the textual rhythm remains consistent.

_The child musicks by engaging in real world musical practices._

_Kathleen takes the paper and puts it on the piano rack in front of me. She adjusts the paper so that I can see it; I say thank you and continue to play and sing. *** She conducts me as I play and sing, a pencil in her hand, her arms waving back and forth through the air. *** She holds the papers in both of her hands, situating them in front of her body. She stands with angelic posture in front of the large reflective window, singing her heart out as I accompany her on the piano. *** Eden takes out her guitar and tells me that her dad is in a band, so it’s really easy for her. “He taught me a lot,” she says. She gets a chair and puts it in front of the music stand, so that she can play me a song out of the music book. *** She has the animals lined up on the lid of the piano, waiting for the parade. She yells at them that they are wasting time—“the music is playing and everything, now stop it!”_
The children incorporate and engage in real world practices of musicking during our lesson time. Sometimes with but often without suggestion or guidance by me, the girls both refer to and incorporate ways of musical being that demonstrate their awareness and knowledge of a musical realm beyond our lesson space. Their awareness comes from a variety of places; school, parents, church, and/or their own experiences mix together to provide them with an understanding of musical ways that they then either talk about or take on as their own.

Musical terminology creeps into our piano talk, as we go about our work. Words such as “composing”, or “solos” and “duets” occur in our conversation. “Counting off” is a phrase we use frequently. These rituals of musical conversation happen naturally in the context of our interactions. Rituals of performance also find their way into our lesson narrative. Kathleen turns off the lights as we play and mutters about being in the theater, that the lights go off, whispering loudly, “quiet!” This becomes her routine symbol for when she wants me to stop playing or singing—if the lights are off, we are to be quiet. Kathleen weaves elements of performance all through her play, without any effort. She has her stack of papers that signify real songs that she has written down, and which she uses over and over again to decide what song we are doing at any given moment. One day, we are singing Old MacDonald, but she changes the top paper. “Oh, are we switchin’?” I ask; “Switchin’!” she replies, and we look at the papers together. “The next song is…Oh, not the B-I-B-L-E again! Let’s just do it…” She says this with such exasperation, as if she has no control over this decision, but secretly I think she is quite thrilled. 

The B-I-B-L-E is the song that reappears most often, and we had just done it.

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90 This is potentially also coming from school practices.
91 Traditional song
92 Traditional song
As I attempt to find the right key on the piano, she runs over to me and says, “This time, we’re doing it for the audience. Last time, I just wanted you to learn it.” The last time, she had stood right up close to the large window in the room, watching her reflection, jumping up and down, pumping her fist in the air upon completion. This time, with the idea of the audience in her mind, she walks over to the large window but backs far enough away so that there is a space between her and it, and stands in position to sing. Her back is straight, her head is tall, her arms are holding her stack of papers directly in front of her and in the middle of her torso. I ask if the audience is ready, and she says “yes.” I count us off and she stands at attention, ready to sing. As we sing the song, she stands very still, but turns to face the wall halfway through, looking very professional. Clearly she has a picture in her mind of what it looks like to sing for an audience, as her demeanor is very intentional.

These holistic moments of complex musicking practices are fascinating to me, because I would not have thought of them, nor would I have directed the girls to do them. The girls design these moments out of their own experiences and understanding of how musicking looks in real life. These moments do, however, provide me with an opportunity to speak into their understanding. For example, Eden turns the piano lid into a stage for her Disney princesses to perform ballet on. She shows me that the audience will sit on the bench, and tells me that mouse and bear are a part of the audience. I ask who will make the music, since the lid is closed. “Uh, who makes the music? We’re going to get another instrument for that.” She goes to get her accordion and brings it back to me, saying, “This makes pretty sounds, so how about we try this one? You can play it. I’ll sit on the couch. You can practice right now.”

I do not know if she had music in her mind as a part of the ballet, but she embraces the idea and instructs me to practice. The combination of the practicing with the performance
suggests an understanding of the real world practice of preparation for an event. I ask her if she wants to switch places—that way the music can be “off-stage”. She agrees to this, and moves to the bench, instructing me to tell her when it is time for the ballet. “Ok,” I say, “this is the introduction music.” I play for a bit as she watches me, and when I finish she says, “That means it’s going to come soon?” Then, she leans her body to where I am and whispers, “When should I start it?” “The introduction is over,” I say, “so it’s time for the ballet to start.” “Ok, everybody come out!” she whispers to the princess dolls.

Turning toward me, she says, “first we’re going to say their names to make sure they’re all there and everything, then we’ll start the performance.” She’s taking roll-call, and the dolls introduce themselves—Eden, Angeline, and Jill are there. “Now, they’re doing solos,” she says when the introductions are over. “Are you ready for the ballet music?” I ask; “yeah,” she says. I play, and Eden lifts the dolls through the air and moves them across the stage. As I wind my music down, Eden says “The concert’s over.” “I’ll play the exit music,” I say.

Together, we craft this musicking moment, using our understandings of how these musical practices occur in real life. This togetherness is also reminiscent of real-life practices, and the girls demonstrate understanding of what it means to make music together as well. Kathleen either counts me off on a regular basis, or instructs me to do it for her. “Count me off!” she yells, waiting to begin her song until I do. She also employs conducting as a means of being together in the music, waving her arms through the air in an intentional conducting pattern as I play. She holds her arms out until I let go of the last chord of the song we are singing together, and then takes a bow. I laugh at her and play a volley of chords. She comes over to arrange the papers on the rack and says, “Actually, the conductor bows when it’s the end.”
She tells me the next song is “ABCD”\textsuperscript{93}. I start to play it, but she puts her hand out and says, “Wait! I say 1-2-3-go! We have to start over.” She counts me off then, and we begin together. I do not sing, however, just play. She bounces away as I begin, but soon makes a bee-line back to me, saying, “You’re supposed to be singing!” She counts me off again, and waves her pencil in the air as I play and sing. She stands off to the side of me, and as the song nears an end, she slows me down with her conducting. It is a beautiful ritardando to the end, executed with great intention and sophistication. I follow her direction, and when the sound fades we stay frozen, looking at each other. Her face is full of delighted joy. We continue on then for many more repetitions of the counting off and the conducting and the directions to sing, the papers changing to indicate the songs. At one point she tells me with exasperation, “you have to watch the conductor!”; at another moment, she points emphatically to the paper when I look at her instead.

Her directions to me indicate a clear picture in her mind of how these moments should go. I find her insistence that I am to sing interesting; Eden also places much emphasis on singing over playing. When I use the terminology “make up a song,” her response is typically to sing one with made-up words. In fact, one day she tells me that the word “musical” means “when you really like to sing and dance.” When I ask her about instruments, she ignores me, and moves on to something else. When Kathleen tells me to write down the song The Ants Go Marching\textsuperscript{94}, she reprimands me when I do not write the words. Though the songs that she writes down are all squiggles, they represent songs that we are to sing. This emphasis on singing is not all that surprising, given the prevalence of sung verbal song in our culture. Again, their emphasis here suggests an understanding of real world musical practices.

\textsuperscript{93} Kathleen is referring to The ABC Song

\textsuperscript{94} See Wee Sing Silly Songs, p. 40
The child musicks by interacting with musical concepts.

*Eden brings me the bells as I play on the piano and sing “hooray!”*, “to make it even more louder, more of a celebration.” *** She tells me she learned a very good dance that needs ballet music. I say I brought a CD with me—“I hope it’s a gentle CD,” she says. *** She tells me that I should play the piano louder in order to do my personal best. I do; “is it loud enough?” I ask. She puts her hands over her ears—“way too loud!” I quiet down, and play more lyrically.

“No you’re doing it gentle, keep it loud!” she says. I follow her directions; “good girl,” she says. *** We listen to Brahms on the CD. “I like that song,” Eden says. “It’s so gentle.” *** I ask Kathleen for a slow, soft, peaceful lullaby, and she plays the piano accordingly. *** Kathleen plays me a song on the white keys. “Do you ever put black keys in your piano songs?” I ask. “Of course,” she says, running back to the piano and playing again on the black keys. *** Kathleen climbs up on the bench next to me and says, “what about you play a song that you already know that’s very soft like a lullaby?”

Opportunity to notice and/or articulate musical concepts occurs on occasion. Elements of tempo, dynamics, tonality, meter, rhythm, mood, patterns, high and low, the logistics of the keyboard and other musical terminology enter our conversation and occur in their moments of play. Our play opens up to include mention of the concepts, and the girls interact with them on varying levels. At times, they do not grasp the concept, but the concept has been put on the table. At other times, the girls demonstrate understanding of the concepts without direct instruction. They articulate aspects of the concepts, even if they are not discussed as official musical concepts. On occasion, however, the girls demonstrate understanding of the concepts as being elements of music.

Kathleen shuffles through the papers on the piano rack. “Is The Wild Horses95 in there?” I ask; “Um, yes, that is this one…” she says, “I’ll go get my horse.” She runs away and comes back with two imaginary horses, Appy and Blackie. She tells me all about them, as she puts their helmets on. She jumps up, yelling, “Boink! Boink!” “Does that mean you’re ready?” I ask.

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95 See *Music Makers: At the Keyboard*, p.20
“Yep!” she cries. I tap three times, take a deep breath, and begin to sing and play the song. She runs around the room yelling “too fast! Too fast!” I stop playing. “They galloped too fast and went upstairs,” she tells me. “Oh no, should we slow it down?” I ask. “I think that was the music,” she says. “So we should slow the music down?” I ask. “Yes,” she replies. I count off slowly, and begin the song again. She moves slowly with me, and says, “Yes, that’s nice.” Suddenly, she starts going faster again, yelling, “Whoa!!! Too fast!” I think she’s talking about the music and say, “I didn’t change anything!” She is running all around, yelling “whoa!” but says to me, “I think it wants to go too fast! Um…I think…that wasn’t just the music!” “The horses had a say in it too?” I ask her, and she replies, “I think the horses were not controlling theirself.” She runs away, yelling, “Come back here!” She gathers the horses back, and I ask, “So, how should I play? Should I play slow or fast or in the middle?” “In the middle,” she replies.

Here the horses give us a reason to incorporate the conversation of tempo, without ever referring to what the definition of “tempo” is. Eden and I have a conversation regarding dynamics that bridges her play with the differences in sound. She is explaining the game “Follow the Music” to me, which she has learned from her music teacher at school. I ask, “So is it like, if the music is loud, we march loudly?” “Yes,” she says. “And if the music is soft, we tip-toe quietly?” I sing softly. “Uh-huh!” she says. “And if the music is…” I pause, and she sings “medium!” “The music is just kinda…,” I continue. She stands up and walks around with her hands in a bunny position under her chin, her head wobbling back and forth, her eyes to the ceiling. “We just kinda go eh-eh-eh! Eh-eh-eh!” she sings. We laugh as I imitate her. Here is a conversation that I lead, but in which she contributes the more vague dynamic level of “medium” with an appropriate physical description that I would have had trouble creating. Without naming
them as such, the conversation articulates the differences between dynamic levels and demonstrates that she has understanding of the differences.

Elements of mood are subtly interwoven into our conversations as well. On a day where we do not have a CD player, I ask Kathleen how we’re going to dance. At first she says she doesn’t know, but as I make “hm” sounds she cries, “a-HA! You could make some sounds on the piano and I could dance to it.” I agree to this, and ask her, “What kind of music do you want? Gentle music or loud music?” “Loud music,” she says. “Do you want it to be angry, or do you want it to be joyful?” “Joyful!” she cries, joyfully. The following week she asks for this dance arrangement again. “What kind of songs do you want?” I ask. “Should they be happy or sad?” I sing. “Happy!” Kathleen sings back. She requests fast when I suggest fast or slow, loud when I suggest loud or soft. “Loud, happy, fast?” I ask, “Ok, here I go!” Eventually she no longer needs me to prompt her regarding elements of mood:

Lauren: I was thinking
Kathleen: Yeah?
Lauren: One of us could play something on the piano...
Kathleen: And the other could dance?
Lauren: Uh-huh!
Kathleen: I’ll dance!
Lauren: Ok, what kind of music do you want?
Kathleen: Fast!...loud...and...fun!...Fast loud and happy!

Later that same lesson she is taking a nap and requests a “slow, happy, lullaby.” Without bringing up mention of the word “mood”, Kathleen thinks about what moods and characteristics the music needs to have in order to be what she wants it to be, and articulates it.
Mood can also be related to tonality, which Eden demonstrates one day when she walks out of the room to go to the bathroom. I sing *Two Little Kitty Cats*\(^{96}\) on “bum”, which is a song in a minor tonality. She calls out, “I just have to use the bathroom! You don’t have to be sad!” This comment makes me laugh for the general cuteness of it, but it also strikes me that she is considering my minor melody to express sadness. I made no comment about her leaving the room that would have indicated sadness, nor is the text of the song a sad text. Though I wasn’t using text, we had done this song many times before. She may be unaware that it is the same melody, but regardless, she focuses on the tonality to draw her conclusion.

Tonality appears again in Eden’s lesson one day while she is coloring. I ask “Did I ever teach you this song?” and sing *Ni, Nah, Noh*\(^{97}\). It is a minor, triple song. After the third phrase, she looks up and cries, “It has the same melody, it has the same melody as stirring and stirring the brew I think!” *Stirring Our Brew*\(^{98}\) is also in minor triple, and so she is associating the similarities in order to draw her conclusion. “I think you’re right,” I say, even though she is not. “Let’s see, is it exactly the same? I’ll sing stirring the brew.” I sing the first line, then say, “and this is ni nah noh…” singing the first line in comparison. Then:

Lauren: Is it exactly the same, or is it similar?

Eden: Similar. [Decisively, without missing a beat.]

Lauren: Yeah, absolutely…you know why? They’re both in minor keys, have you ever heard that word before?

Eden: No!

Lauren: Have you ever heard of major keys before?

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\(^{96}\) See *Songs for Children*, p. 59
\(^{97}\) See *Music Play*, p. 104
\(^{98}\) See *Songs for Children*, p. 50
Eden: No!

Lauren: Some songs are in major, like [sing *Hot Cross Buns*] but [singing] stirring and stirring our brew is in minor.

Eden: [Is quiet.]

Lauren: These are very sophisticated musical terms.

Eden: [Stands up] There we are—we’re dog is finished!

Since she is engaged in her coloring during this entire exchange, I cannot say for sure that her answers reflect real thinking. She responds, however, with animation and without hesitation. Though I focus on tonality in the moment, the meter is another possibility for Eden’s recognition. One day, we take out our drums. She has a large one with a removable lid, in which other instruments are kept. There is a neck strap attached to the drum, and Eden puts the strap over her head. I have begun to sing *The Ants Go Marching*\(^99\), and she looks back and forth from me to her drum, urgently attempting to get the lid to stay on so that she can join me. She finally gets herself ready to go, and I say, “Let’s march with a very steady beat.” I strike my drum, march in duple, and say “bum” for each beat. She begins to speak “bum” with me but drops out; she bounces on her feet and strikes her drum, but quickly. Her beat is actually mostly steady, but it is faster than mine\(^100\). She looks up at me and says gleefully, “Mine’s not steady at all!” “Me or you?” I ask, for clarification. “Mine,” she answers. I say, “Let’s do an unsteady beat!” and jump around, tapping my drum unsteadily. Eden stays in one place, and doesn’t change her beat. “Alright, let’s do steady!” I call, and she continues to beat steadily, but slows

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\(^99\) See *Wee Sing Silly Songs*, p. 40

\(^100\) I am beating at quarter note = 80; she is beating at quarter note = 200
her tempo down\textsuperscript{101}. She is standing in one place, beating steadily in a different tempo from me as she watches me march around her.

Here, she is engaging in the metrical conversation about whether or not she’s doing an unsteady beat. She evaluates her own participation, saying that she is not playing steadily. What she interprets as unsteady, however, is really just a differing tempo. Since she considers herself to be unsteady, she doesn’t change her beating when I say we should do unsteady beating; when I return to steady, however, she changes her beating according to my direction. She is not successful in matching my beat, but she does beat steadily in her own tempo.

I consider this example to be a metrical conversation because it has to do with metrical properties of steady beat, though it could also be a conversation about rhythmic properties. Eden also engages in conversation regarding rhythmic concepts when she begins to draw musical notes. I can’t quite see what she’s doing, so when I ask her what it is she replies, “It’s a musical note! I’m playing musical notes!”\textsuperscript{102} I join her in the drawing, and she sings, “I want to see if this one looks familiar to you, it might, it might.” I sing back, “It does, it totally does.” The following week we color the notes, and eventually I play both hers and mine. I demonstrate a rest, and tell her I need to start with silence since I’ve written it first. I play a trill, as I point it out to her in my notes. Somewhere in my pattern I play a whole note, but do not point it out to her on the paper. I finish, and she points to it on the paper and says, “Which one’s the circle?” I play the long chord again that I’d done for the whole note originally, and she says, “Oh.” I explain, “When it’s a circle like that, it’s a long note! Do you want to play a long note?” “Sure,” she says, listen to my long note!” She then plays a long note, and attends to the sound as it fades.

\textsuperscript{101} She slows to quarter note = 144
\textsuperscript{102} She is not actually “playing”, but is drawing.
This conversation could be considered cursory given its limitations regarding specific length of the whole note in relationship to others. Alternatively, this conversation could be considered foundational in her developing understanding of long versus short notes. In fact, later in the same lesson, she plays the highest key of the piano over and over again, quickly. I ask her if she thinks it’s a quick set of notes or slow; though my terminology refers more to tempo than rhythm, her response of “quick” suggests that she understands the difference between the long note and quickly moving notes.

Later that lesson, she and I cut out music notes and paste them into patterns. She brings me all of the supplies that I will need, and sits closely to me, looking into my space to see what I am doing. “Now what kind of musical notes are you writing?” she asks me, as I cut out eighth notes. She asks me for some of my notes, and I give them to her. “Look, that note and that note are the same, right?” I ask. “Yeah!” Eden says. I ask if she wants another one of my notes so that she has a pattern—“Do you want the pattern or no?” “Uh, I still want the pattern,” she says. She asks me for “one of those circle ones.” I give it to her, and say, “Look at that! It’s a solid one, followed by one with a hole in the middle, followed by a solid one, followed by one with a hole in the middle!” I say, pointing her attention to the differences between the quarter notes and whole notes. She is preoccupied with cutting out her own whole note, and so does not respond to me. This hands-on activity was designed by Eden, and gives her experience with the visual properties of the notes as she attends to the notes she makes and the notes that she wants in her pattern.

Patterns come up for Kathleen one day, but aurally. She sits next to me on the bench and plays two keys in a rhythmic pattern over and over again. The pattern is Do Do Re, the Re held for two beats. She yells, “That’s a pattern!” She goes to get her harmonica, and plays excitedly
in a repetitive sound and motion on it. She stops playing, says, “That’s a pattern!” She jumps
over to me, “This is a pattern!” She breathes in and out on the harmonica, and plays a pattern that
approximates “Do-Re-Do-Re-Do” followed by a high pitch to end. I sing it back to her: “doo-
doo-doo-doo-doo---boop!” She joins me on the high pitch, and repeats the phrase with me. She
jumps in the air to emphasize the “boop!”

This episode is a process of Kathleen discovering a property of music for herself within
our space. I do not know where the word “pattern” was explained to her, but it is clear that she
understands it and applies it to the sounds that she makes on the piano and on the harmonica.
This understanding was not apparent earlier in the year, when I had laid all the key sticks out on
the white key in the middle of the groups of two. She is off to the side, drinking from her cup. I
sing, “Look, is there a pattern?” She puts the cup down, runs over, looks, and shakes her head
no. “Is there anything the same?” I sing. I am hoping that she will see that the sticks are all
located between the groups of two, but she sings “no,” followed by a quick, “yeah!” “What?” I
ask; “’cause they all look the same!” she cries. I think that she means they are in the same place,
so as she climbs up on the bench next to me, I ask her, “Where are they? Should we play them?”
She replies, “Wait! There’s more reds!”

I have completed all the groups of two, however, and so we do not need more reds to
complete my pattern. “I know, but do we need them?” I ask. Kathleen, however, says “mm-
hm!” I play the red sticks, ask her if there are any more places like where they already are on the
piano.103 “Well, yes!” she says. I think my question may be too vague since she is not
understanding what I am attempting to portray, and so I sing, “The red stick is where? What
group of black keys is it by, the group of two or the group of three?” She looks at the keys,

103 In the middle of the group of two, on the D.
leaning on my legs. I play the groups of two. She doesn’t answer me, but leans down to pick up another stick off the floor. She lays it on a different key. I ask, “You want it there? Does it match where all of these are?” She doesn’t answer me, but continues to put the remaining red sticks wherever she chooses.

This example is evidence of what I have come to think of as “the wall.” Kathleen is participating, she is engaged and even invested in what she wants to do for the activity. She is participating in ways that I did not envision, however, and since my expertise commands a certain response, I attempt to get her over to my side of the wall. The child, however, is firmly rooted on her side of the wall, and we stand at an impasse. Ultimately, I cannot move her into working on a concept that she is not ready for. All that I can do is allow her to experience the concept as she sees fit within that moment.

To allow a child to be oblivious or even wrong involves a high level of trust in the possibility that—given time and space—the concept will come to light. In this case, my trust was rewarded; given time and space, I did not have to instruct her at all in how to put the key sticks in a pattern. At her final lesson, I ask her, “What if we find the key in the middle of the group of two black keys with our key sticks?” She takes a stick from me, and places it standing up on one side of the D. “Another red one please,” she says. She places this stick standing up on the other side of the D. Though my vision for this activity is that the stick rest on the surface of the key, she encases the key in between two sticks. She works diligently, and continues the pattern over the whole keyboard. She counts and plays the keys, announcing that there are seven keys and fourteen sticks.

I think of the keyboard as a category of musical concepts, when I consider the girls’ understanding of the piano, and how it looks, functions, and relates to musical concepts. When I
attempt to have Eden copy parts of the song *Bow Wow Wow*\(^\text{104}\), she plays different keys than what I show her. I ask her, “did I play that one, or this one?” and she consistently answers incorrectly. Ultimately, the exercise of playing the song does not work. What is interesting, however, is that when I ask her, “Where do we have to start in order to sound the same?” Eden has the mouse say, “We have to start here, and then we press it again a little bit harder and softer to make different sounds on the same key!” This is a very sophisticated explanation of varying weight on the keys. It is not something that I have described to her, or even mentioned. It was not the answer I was looking for, because what I held in my mind as the focus of the moment was not what she was holding in hers. She seems to be thinking more about the repetition of keys, which could be explained by the fact that she had just played C C C, followed by Eb Eb Eb.

I am not clear why playing the keys I demonstrated to Eden was difficult for her. I was using a mixture of white keys and black keys, which may have convoluted the process for her. Less than two months later, she put together a giant keyboard made out of poster board, barely having to look at the real piano keyboard in order to place the black keys in the appropriate places. This indicates to me that her visual understanding of the keyboard was well in place. Perhaps it was attending to the specific and many white keys in the context of a musical pattern that kept her from retaining the information, or the emphasis on instruction.

I wonder what might have happened if I had framed the playing differently, within the context of pretend, and informally? This informal framing happened one day at Kathleen’s lesson, when Kathleen said, “what about you sing and I’ll play [piano], and you shake the egg and we’ll do two little kitty cats lying in the sun?” “Awesome,” I say, “Do you need the bench

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\(^\text{104}\) The source of this song is unknown to me as Eden taught it to me out of her experience.
or are you happy standing?” “I’m happy to stand,” she replies. I sing on one pitch, “Can you give me, can you play me the white key in the middle of the group of two black keys?” She finds it, hovers over it. I say, “That’s it, can you play it?” She does, and I sing, “That’s the note I want to use to start.” I give us a “ready, let’s sing” on that pitch as she watches me, her hand still over the key.

She plays the note as we start, and then plays rhythmically along with the text on a variety of keys. After a little while, she drops out, but jumps rhythmically while her hands remain hovering over the keys. Soon, she comes back in—not rhythmically on the text, but poking at single keys here and there. (Her approach reminds me of someone making snippets of commentary in the background while someone else is giving a speech.) She changes back to the textual rhythm on the last phrase. At the end, she holds her last cluster, as I shake the egg in finale. Just as I cut myself off with a “bum!” on the resting tone, she intentionally plays the D to cut herself off. She walks over to me and says, “I used the middle of two black keys to end it too!” She goes over to point to the key again, and then walks back to me. “I heard it!” I say, “It was the same note that I was singing!” She taps me lovingly on the mouth, and walks away to the window.

It strikes me that when Kathleen plays our songs without me on the bench, she tends to play in the central part of the keyboard. Is this a musical practice that she is observing, or is it a tonal awareness of register? Awareness of register is another musical concept that the girls engage in at the keyboard, connecting abstract high and low sounds to the vertical keyboard. Eden has four stuffed animals spread out across the keyboard. “Alright,” I say, “the question is, which one of these animals is going to make the lowest sounds?” She leans over me and pushes

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105 Her playing often does exceed the singing range, so I suspect that her choice could potentially follow a picture she has of where pianists sit, if anything.
down the bear, who is sitting on the highest keys. “Oh no,” she says, “that’s the highest.” She reaches down to the cat, who is indeed on the lowest keys. She pushes the cat down into the key bed. I ask about medium low and medium high; she plays both of the animals for a while, but eventually shows me which animal is which. Here she demonstrates an ability to evaluate her answer and to fix it, without my feedback.

**The child musicks by expressing belief regarding her musicianship.**

Kathleen sits on the couch, working diligently. “I’m writing down all the songs I can figure out,” she says. ***Kathleen’s mother tells me about songs Kathleen had played that morning, saying some of them had more than one part. “Both of them!” Kathleen says, matter-of-factly.*** “How does that go?” I say, and Kathleen yells, “pause! Let me sing it for you.” She plays on the harmonica while moving her legs. She finishes and says, “That’s how it goes.” ***I ask Eden how she keeps all of her songs in her head. She thinks for a moment and says, “I just keep sing…I take out ideas that I’ve already done, then I put in new ideas.”*** “Do you play on your piano?” I ask Eden. “Yeah…I mostly play on my little kitty piano. It’s my own piano, I never let my parents play on it.” “Oh,” I say, “so the little piano is yours.” “Yeah,” Eden says, “and the big piano is for everybody to share.”

The children seem to hold firm beliefs that they are indeed musicians. The essence of Eden, marching around a room with a drum around her neck, or Kathleen, conducting me as I play, suggests this belief. Their very ways of being in the space express an inherent awareness of their place there. The ways that they converse with me about their musical practices also express an unawareness of limitation.

Kathleen picks up the notepad and starts to write. “I’m writing down the cleaning up song I’m going to practice.” “Ok,” I say. “I’m not practicing it right now,” she drily tells me. “You’re not practicing it right now? You’re going to practice it later?” “Yeah,” she says. I inquire, “Do I get to hear you practice, or are you going to do it on your own?” “You’re going to hear me,” she assures me.
She speaks about this song as if it is a reality that she will practice it, and needs to write it down in preparation. Her writing, however, is squiggles—not a document holding interpretive potential. She does this with all of the other songs that she has written down over the course of the lessons, songs that hold real meaning for her as she studies the paper to play, or directs me as to which song it is. As she is writing one day, I sing *My Pony Bill*106. “Not that one,” she says. “What song is it?” I ask. She replies with a patient, “You’ll see!” I ask her if I am allowed to sing while she writes, and she agrees. I start to sing *Two Little Kitty Cats*107, and she turns sharply from where she is lying on the floor to look at me. “That’s the one I’m writing!” she says, incredulously.

The belief in written down notes appears in Eden’s lesson narrative as well. Eden plays me a guitar song, looking back and forth between me, the guitar, and the music book on the stand. She interrupts herself to say, “First I had to learn each sound [the guitar] can make.” “Ooh,” I say, “how did you do that?” “I touch different parts of the guitar and it makes different sounds,” she says, matter-of-factly. The discussion about the guitar leads her to say, “I have so many songs that you don’t know.” “You have so many songs, it’s true,” I reply. She is going to play me one, says, “I can’t wait to do this.” “Me neither,” I say, but she clarifies for me, “you can’t wait to listen to it.” Apparently, it is important to her that this is her show. I ask which song she’s going to do, and she points to the page in the book in front of her.

Though she is being very planful, she seems a bit hesitant, and her eyes are getting big. I say, “Why do you look so nervous?” “It’s the first time I’ve ever played a song for somebody,” she says seriously. I tell her I am honored to be the first person to listen, and she begins to play. The song slows to an end, and we look at each other, her eyes big. I say the song was beautiful,

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106 See *Music Play*, p. 103
107 See *Songs for Children*, p. 59
and that I noticed she didn’t look at her music at all. I ask her if she had the music in her head.

“Yeah, first I look at it for a while and I remember it and then I instead focus on what I’m doing,” she explains. “Oh, so you do need it?” I ask; “I do need it,” she replies.

Later, though we have moved on and away from this conversation, she continues where we left off:

Eden: I don’t *always* need notes. Sometimes I can just imagine songs in my head.

Lauren: It’s like you can hear it in your head?

Eden: It’s like I can see the page of the music notes inside my head…sometimes that’s how I play instruments without my music book…sometimes that’s really how I do it.

Lauren: How do you do it when it’s your own song?

Eden: How I do it my song is I just try to remember that song for a while and then when I forget it I wait for those notes to come back to my head and when they come back to my head I sing it again.

Her sense of legitimacy in this conversation is fascinating. She is expressing very sophisticated musical practices, and claims them as her own. If I didn’t know anything about her, I would believe that she genuinely knows how to read and interpret musical notation, based on my own notation reading and learning experience. From my expert perspective, I know that she cannot participate in the practices she is claiming to. From her expert perspective, she is telling the truth.

The question of what is “truth” is raised in relation to what the girls believe their musicianship is constituted by. When I ask Kathleen what we used to use the animal pictures for, she says blankly, “Made music with them.” Her use of the phrase “made music” suggests that our making of random sounds all over the keyboard is legitimate “music” to her.
Legitimacy in music making takes on a further dimension when Kathleen uses her Bibles as songbooks, and plays extensively from them. Her monologue with herself and her dialogue with me demonstrate her belief that she is participating in legitimate musical acts.

She works diligently to find the page she wants, and to keep the page she wants, as the book continues to fall shut. She calls me over for the “bench emergency!” that has her too far away for her comfort from the keys. She places her hands on the keys with beautiful arches, and straight-backed posture. I ask her how she feels—“do you have room for your arms?” I ask. “Yes,” she says, confidently.

After multiple renditions out of the books, she finishes and slides off the bench. “Wow!” I exclaim, “That one was so much different than before!” She leans on the bench and says confidently, “I know.” I ask her if there’s more, and she climbs back on the bench, saying, “the last part!” I ask what the last part is about, and she leans back and says with frustration, “Jesus being born, I told you!” “Oh,” I say, “it’s still about Jesus being born? Gotcha.” She nods her resolutely and says, “Every song.” She has a plan for what these songs are about. She turns the pages, combs the columns with her fingers, looking for where the parts start. To her, this musical moment is authentic, it is real.

Eden has similar moments of legitimacy. I ask her if she has any songs she wants to play for me before I leave. She sings, “I’ll play that cuckoo bird song.” She goes to the piano and plays, looking at me every once in a while, looking at the keys. The song has a very clear ending, and I whisper, “I love that song!” She looks at me shyly, almost demurely. I have the sense that this was a precious moment, that she shared something of herself with me.

Another precious moment occurs after a week off, during which she had gone away and we had not had a lesson. I sit at the piano and she walks away from me, tapping the drum,
singing to herself. Her singing is quiet, is about her “piano lesson” when she was “away.” She becomes completely absorbed in this song, picking up momentum and singing her guts out as she goes along. The words are repetitive, phrases such as, “When I was away, so far away, from you…I knew I needed you, I knew I loved you, I knew it was good to do. Finally, mom and dad were with me again, but I was still far away from you, I was so far away from you, but I knew that I still loved you.” Part way through the song I begin to play a piano accompaniment to set a steady beat underneath her. We finish together, slowing down, quietly. We look at each other. I whisper, “That was the most beautiful song. How do you know that song?” “I just made it up!” she says. “The words?” I ask. “Yes,” she says. “Did you make up the melody?” “Yes,” she says. She is standing so quietly, her “yesses” are almost whispers. I ask her what she was thinking about when she wrote that song, and she says, “I was thinking about trips, and how you love me.”

We move into a discussion about what we are going to do next. She says, “I thought you had your mind filled with ideas for our piano lesson!” “Well, that’s true,” I say, “but that doesn’t mean you can’t give me your ideas!” “I had the idea to sing that thing, anyway!” she says, sweetly. I suggest that we use our picture book to make up a song on the piano. “Sure!” she says, “I could even play the melody!”

What strikes me here is how easily the girls refer to themselves making up songs, without any sense of judgment or evaluation. (I wonder if Eden’s shy responses are an indication of fear that her song will be judged, and so I make every effort to express my love for her songs.) The made up songs simply fall into the category of “song”. They also easily offer to teach me songs. They do not seem concerned with whether or not they have a full grasp of it, as Eden often sings songs for me from school in which her melody is so vague I cannot hold onto it, and she spends
much of the time looking into the air as she attempts to remember how it goes. Kathleen tells me she will teach me ABCDs, jumping up and down at the piano while she plays clusters with textual rhythm and sings.

Eden teaches me *Bow Wow Wow*\(^\text{108}\) from her music class at school; for weeks afterward, she routinely asks me if I have taught it to any other kids. I explain that I taught it to my baby music class, and she asks me, “How did the little kids sound, with their bow wow wows?” I tell her they sounded good, but that not all of them sang. “You know, the thing about little kids is, sometimes they don’t sing because they just want to listen and get the sounds in their head. Do you hear sounds in your head?” “Yeah,” she says, “but I still sing.” I ask her if she hears the words, or if she hears just the notes. “I hear just the notes,” she replies.

This leads us into a discussion of how babies absorb music like a sponge. I say, “You’ve absorbed a lot of music, that’s why you’re so musical! Where do you think you absorbed music from?” “Um, maybe, um, at church, at school, and with you,” she says. “I bet, all of those places,” I say. “What about your mom and dad?” I wonder. “Um, sometimes, but I usually teach them ones from school, and ones from you!” This statement is an assertion of her own musical activity over that of her parents. Though at other times we have talked about the ways her parents are musical, for whatever reason she does not include their musical behaviors here.

To some degree, unawareness of the reality of the musical state of others in comparison to themselves is what allows the girls to speak freely regarding their belief in their own musicianship. Awareness and the role it plays in belief or unbelief is revealed one day when I ask Kathleen what she would tell someone if they asked her if she knew how to play the piano. Kathleen says, without hesitation, “yes.” When I ask her the same question regarding singing

\(^{108}\) The source of this song is unknown to me as Eden taught it to me out of her experience.
and dancing, she says, “yes.” When I ask her what she would tell them if they asked her if she knew how to make dinner, she says, “no.” She is clearly aware of her inability to make dinner, as it is her parents who provide food for her. And, in her mind, she plays the piano, because that is what she does, frequently. She has no awareness of training or learning beyond what she does.

There are times, however, when the girls articulate an awareness of their musical differences or of an inability to perform. When Kathleen is singing for the audience, I ask her what she would play if there were a performance in front of an audience for the piano. She thinks about this for a moment, then says, “I wouldn’t play the piano! I would sing and someone else would play the piano!”

Lauren: Why wouldn’t you play the piano?
Kathleen: ‘Cause!
Lauren: ‘Cause why?
Kathleen: ‘Cause I’m not big enough!
Lauren: You’re not big enough to play the piano?
Kathleen: Yes.
Lauren: How big do you have to be to play the piano?
Kathleen: As big as you.
Lauren: As big as me?!
Kathleen: Yes.
Lauren: I didn’t know that…But you play the piano, I’ve seen you!
Kathleen: Yessssss, but I only play this piano!
Lauren: Oh, only this one? So, you’re not ready for the rest of the world to hear you yet?
Kathleen: No. I’m only ready to sing in front of audiences.
Lauren: Not play in front of audiences

Kathleen: Noooo.

Lauren: Gotcha. What would make you ready? What would you need to do to play in front of an audience?

Kathleen: I would need to dress up, I would need to dress in bigger clothes, I would need to get my papers ready, I would need to get ready to play the piano.

Lauren: How would you do that?

Kathleen: I would get my papers on it and sit down to practice my songs.

Lauren: Well, do you want to practice right now?

Kathleen: Alright.

Lauren: Alright. I’ll pull the bench in so it’s perfectly placed for you.

Kathleen: Here’s the, noooo, here’s the papers for YOU!

I have included this exchange in its entirety to capture Kathleen’s thought process here, as it demonstrates an awareness that outside of our space she is unequipped to participate in piano events. There is another brief conversation between us that might reflect more of her thoughts here as well. After we compose her birthday song, where Kathleen was full of excitement for the process and contributed creative ideas as I wrote them down on the paper, I say, “Ok! Let’s play our song from the very beginning.” She shuffles over to the nearby chair and sits down heavily. Wearily, she says, “I don’t want to play.” “You don’t want to play?!” I say, in disbelief—“You don’t want to play your song?” Dejectedly, she says, “I can’t read it! YOU have to sing it!”

I realize in the moment that she is aware of her inability to read, and how that affects her ability to play the song that I have written down. “Well,” I say, “I’ll read it, and you play it!”
She walks over to the bench and sits down next to me, beginning to play immediately as I read the story. Her playing is profoundly symbolic of the words, and, as I sing “theeeeeeep——“ at the end of it, she turns to watch me as I poise my arm through the air in an arc toward the lowest key. She times herself to sing and play “end” with me, as I approach the key. We pause for a moment and smile at each other, releasing our bodies at the same moment. I exclaim, “What a great song, hooray!” and Kathleen runs into the stairwell, laughing.

Eden expresses a similar inability one day when I ask her to play the The Wild Horses song for me. “What wild horses…” she says, and I sing a bit of the first line for her. “Ok!” she says, and goes to the piano. She pauses for a moment, and says, “I don’t even know how to play that, will you show me how to play that?” Here is an articulated awareness that she does not know how to play the song. Without playing textual rhythms or even pretending to play an approximation of the song, she expresses a need for help.

**Summary of lived musicality.** The children engage in the lesson by musicking, with a variety of intention and in a variety of ways. Their intentions include simply being there with me in the space, responding to musical stimuli in imitation or improvisation, initiating musical moments, enacting and/or practicing their musicality. They musick by singing, chanting, moving, playing instruments other than the piano and/or playing the piano. They sing or chant overtly, as conversation or with a musical purpose. They create songs or patterns, often for the purposes of the pretend context. They also musick to accompany their singing, or to play the textual rhythm of songs.

The children’s musicking also parallels real-world musical practices, reflecting experiences they have outside of the lesson. Their behaviors reflect routines of practicing and

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109 See *Music Makers: At the Keyboard*, p. 20
performing music. They also interact with musical concepts on varying levels, whether un-grasped but suggested, understood and articulated without direct naming, or specifically understood as a musical concept. Further, the girls express belief regarding their musicianship. Their actions portray a belief in the legitimacy of their musical behaviors, as does their conversation. Awareness of the musicality of others seems to influence their belief, at times resulting in an articulation of unbelief in their musicianship.

**Summary of the Lifeworld Themes**

The goal of this chapter was to describe and reflect on the children’s behaviors within the setting, in order to gain insight into the children’s experience. I used the four lifeworld existentials of Van Manen (1990)—lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other—as well as a fifth that emerged as necessary—lived musicality—as a lens. I found that the children engaged in the lessons by expanding the boundaries of the room (lived space), by using their bodies (lived body), by directing the time (lived time), through multiple relationships (lived other), and by musicking (lived musicality). Though considered separately in this chapter, these dimensions weave together to form a unified picture of the children’s experience of the informal child-oriented lesson setting.
Chapter 5: Addressing the Purpose

Purpose and Process Restated

The purpose of this study was to seek insight into what children find meaningful and valuable when participating in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting. The study was guided by the question “What is the nature of a child’s engagement in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting?” Anecdotes of 18 episodes per child were deconstructed into meaning statements, which led to the emergence of essential themes. The themes were structured around the lifeworld existentials of lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other (Van Manen, 1990), and lived musicality. Reflection on and description in support of the themes occurred by further reviewing the videos, transcripts, anecdotes and meaning statements. The descriptions found in Chapter Four explicated each theme and sub-theme in answer to the question of the nature of the children’s engagement in the setting.

Ultimately, the themes and sub-themes that emerged provided insight into the question of the nature of the children’s engagement in the setting. In order to turn back to the purpose of the study, however, a discussion is warranted toward an understanding of what the children found to be meaningful and valuable during their experience. In this chapter I summarize the themes as a starting point, and then turn across the themes for a deeper discussion of what the children’s engagement indicated regarding meaning and value. Due to the complexity of this task, and in order to be thorough and objective in my discussion, I organized the discussion by aspects of Action (what did the children do?), Decision Making (why did the children act?), and Dimensions of Being (how did they “be”?). I also considered the converse of engagement, seeking meaning through the filter of disengagement.

Looking at the Themes
The themes and sub-themes provide the first level of answer to the question of how the children engaged in the setting. The descriptions and reflections provided in the previous chapter reveal that the children engaged in a variety of ways that existed in parts but threaded together as a whole. The children engaged by expanding the boundaries of the space, using the whole room in flexible ways (lived space). They engaged by using their bodies, as a means of communication, verbally and non-verbally participating in and emphasizing elements of our conversation (lived body). The children engaged by directing the time (lived time). Their conceptualization of time influenced how they overtly spoke directions or covertly acted in direction, investing in their ideas and the setting productively or unproductively. The children also engaged in the lesson through relationship (lived other). At times the relationship was navigated through negative behavior, but ultimately seemed most productive in the context of pretend and in relationship to the objects of play. The relationship with the adult was complex but central. Finally, the children engaged by acting in musical practices with a variety of intentions (lived musicality). They sang, chanted, danced; they played the piano and a variety of other instruments. They engaged in real world musical practices and worked with real life musical concepts. They expressed belief in their musicianship, which at times was shaken by an awareness of their skills in contrast to the adult or others.

Lived space. The children demonstrated that any area of the room is valid for inclusion in the lesson. Kathleen incorporated other rooms as well. They participated in the room without boundary; they also assigned roles to parts of the room. They moved fluidly back and forth in a reciprocal and flexible relationship with the space that provided opportunity for the pretend context and for their musicking. The space held infinite possibility for inclusion of other materials as well as for distraction.
**Lived body.** The children existed within their bodies in the space, and used their bodies for multiple purposes. They used their bodies to communicate, bodily participating in our conversations and emphasizing our conversation with bodily gestures. Their bodies expressed non-verbal communication; at times there also appeared to be a dichotomy between their verbal and non-verbal physical communication.

The children used their bodies in rhythmic response, with inflection and intention. Their responses often appeared to be intuitive, with intention located in their bodies as opposed to their cognitive awareness. Their bodily rhythmic response could be predictive in nature, could be a response to a musical stimulus that I offered, or a musical stimulus they offered themselves. The girls also adjusted their bodies in relation to the musical stimuli.

The girls also used their bodies in their approach to the bench and to the piano. The bench was an extension of their bodies, and took on the role of a place for them to be with me. The bench mediated their bodily relationship to the piano. When approaching the piano, they used a variety of bodily gesture. Sometimes standing, sometimes sitting, they used their fingers, hands, arms, elbows, and/or feet. They also used the stuffed animals or beanbags to play, which weighted their bodily approach. Overall, their physical approach to the piano utilized an intuitive understanding of gravity and weight.

**Lived time.** The children participated in the setting according to their conceptualizations of time. Capable of participating in an idea for lengthy periods, they also transitioned quickly from focus to focus. At times their ideas wove in and out with interruptions occurring frequently, but overall there was a thread of a story arc that gave continuity to their participation. Further, a cycle of memory existed that allowed the girls to call on previous moments—either in the current lesson or an earlier one—without any apparent premeditation.
The girls directed the time by speaking overt directions, telling me what to do with a mindfulness of knowing how their ideas were “supposed” to go. They articulated these ideas and directions without hesitation. Their ideas often incorporated elements of daily life. The girls also directed the time covertly, with their actions. Their actions demonstrated where they wanted to focus, as they intended an outcome by their participation. They invested in their own ideas with great patience. Their investment focused on the things that they loved, and indicated a place where they felt competent. When I allowed their investment to unfold, it often resulted in rich moments of musicking.

The girls also directed the time with behaviors that were either productive or unproductive. Productive behaviors did not necessarily mean that a product was created; productivity was found in the processes that the girls invested in and the quality of their interactions. In fact, productive use of time could be found in moments where they disagreed with me or even ignored me in order to invest in their own ideas. Unproductive use of time, then, occurred in moments of aggressive behaviors, or obnoxious verbal responses. Unproductive moments could also be passive-aggressive interactions, where it appeared that the child was participating but where the underlying demeanor was one of subversion or resistance.

**Lived other.** Negative behaviors appeared as an element of the girls’ relationship to me and to the setting. Outside factors may be one explanation of the negative ways that the girls chose to behave. Appearing in both language and action, negative behaviors could be dichotomous, where the child expressed both dislike and like at the same time. The behaviors could also shift abruptly, turning from disagreeability to agreeability without signal. It seems that one explanation for the negative behavior could be an awareness of incompetence in the setting or a confusion of expectations regarding what was supposed to occur in the lesson. Negative
behavior might also function as a means of working out personality characteristics, and may not be considered by the child as negative in the way that I perceived the behavior.

The children also existed in relationship to the pretend context, which became a unifying and mediating field within the setting. It was often dramatic, complex, and detailed, following rules I did not always understand. The pretend context was woven into other aspects of our lesson time, and included elements of daily life. The play objects functioned as characters within the pretend context and within the setting. The characters could be physical materials in the room, instruments, or imaginary. In any case, the children considered them to be real players in our lesson time, serving the pretend context and the musicking.

The children’s relationship to me involved responses of agreement, disagreement, deflection or ignorance. The girls directed me verbally and non-verbally, and freely expressed a range of emotion. They shared the space with me; at times co-constructing the lesson in a reciprocal back and forth, they also took ownership and responsibility in ways that gave me little to no voice. They demonstrated an awareness of togetherness and were willing to invite me into their pretend, but their demonstrations of ownership also reflected an awareness of me as an ‘other’.

**Lived musicality.** The girls musicked with a variety of intentions. At its most basic, musicking involved simply being with me in the space as I made music. They also musicked by responding in imitation or improvisation, by initiating, enacting, or practicing. They musicked by singing, chanting, moving, and playing instruments. They made up songs and sang established songs they had learned either in or out of the lesson. They sang both snippets of song and structured song. Their singing wove in and out of the time in either overt sung response or covert response. Their overt sung response could be conversational, related to logistics of the
time or the pretend context; their overt response could also be for musical purposes. The girls musicked on the piano as well. They played with improvisatory exploration, in structured made-up song, in complex patterns, in textual rhythms, or some combination of these. They played to accompany their singing or for the purposes of their ideas in and out of the pretend context.

The musicking of the girls demonstrated an awareness of the real-world musical practices, incorporated from other musical environments in which they participated. They demonstrated awareness of musical terminology, and of rituals of performance. They assigned musical roles of audience, performers, or conductor. Their musicking involved moments of working with musical concepts, whether articulated as such or not. They demonstrated understanding of musical concepts such as tempo, dynamics, mood, tonality, meter, rhythm, and patterns. They also demonstrated understanding of the keyboard and its registers. When concepts were unavailable to their understanding, they worked with the concepts on the level at which they were able, existing apart from me on the other side of what I have termed “the wall.”

Their musicking also demonstrated a belief in their musicianship as they embodied musical behaviors and were seemingly unaware of their limitation. They considered their musical offerings to be legitimate, without an articulated difference between my musical training and their own. At times an awareness of our differing musicianship seemed to surface, and appeared to affect their belief in their own musicianship.

**Looking Across the Themes**

Looking at the individual themes and sub-themes provides an answer to the question of the nature of engagement in the lesson setting. Returning to the purpose of the study—to seek insight into what children find meaningful and valuable when participating in an informal child-oriented piano lesson—what follows is a discussion of meaning based in looking across the
themes, in order to interpret what the children’s engagement indicated regarding the making of meaning within the setting. I considered aspects of Action (what did the children do?), Decision Making (why did the children act?), and Dimensions of Being (how did they “be”?) as a guide in the process of deriving meaning out of the themes. I also considered the converse of engagement, seeking meaning through the filter of disengagement.

**Action—What did the children do?** The children engaged in the setting by performing actions that indicated where their interest lay and what they considered valuable. This category reflects the *what*, the specific actions that the children made, the elements to which they attended. In essence, this category asks the question “what did the children do?”

The first action I see is that the children moved in relation to the space of the room. They moved in the space, they moved through the space, they moved around the space, they moved beyond the space. They re-defined my understanding of what a lesson room might look like by their incorporation of and interaction with the entire space. In the case of Kathleen, the space extended and existed beyond my experience of it. My physical interaction with the sphere of her bedroom was limited to two occasions in the first semester; only twice did she invite me into her bedroom space. Beyond that, the moments that she spent in her bedroom were moments when she was not physically with me, and yet was still engaged in the lesson.

The children acted by moving in relation to the space of the setting, but they also acted by moving with expression. I observed them move with joy, frustration, musicality, freedom, affection, anger, purpose, contentment, pleasure, aggression, thoughtfulness, playfulness, and to demonstrate disconnection or connection. They also moved in a variety of ways; bouncing, hopping, jumping, running, leaping, skipping, jigging, shaking, swaying, meandering, falling,
puttering, climbing, crawling, walking, laying, dancing, sliding. Further, the children acted by being still. They lay on the floor, or sat on my lap; they leaned on the bench or on my leg.

I see that the children acted by interacting with the text of the songs and chants. Kathleen fell in the popcorn and ran with her horses; Eden gave the mouse and bear a bath. Kathleen embraced the bath song to refer to the cleaning of the piano. She brought me palm branches so that I could swim during a variation on *Go and Stop!* They interpreted the text and adjusted their actions accordingly. They also acted by devising words to improvised or standard tunes, interacting with the moment through a musically verbal approach.

They acted by implementing their ideas, using materials found in the room in creative ways. They used stuffed animals, instruments, paper and writing supplies, bouncing balls, palm branches, stickers, coloring books, other books, dolls, scarves, beanbags, and more to express their participation in the setting. These materials were either familiar to them or became familiar to them; they either emerged from their everyday life, or were brought to them by me. In either case, the materials were used for the purposes of the lesson as the children saw fit.

Hence, they acted by creating wide webs of meaning for the situation of the moment. Their pretend contexts held for them a place of depth and truth that could not be designed by me, and which I needed them to interpret for me. Situating themselves within the pretend, the children made sense of our time together with tents and forts, napping and bedtime, cleaning and bath time, stories and poetry, getting ready, getting sick. Beyond creative elements, their pretend contexts reflected real life events, as when Kathleen pretended to be the teacher or pretended that we were writing out songs, and as Eden pretended that she was playing a song on the guitar.

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110 *Music Play*, p. 115
They acted without separation of pretend and real; they acted within the pretend, they appeared to act because of it.

I see that the girls acted musically. They sang, danced, chanted, and played. Their musical acting was complex; it involved various meters and modes and phrasings and structures. They spun melodies and moved in rhythms that I could not notate, either because they were too nebulous and unformed in terms of stylization or because they were so concise and formed that they were beyond my musical capabilities. The girls imitated and improvised, they watched and they led. They sang in parts and in wholes, they sang in rehearsal, in process, and in performance. They played drums, harmonica, recorder, shaker egg, rattle, guitar, accordion, tambourine, xylophone, and piano. They played the piano while standing or sitting, and with their whole bodies. They played in seeming belief that their playing of all kinds held meanings that we both understood. What’s more, they took ownership of their musicking, simply as a part of the process of being in the lesson.

I see that their actions included teaching, as they took responsibility for the moment and shared with me what they knew. At times, they took an ownership that elevated their role above mine. At other times, they seemed to act in the belief that we were equal partners, and that our being together involved a mutual sharing of information and lesson material. They acted in co-construction, bouncing their ideas with mine, evolving their own as they allowed me to take part. I see that the girls believed in the worth of their ideas, and that the spinning out of them was important and worth their time. Productivity occurred within their direction, though it could leave me guessing in the moment.

Decision making—Why did the children act? When I turn my eyes to the space beyond action, I see that the children engaged in a mindfulness of decision making, making
specific decisions that demonstrated a capacity for complexity. In this aspect, the question becomes “why do the children act?” What was it that drove them to continue forward or turn their minds from one thing to the next? Inherent in decision making is a presence of mind; mindfulness must be present on some level in order to press on or to change direction. Inherent, then, was a presence of thought, which I witnessed as it came to life in the ways that the girls expressed intention toward the setting and the elements of the setting. Their mindfulness of thought and intention was seen in the decisions that they made within the setting, and as they set a clear trajectory for how they desired the time to be spent.

The children were mindful of their placement in the room, choosing where they wanted to be, when they wanted to be there. This happened reflexively, which did not preclude when it happened planfully. Their decisions extended to the objects and ideas for which they exhibited love and care, and they found in the setting what they wanted and ignored what they did not. Decisions of where they were and what they were doing seemed to speak of deeper contexts—contexts of emotion and inner thoughts that they may or may not have been able to articulate, but which their behaviors and choices demonstrated.

The expression of deeper contexts also occurred in their physical behaviors toward and verbal responses to me, as they made communicative decisions that reflected positive and negative emotion. They seemed to be mindful of the importance of their connection to me as the adult in the space, as they communicated and expressed their needs and desires. I also see, however, that they were mindful of being with me beyond the need for overt communication, and were comfortable in their freedom to ignore me. I see that their ignorance was also a decision they made, and was guided by their focus; it was not a derisive ignorance against me, but an expression that they felt safe to just be themselves with me and in the space. I see that
sometimes they were capable of deciding to change their behaviors, but that sometimes they were not. I also see that sometimes their choice to act negatively might have been made for reasons other than I might have inferred. In addition, these presumably negative behaviors might not even have been considered negative by the child, as evidenced when Eden told me to my face that she did not want me to come back, but whispered behind her hand that she was kidding.

I see that the children decided how to direct the time based on their conceptualization of time. Outside of the time parameters of my adult mind, they participated for lengthy periods of time or made quick transitions. They tied their ideas together with an overarching story, and held it in place by an underlying cycle of memory. Their decisions reflected the presence of their mind in the moment, but also demonstrated the connection of their thoughts to previous moments in the cycle of memory. An element of future mindfulness appeared to exist as well, as they envisioned where they wanted to go and made decisions that led us there.

Their decision making was directed at and by the pretend context, which factored hugely into why the girls decided as they did. Situated inside of it, the girls directed us through it and beyond it as the contexts unfolded and evolved into deeper and/or new ideas. The play objects and characters depended on the pretend context for their role in the lesson, and it was the girls who decided how the play objects participated. At times this was in response to a suggestion I made, a response that could go in the direction of agreement or disagreement. Mostly it was of their original design.

I see that they controlled the space through the decisions they made, and that the control took a differing quality dependent on their conceptualization of the moment. The control could be overt, through direct statements that left no room for question or through physical statements that left no room for doubt as to what they meant. It could be suggestive, as in verbal moments
of “I have a good idea!” or covert, as in physical moments that directed us without words. The control could also be passive aggressive, as when Eden disagreed without disagreeing; in the space with me, she paralyzed us both instead of moving us forward.

The girls demonstrated mindful decision making when they incorporated aspects of their daily life into our lesson time. They made decisions based on what they had seen or heard, out of their own experiences, or the experiences of others. They demonstrated mindfulness when they manipulated roles or took responsibility for me or for the play characters. Their decisions demonstrated thoughtfulness in awareness of how the world works, and of their own place in it as they spoke and acted in rehearsal and play.

Musical behaviors also functioned as a product of decision making, with a clear element of choice—the girls acted musically when they chose to. At times they actively resisted joining me in musical behavior, and then suddenly and inexplicably did. At other times they neither resisted nor joined; they simply allowed themselves to be quietly with me in the moment. Belief and intention became mixed together in their approach to music in the setting, as they made decisions based on what they seemed to believe about themselves as musicians and what they intended to do in the moment. Their musical decisions could be based on past events, or come from new inspirations. Songs—even if sung on a neutral syllable such as “bum”—reminded them of past events, and could result in a re-creation of the associated pretend. Demonstrating mindfulness of previous times, they made decisions based on what had come before. Their decision in the moment, however, could lead them to places previously unexplored, as their ways of participating evolved throughout the course of the specific action and over time.

When the girls approached the piano, they did so with bodily intent. I see that at times they used the piano as an object in relation to their pretend, but sometimes they decided to
explore the possibilities of the piano in relationship to the pretend. Sometimes, their exploration turned a corner into improvisation, as they explored the piano’s relationship to sound with intention and underlying structures. Beyond exploration and improvisation, the girls also played constructed songs on the piano, as they engaged in textual rhythms and thought-out placement of their bodies in relationship to the keys.

Ultimately, I see that awareness of mindfulness existed on a cognitive level that the children sometimes appeared to access, and sometimes appeared to not. At times the girl’s mindfulness existed at a surface level, where their thinking was transparent. Often, however, their mindfulness seemed to exist in a deeper plane, one where decisions were made and actions performed reflexively, intuitively, without premeditation. It seemed that the girls engaged on this plane more than I did in the setting. I was mainly cognizant of my mindfulness, as I navigated our interactions and our activity. The way that the girls wove in and out, however, with focus and concentration in the moment that appeared reflexive and not planful leads me to say that much of their mindfulness happened in an unaware space. This does not mean that their mindfulness was always in this unaware space, as their planfulness was at times made transparent. Planfulness and reflexivity operated in tandem, as the girls made mindful decisions throughout the lesson.

**Dimensions of being—How did the children “be”?** The qualities of their acting and their decision making lead me to say that there were dimensions to their experience of being in the space. More than the *what* and the *why* of their engaging, there was a realm of *how*. The children engaged in the setting by their way of being, which existed in varying dimension. At its most organic, the children simply “were”. They existed without inhibition, speaking their minds, moving where they wanted to move, doing what they wanted to do. There was an element of
focus so deep that there was no moving them. At its most articulate, the children existed in conversation and explicit co-construction with me. Somewhere in the middle of these two spaces, there was a space where the way of being became uneasy and wrestled within itself. Ultimately, I think of this category as being one of attunement, illustrating how the girls existed within the setting beyond their decisions and actions.

I see that in their ways of being, the girls wedged themselves deeply into process. When given time to work through repetitions of a piano song or activity, the girls evolved their behaviors, using expanded ranges and increasing sophistication. In their musical behaviors, they rehearsed and practiced and performed without pretension. They grew in their capacity to keep a beat, to express their thoughts, to sit at the piano with poise and real-world reflection. I see that sophistication and complexity were imbedded inside of their process; hence I see that sophistication and complexity is indeed a way of being, a dimension of their existence in the setting and in the world. I see that their growth was a natural occurrence of which I took very little control. I see then that they grew when given the time and space, developing their ways of being.

The girls existed purposefully in the space, negotiating elements of the room and their place in it to develop detailed and complex moments of play. They existed outside of adult boundaries in terms of placement and bodily engagement. Their spontaneous movement throughout the space and the time reflected significance in what I would have deemed distraction. Though the children acted disjointedly in ways that did not always make sense to me, I see that their actions seemed to serve a larger purpose.

Purpose, then, becomes a property of being. The girls existed purposefully, as contributors and directors. From their very first lessons they told me their thoughts, their
understandings of what music is, of what they wanted me to know about what they knew. They worked for their purposes, investing in moments above and beyond what I could see as necessary, and communicated to me through their work that their sense of being was being fulfilled. Their purposeful engagement indicated to me that work is fulfilling when directed innately. It was their way of being in their work that tells me this, that demonstrated to me how to meet them in it.

And yet, the girls did not act entirely on their own while they existed with me in the setting. When received, my ideas became woven into their ideas, my overt and covert suggestions borrowed and manipulated and changed. In conversation with me and action toward me they demonstrated that I was welcome, as they included me, cared for me, and shared their thoughts with me. They demonstrated an inherent understanding that I was there to be with them, and that my being there was appropriate, necessary, and pleasant. Hence, they existed in a dimension of togetherness, of deep understanding of the role of togetherness, and how it was an unquestioned element of the fabric of the setting.

In this togetherness, I see that articulation of emotions and inner thoughts was at times monitored, and at times not. At times the girls seemed to consider my feelings, but at other times seemed unable to or even uninterested. Depending on the moment, my feelings and thoughts were more or less welcomed or sought out. I see that the line of self and other was blurred when they spoke to me without consideration of the fact that I was “the adult”. My response to them was often childlike, that I dove into the play of the moment as far as I could see where and how to go. In their own childlikeness, the girls responded in our togetherness by freely and even bossily directing me. Hence, the nature of our togetherness was reciprocal, as we responded to each other and as our interactions evolved.
I think of Kathleen and of how over time she moved deeper and deeper into a director role, without questioning her right to. I see her comfort with me, her absolute giving of herself to the time and the space and to me and to the music. I think of Eden, and of her struggle to be free, her wrestling with the tensions of lying in my arms and hitting me with the stuffed animals. I think of myself, and of how these memories bring me to tears in the deep places of my heart due to the reality of their realness. I see this dimension of togetherness was one of love, in all of its fullness.

In fact, a fullness of expression was found on more than one level. I see fullness in the children’s lack of inhibition. At times it may have felt uncomfortable for me, as I questioned the value of allowing them to run freely with their thoughts and ideas, but ultimately lent to the perception that we were really living in our being in the space together. Allowing for fullness of expression meant opening the door to negative expressions, and that there may be more to the story when a child behaves negatively. But I also see that allowing for fullness of expression bred richly beautiful and magically surprising moments of musicking, which came out of nowhere and left us breathless with the profound simplicity of their complex goodness.

I see fullness where the children wove in and out, being productive and unproductive in the same space, as they actively musicked and not, as they agreed and disagreed. I see that the girls wove in and out of ideas and the means of expressing the ideas. I see that ideas existed in their memory even when they were not exposed on the surface. And so I see that the girls existed in a state of planful spontaneity, as the two poles co-mingled in the setting and created a fullness I would not have expected.

The Filter of Disengagement
In this chapter thus far, I focused my understanding through the lens of engagement. However, additional insights may be gained by considering the ways that the girls disengaged in the setting. Disengagement lives on the opposite side of the spectrum from engagement, it breathes in polar opposite to how the girls expressed their engagement. As such, it offers additional insights into value and meaning in the girl’s experience of the time. It is, however, much more difficult to see how the girls actively disengaged, as their engaging takes up the majority of the space. In fact, I wonder if there is a layer of difference between engagement and disengagement that might be more appropriately called ‘not engaging’ and which needs to be explored.

The reality is that the girls rarely actively disengaged; more often, they engaged in something other. For example, it was characteristic for the girls to engage on occasion with the animal cards that I included in their box, but it was not an activity they gravitated toward. In fact, after my initial introduction of the cards, they appeared only briefly in each girl’s lesson, and as a support for the pretend context. As such, how do I fully see the places that they disengaged, as even their disengagement could be redefined as simply a flex in purpose?

Nonetheless, looking for disengagement does help me in my quest to see what the girls found to be valuable and meaningful within the setting. When looking for disengagement I am essentially looking for the places where their focus could have been but wasn’t. In some way, this becomes a moot point; one might say that they could have engaged in a certain way, but did not, and hence, one need not look any further. In order to see their engagement even more clearly, however, I can look for the opposite of what they did actively engage in— I envision what they rejected in favor of what they chose. In other words, in order to fully understand their engagement I need to look closely, and envision the opposite of it.
When they chose to participate in their own way over my demonstrations of “correctness”, I see that they were uninterested in correctness. In fact, correctness held no meaning for them as long as they were unaware that my ways of being might demonstrate such a construct. It was when glimpses of “my way” began to unsettle Eden that her behaviors turned to disengagement. It is difficult even to say that she was genuinely disengaged at times; the nature of her passive aggressive behavior was almost more of a negative engagement than an outright disengagement, and, in retrospect, might have even been less negative than I perceived it to be.

The girls disengaged when I applied a rigid understanding of how the space and time should be used. They flew around the room and into surrounding ones, exceeded the boundaries of physical space, and filled out my ideas in the richness of the pretend context. Even in my commitment to a flexible environment, my ideas were more structured and narrower than theirs. Hence, I see that they disengaged in shallow ideas, when their ideas moved us deeper and took us further than I ever would have envisioned we would go.

This occurred musically as well. The richness of the music that we created together occurred when I allowed them to proceed in their own ways. When I acknowledge that dry renditions of songs like Hot Cross Buns tended to leave us in places of confusion and unproductive chaos, I see that the children were interested in rich musical experience. The girls would participate deeply in rich musical moments, when given the time and space to develop them.

And yet, once again, while structure and format and dry renditions were mostly met with disengagement, they were not always. There was room for the girls to step out of themselves and be with me in the space in my ways of being. There was also indication that their handling
of the setting would change over time. For example, Kathleen received my idea of the structured four-part song by her last lessons, which was something she had shown no interest in or even capacity for previously. She not only received it, but she performed brilliantly within it, meeting me halfway within a pretend context. Eden was ready to move into more structure by the end of the data collection period as well; even though this transition took some time to fully shape, it was a transition that was necessary. I see that the children needed me—my role was to move them beyond what they knew, into new dimensions of knowledge and understanding and being.

Concluding Thoughts on Meaning and Value

In conclusion, I see that the children valued the freedom to move in relationship to space, with expression and variety and the possibility of stillness. They valued the flexibility of time, where ideas could take shape or be left behind, evolve or return. They valued the materials and experienced them as elements for their control. They found and made meaning in the shape of pretend contexts and the framework that the contexts set in place. They valued musical moments and used them to contribute to the meanings they made. They valued their ideas and found meaning in them, investing in them because of the importance they found in them. I see that I could trust them to tell me through their word or action what it was that they needed as they pointed to where it was they wanted to be, just by their simple act of being.

I see that the girls valued being fully present, as they connected deeply to me and demonstrated a willingness to be in the space with me. I see value and meaning in the elements of daily life that they worked on in the lesson, and that they valued the possibility of working those elements into the fabric of the setting. Maintaining the freedom to purposefully plan and invest in their process was valuable to them, and this freedom extended to the choices they made regarding their musicking behaviors. They made meaning out of time and space to grow without
comment or overt direction, in full expression of their being. Ultimately, I see that meaning was both found and made in the ways that the girls engaged in the setting, and that they were active participants in the construction of the space.

Over all of these elements I see a pattern of ‘both-and’, not ‘either-or’. Aspects of action, thought, and being did not exist in exclusion of each other; they happened in conjunction with each other. The setting would not have been what it was without the acknowledgment of the both-and. It was not a sphere of black and white; it was nebulous and ambiguous, it was made up of gray. In the gray was the meaning; in the gray was the value. The gray was situated in our being together, our commitment to each other as we wove a fabric of what the time and space needed to be in order for it to be ours. The meaning and the value were found in the us-ness, the in-the-space-ness, in the productive and the unproductive.

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111 Instead of saying “it is either X or Y”, I see the setting as a place where we need to say “it is both X and Y.”
Chapter Six: Reviewing, Discussing, and Moving Forward

Reviewing

**Background.** My journey into informal piano settings with young children began in an early childhood music class, where I witnessed young children organically respond to musical stimuli provided by a teacher who functioned as a co-participant in their musical play. When I began teaching piano to one of these young children, I considered that the limitations she was exhibiting might be due to where she was in her developmental journey as opposed to her overall potential. My experiences with this child led me deeper into informal teaching, as I explored how to bridge her level of readiness with a valuable piano experience. Soon I extended my exploration with an even younger child, and discovered characteristics of her musical play that fascinated me and which I wanted to explore further. Convinced that our time together was valuable, I struggled to reconcile expectations of teacher-driven product with the child-driven processes of the lessons. Hence, I was left with questions regarding the value of the time—what does the child find valuable in this setting?

Children develop within the social and cultural environments in which they are situated (Walsh, 2002). The meanings they make within those settings determine their identity, motivation, and engagement within specific domains (O’Neill, 2002; Trevarthen, 2002). According to Dissanayake (2000), meaning making is framed by five essential human needs, beginning with a child’s relationship to her mother. *Mutuality* between mother and infant involves a shared intention; beginning from the earliest days of the child’s life, this imitative and turn-taking communication extends into other relationships in which the child becomes a part. *Belonging* then to a community, the child seeks out value, communication, and emotional connection with others. The child survives in the community by *finding and making meaning*,
where what is valuable to her “makes sense” (p. 73). This value speaks to the child’s need and desire to exist, and is worked out in the process of hands-on competence when the child makes active meaning by being a part of something larger than herself. Ultimately, the child participates in elaboration behaviors, extending basic human features of sound, expression, and movement into the arena of art in an “indication to others of strong feeling or care” (p. 130).

These evolving properties of human existence—mutuality, belonging, finding and making meaning, developing hands-on competence, and elaboration—are made of both objective and subjective lived experiences. Boyce-Tillman (2004) also pointed to the role of objective and subjective reality in the domain of music education, calling for personal involvement and factors beyond a merely cognitive understanding of music. She suggested we approach music education through materials, extending this definition beyond physical objects to include elements of sound and space “drawn both from the human body and the environment” (p. 104). Expression speaks of meaning, involving personal experiences of mood, emotion, images, memories, and atmosphere in relationship to the music making. Construction occurs when the structure of the music reflects theory and cultural biases. Values are contextual, speaking to the systems in place when the music is created and experienced. Finally, Spirituality is music’s unique ability to move a human being into “another world” (p. 109).

These five realities of music are not limited by age or ability, but can be found even in the musicking behaviors of young children (Campbell, 1998a; St. John, 2006). Depicting the places where they need time to develop within a domain, children participate deeply within that domain in the ways that are natural to them (Stinson, 2002; Walsh, 2002). Hence, allowing children the time and space to absorb, incorporate, and develop their behaviors along the lines of their culture is crucial to their overall development of agency and ownership (Smith, 2002;
Whitfield, 2009). They develop within their culture by using “all of their senses” (Louis, 2009, p. 6) and by engaging bodily with the elements of the domain (Bresler, 2004; Fromberg, 2002; Heebert, 2009; Walsh, 2002). More interested in the process than the product, children work within their play to make sense of the elements of their environment (Dunst et al., 2001; Jambor, 2000; Louis, 2009; Paley, 2004; Smith, 1996). Ultimately, providing informal environments where adults come alongside the child as a co-participant and not director breed children’s mastery of a domain (Louis, 2009; Sommer et al., 2010; Stamp, 1993; Walsh, 2002).

**Rationale.** The expectation in piano pedagogy traditions is for young children to be ready in order to begin piano instruction, given a prevalence in the preschool piano pedagogy literature for the use of teacher-driven activities and visual representations of materials (Bastien, 1995; Collins, 1996; Huang, 2009; Jacobson, 2006; Skaggs, 2004; Thomas-Lee, 2003; Uszler et al., 2000). However, research in early childhood and early childhood music (Custodero, 2005; Dunst et al., 2001; Gordon, 2003; Louis, 2009; Reynolds, Long, & Valerio, 2007; Rutkowski & Hsee, 2009; St. John, 2006; Young, 2003a), suggest reconsidering elements of readiness for young children can be worthwhile. Hence, blending elements of the early childhood informal child-oriented music class with elements of piano lessons as a process of readiness is worth investigating. Re-defining expectation based on the ways that young children have been found to learn may be a necessary consideration, when aiming to provide our students with the skills and abilities necessary for strong musicianship over a lifetime at the piano.

**Purpose and guiding question.** The purpose of this study was to seek insight into what children find meaningful and valuable when participating in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting. I aimed to locate the places where the children demonstrated meaning-making, by looking for the ways that they engaged in the lesson setting. The purpose was structured on the
foundation that where a child demonstrates interest is where her meaning is being made, and that meaning-making is essential for deep learning processes to occur (Fink-Jensen, 2007; Hedegaard, 2009; Sokolowski, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). This purpose was rooted in my overall research interest: to understand what is valuable and meaningful for young children in piano lessons, in order to appropriately guide their musical learning. In order to achieve this purpose I embraced a qualitative approach to the study, using ethnographical and phenomenological techniques of data collection and analysis. I sought insight into what children find to be valuable and meaningful in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting by asking the question: What is the nature of a child’s engagement in an informal child-oriented piano lesson setting?

**Methodology and method.** This study was qualitative in nature, within the paradigm of social constructivism (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008), and was influenced by ethnographical and phenomenological traditions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, 2001; Glesne, 2006; Van Manen, 1990). Ethnographical considerations regarding my researcher role in the setting was as a long-term participant-observer, poised to collect the data, describe the setting, and derive meanings found there (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Emerson et al., 1995, 2001; Glesne, 2006). Phenomenological techniques of *anecdote*, and *line-by-line* analysis were applied through a phenomenological lens of four *lifeworld existentials*, in order to identify themes.

Two girls were purposefully selected as participants due to their musical behaviors and expressed interest in the piano. Each participated in individual informal piano lessons with me over the course of two semesters (January-June and September-December). Eden was 4.6 years old at the start of the lesson period, and 5.5 at the end; Kathleen was 4.2 years old at the start,
and 5.1 at the end. The lessons followed a flexible framework\textsuperscript{112}, and were based on principles of music learning in early childhood (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; Gordon, 2003; Hornbach, 2011; Reynolds et al., 2007; Valerio et al., 1998; Velez, 2011; Young, 2003a).

I collected the data via video recording and journaling over the course of the two semesters for both children. Following each lesson, I reflectively journaled my perceptions of what had occurred. I then watched the video, and transcribed what I saw there, attending to description of the children’s engagement and taking note of moments that stood out as particularly interesting. Eden’s mother contributed to the data by posting recorded conversations with and music making by Eden to a blog set up for the study. She also discussed elements of the lesson setting and Eden’s participation in it during two formal interviews at the end of each semester. Kathleen’s parents contributed to the data collection by journaling brief episodes of Kathleen’s musical behaviors outside of the lessons. Further, her mother participated in one formal interview with me at the beginning of the second semester.

Following the close of the data collection period, I returned to the video transcript. I isolated 18 episodes per child that either demonstrated particular engagement or disengagement, were characteristic of the setting, or were difficult for me to understand. For each episode, I re-watched the video and re-documented the experience, being mindful of fully capturing the situation through descriptive language including bodily movements, placement in the room, conversations between me and the child, musical contributions, tone of voice, and inclusion of materials. These documentations existed then as narrative anecdotes for my further analysis.

Each anecdote was broken down into numbered statements. Each statement was then interpreted using the phrase “when looking for the nature of a child’s engagement in a lesson,

\textsuperscript{112} See Appendix A
this sentence shows that…” (Van Manen, 1990). I created a corresponding numbered list with the completion of this phrase, as reflections of meaning in the setting. I then approached the meaning statements through the lens of four lifeworld existentials, which Van Manen (1990) asserted to be essential to all human experience\textsuperscript{113}.

These four existentials of \textit{lived space}, \textit{lived body}, \textit{lived time}, and \textit{lived other} enabled me to identify essential themes within the episodes. As I did so, it became evident that I needed to add an existential, which I termed \textit{lived musicality}. The themes that emerged became a framework on which to organize my reflections on the data. Ultimately, the themes guided my writing and reflection and enabled me to move in and out of the data, looking back and forth between the video, the transcriptions, the episodes, and the meaning statements. I also looked at the contributions of the parents through the blogs, journals, informal conversations, and interviews for insight into what appeared in the themes. The view of part against whole in this back and forth process provided me with a rich and thorough understanding of the data, as I reflected and wrote descriptively regarding all that I saw.

**Findings.** The dimensions of \textit{lived space}, \textit{lived body}, \textit{lived time}, \textit{lived other}, (Van Manen, 1990) and \textit{lived musicality} revealed themes regarding the nature of the children’s engagement in the informal child-oriented piano lesson setting. The children engaged in the lesson by expanding the boundaries of the room, by using their whole bodies, by directing the time, by participating in multiple relationships, and by musicking (Campbell, 1998a; Small, 1998). Each of these themes stands on its own, but also as a thread in the fabric of the whole. Additionally, the themes involved sub-themes, which further describe the experience, and are explicated below.

\textsuperscript{113} See Appendix C
**Themes and sub-themes.** In regard to *lived space*, the girls participated in a reflexive and flexible use of the room. Within the room, they assigned specific places for specific events and purposes. Areas outside of the room were also assigned purpose for the lesson. Their fluid movement throughout the room included interactions with materials that could either distract them from the lesson or be incorporated into the lesson. Ultimately, the girls moved in both planful and reflexive ways throughout the room.

In regard to *lived body*, the children used their bodies to communicate, participating in and emphasizing our conversation. They also used their bodies to communicate non-verbally, and at times their non-verbal actions conflicted with their verbal statements. Their bodies responded rhythmically to musical stimuli provided by me, them, or a CD. At times, the response followed a stimulus; at times it predicted one. Able to adjust their bodies to musical material, their bodies held musical inflection and intention. In their approach to the bench and to the piano, the girls used a variety of bodily gesture and demonstrated agency in their intuitive understanding of the relationship of gravity to the instrument.

In regard to *lived time*, the girls directed the time according to their conceptualization of time, engaging in lengthy participation, transitioning quickly without apparent premeditation, weaving a thread of a story arc through an overall period that appeared disjointed on the surface, and/or returning to previous events in a cycle of memory. The girls directed our time overtly, by articulating what they wanted to do and how it was “supposed” to happen; they also directed covertly, simply by their actions. Their investment in their ideas directed how our time was spent, as they patiently and lovingly focused their energies. Further, the girls demonstrated both productive and unproductive use of time. Productivity was found in fruitful process and a
positive quality of interaction; unproductivity was found in moments of aggressive, passive-aggressive, or obnoxious behavior.

In regard to \textit{lived other}, the girls interacted in a variety of relationships within the setting. These relationships consisted of negative behavior, a pretend context, the play objects, and me as the adult. I considered negative behavior to be an aspect of relationship, as it functioned between the girls and me, between the girls and the setting, and between each girl with herself. Negative behavior appeared as a result of outside factors, but also seemed to be an element of working out personality factors within the setting. Negative behaviors could be dichotomous, with negative verbal expressions and positive physical expressions occurring simultaneously or with negative and positive interactions weaving in and out of each other. Negative behaviors may also have occurred as expressions of exploration, control, fear of incompetence, or confusion regarding expectations of the nature of the setting.

The pretend contexts that the girls devised were an obvious relationship in which the girls engaged, as the pretend unified and mediated the setting. Often complex and detailed, it involved elements of daily life including social interactions. The pretend context was often their priority, and all other aspects of the time were woven into it. Ultimately, the pretend context provided the children with an over-arching story in which to situate our time and demonstrated to me the places where they were most interested. Within the pretend context the girls used lesson materials as play objects, which often took the role of specific and significant characters. These characters often returned from week to week, and were either physically present or imaginary.

Further, the girls engaged in a relationship with me as the adult with a variety of expression. They disagreed with me, agreed with me, deflected me, or ignored me. They brought me into their pretend, either directing me in what I should do, or allowing me to
contribute my own ideas. They demonstrated that my presence with them was necessary and important to them as they included me in co-construction, used me for their purposes, invited me to play alongside of them, or embraced my ideas. We participated in the setting together, where expression of emotion ranged from pleasure to frustration, and where magical moments wove together with the more mundane.

The final theme of musicking demonstrated that the girls musicked in a variety of ways and with a variety of intention. By simply being with me as I made music, they engaged in the processes of musicianship. They sang, chanted, moved, and played instruments. Their musicking took the form of both imitated and improvised responses to my musical material, initiation, enacting, and practice of the material. They sang both snippets of song and structured song and demonstrated sophisticated and complex patterns of musical understanding. They sang in overt and covert response, for conversational or musical purposes. Musicking also occurred on the piano in improvisatory exploration, structured made-up song, complex patterns, textual rhythms of established songs, or a combination of these. They played the piano to accompany their singing, or as a part of the pretend context.

The musicking behaviors of the girls demonstrated an understanding of real-world musical practices, terminology, and rituals of performance. The setting provided interactions with musical concepts such as tempo, dynamics, mood, tonality, meter, rhythm, and patterns. Aspects of the piano keyboard such as differences between white and black keys, and high, medium, and low registers were explored and articulated. When concepts were unavailable to their understanding, they worked with the concepts as they saw fit. Overall, their musicking demonstrated a belief in their identity as musicians. Their verbal references to and physical embodiment of their role in real-world musical practices expressed legitimacy in their musical
ways of being. As time progressed, both children articulated to differing degree an awareness of their ability in comparison to mine; this awareness appeared to affect their belief in their own musicianship, though this appeared differently for each child.

**Aspects of meaning.** Aspects of meaning making and expressions of value in the setting appeared in a variety of ways when considered along aspects of 1) action, 2) decision making, and 3) dimensions of being. The girls demonstrated an appreciation for freedom and flexibility in their capacity to move, implement their own ideas, and to direct the use of materials and the time. Their preoccupation with the pretend context indicated the worth they placed in it. Further, the degree of ownership they took over the unfolding of the pretend as well as their direction of both the play objects and of me within it indicated a place where their investment held meaning. Musicking was often woven into the pretend, as the girls took a role of active participant in the construction and direction of the lesson.

The children’s rich participation in musicking and in the pretend suggested that they valued the opportunity to allow richness to unfold. The incorporation of elements from their daily life and their uninhibited expression of a wide range of emotions and actions indicated that meaning was made in holistic and organic form. The depth of meaning making was seen in the ways the children expanded and evolved both my ideas and their own. This process often occurred in a reciprocal co-construction of time and materials, indicating that the togetherness inherent in the setting lent to the meaning and the value in the setting.

When in the thick of the process, the children were focused and purposeful in their work as directors of and contributors to the setting. They invested in lengthy participation, but could quickly transition to a new idea or a return to a previous idea. The previous idea may have surfaced at other moments of the current lesson, providing a story arc from the beginning of the
lesson to the end. The previous idea might also be taken from previous lessons, abruptly returning to the setting as it cycled in and out of the child’s memory. Their process also seemed to be directed by a mindfulness that was both planful and reflexive.

Musical aspects of meaning were seen in the ways that the girls chose to musick. Their musicking behaviors came from their life experiences outside of the setting, but also were formed in the moment. New inspirations emerging out of their interactions with me, with the materials, and the pretend context were also evident. They approached the piano with bodily intent, sometimes treating it as an object, sometimes as an instrument. They used it for the purposes of their pretend as well as for musical purposes, sometimes weaving the two purposes together. Ultimately, their musicking behaviors were ones of exploration, improvisation, and construction.

**Discussing**

Thus far, the purpose of this chapter has been to review the work of the previous chapters. I turn now to a discussion of the findings of the study in relation to the literature. The purpose here is two-fold. First, I intend to situate this work in the broader context of scholarship in order to more deeply understand the findings of the study. Second, I offer a comparison of the findings of this study with the existing literature as a means of addressing issues of validity. To begin, however, I address limitations of the study and issues of validity.
Limitations of the study. Qualitative research traditions do not claim to seek empirical truth or to profess generalizability (Bresler, 1995; Danaher & Briod, 2005; Van Manen, 1990). I embraced the same stance for the study. The purpose of this study was to seek insight into the children’s experience, not answer quantifiable or generalizable questions. This document of my time with these children is meant to be “put on the table” so to speak, for conversation and for pedagogical purposes, in order to breed awareness and understanding of what may have been involved in this experience for these children.

Inherent in the study is an acknowledgment that I, as the adult, can never assume that I am speaking with absolute authority regarding the minds and experiences of these children. I cannot read their minds; I can only discern what seemed to be occurring as I closely observed them, drawing conclusions based on subtle characteristics I had learned about them. Due to my relationship with them over the course of the year, I can claim a rightful place in interpreting their behaviors; I cannot know for sure, however, that I am always correct. An additional limitation is the restricted voice of the parents. The blog and journal posts, informal conversations, and interviews with the parents helped to inform my understanding of what occurred in the setting; as representatives of their children, however, the voices of the parents were not fully represented.

Further, this setting was designed by me. Though I intended to allow the children as much freedom as possible in their choices for engagement, I must consider that they may have acted differently had I not intervened in the design of our time together. Ultimately, I wonder what musical behaviors they would have chosen to participate in without my intervention, and if those choices would express a different lived musical experience without me. Though I was looking at how they engaged in this particular setting and attempted to not put parameters on
them, my approach ultimately steered the lesson. My interactions with the girls cannot be separated from their behaviors. Hence, my conception of a lack of parameters is, in essence, a parameter.

Finally, though I worked to interpret the girl’s experiences outside of my theoretical and experiential knowledge and biases, I cannot claim to be purely successful. By the very nature of being myself, I hold embodied and deeply seated ways of viewing the world that may not be transparent to me. While the philosophical underpinnings in the phenomenological framework regarding the balance of subjectivity and objectivity in the role of the researcher help in this, they cannot fully account for my voice in the interpretation of this data. Though I aimed to articulate the expressions of meaning and value of the children’s experience, I cannot separate my understanding fully enough to claim an unadulterated expression of the meanings they made and the values they found.

**Addressing issues of validity.** My personal involvement with the setting and the children brought benefit to the study, because I was able to closely observe the happenings within the context of the space. My close involvement, however, also had potential influence on my impressions and interpretations of the data. My areas of bias included a belief that the setting was beneficial to the children, and that time and space were necessary for their thriving within the setting. I was also committed to their personal agency playing out without my control. Hence, there is danger that I have interpreted all of their behaviors as indications of thriving due to the agency they demonstrated, when perhaps this was not the case. Further, I have taken an interpretive stance on the meanings the children were making out of the intentions I observed, when it is possible that their behaviors did not intend anything of the kind.
Ultimately I have no way of knowing for sure that my interpretations speak of the experiences of the children; I can only base my interpretations on what I think might be happening out of my personal experiences of and familiarity with the domain and the girls. Given this, a return to the existing literature in comparison to my findings provides further support for the findings. Further, it enables me to evaluate if the literature supports my findings in the ways that I assume, or if other explanations for what I have found could exist.

**Lived space.** I found that the girls engaged in the lesson by expanding the boundaries of the room, participating in the lesson in many integrated yet specific areas of the room and even beyond it. I also found that the girls used the materials in the space for their purposes and as a part of the lesson. The expansion of the room included the use of removed and even hidden spaces, when on occasion the girls removed themselves from the central activity of the space as they took naps on the couch, built tents, got ready in the ‘dressing room’, or wrote songs in the bedroom.

Burke (2005) found specific places within children’s spaces hold meaning, as activities become space-related, determined by the aspects of the space. According to her, open spaces provide children the freedom to move and to use the extent of the space, and closed spaces provide children with safety and privacy. I saw the girls utilize both open and closed spaces over the course of my time with them. Burke indicated that both spaces are necessary as children make meaning out of their experiences and through their activity. She also maintained that restrictions of how space can be used results in restrictions of free exploration and play.

An interesting corollary to this was found by Tegano, Moran, DeLong, Brickey, and Ramassini (1996). These researchers suggested that children invest more deeply in their play within smaller spaces. The quality of their play was seen to be more complex and their attention
was held for longer periods of time when their play space was designed to feel small. The researchers held that the small space enabled the children to feel large, which influenced their desire to engage in their play. This may address why the girls invested in prolonged engagement with the smaller spaces they created within our larger space.

According to Rasmussen (2004), a place takes on existence and character when it has meaning, and hence where children denote and use place implies their meaning within a space. Further, the children’s knowledge of the chosen place deepens as they interact with it, and proscribe feelings to it in relation to their learning. Ultimately, the various ways that children use wide and seemingly divergent space can be considered as an integrated whole. The girls participated in the lessons in this way, assigning places of the room with particular roles. Elkind (2007) supported this as well, considering children’s use of space to indicate their need for a development of self. The use of space is related to the development of independence and self-sufficiency, as children decide what they need in regard to the space and in how they desire to use it.

Berger and Cooper (2003) found that when musical instruments were readily available within the space, children used them for enhanced musical play. The authors considered this provision to be one of powerful skill acquisition, due to its allowance for personal discovery. St. John (2006) found that children will use the space in a variety of physical ways as they interact with and transform the idea of the moment. Further, Sims, Cecconi-Roberts, and Keast (2011) maintained that children need private spaces in order to partake in individual music experiences. Hence, the girls’ use of the expanded room indicates that they were invested in making meaning as they directed and constructed the lesson time.
In summary, all of these findings indicate that children may need ownership over the use of the space as well as opportunity for significant places within the space in order to navigate their own learning. Providing children with flexible options for how the space is used, including possibilities for removing themselves from the central activity, may benefit their grappling with and incorporating of musical material. This conceptualization of space may further benefit the children’s understanding of self within a musical environment.

**Lived body.** I found that the children engaged in the lesson by using their bodies in a variety of ways. As a form of communication, the girls participated in and emphasized conversation with bodily gestures, both verbally and non-verbally. They used their bodies for rhythmic responses, and to approach the piano and the bench.

According to Samuelsson (2004), children communicate physically. She also affirmed the integration of seemingly opposite emotions regarding non-verbal and verbal communication of young children, as I observed during some moments I perceived as negative behavior. According to Lindahl and Samuelsson (2002), children can struggle in their attempts to reconcile their behaviors, communications, and self-expressions; Samuelsson (2004) pointed to this difficulty particularly in children’s interactions with adults.

Elkind (2007) considered children’s use of the body in extended ways to be indication of the process of mastering motor skills. Hannaford (2005) discussed in detail the role of children’s bodily exploration in developing systems of the brain. Sensory experience via the body in relationship to space is crucial for the development of the vestibular system, which plays a critical role in understanding and learning as it mediates information gleaned from an environment. Flohr and Persellin (2011) also spoke of the brain and body connection, suggesting that the brain moves the body as the body teaches the brain. The girl’s rhythmic responses and
inflections, which appeared as an intuitive process, may be accounted for by this sensory exploration. Further, the ways that the girls moved and their free approach to the piano and bench may be beneficial for the development of brain and body connections.

According to Flohr and Persellin (2011), the interaction of brain and body is imperative for learning and understanding foundations of music. Citing the development of neural connections made through the brain/body connection, they posited that early music experiences should involve active processes and not passive procedures. Rhythmic impulses are the nature of the brain’s interaction with the body, and can be developed through use. The girls appeared to have an organic understanding of this connection, as they interacted physically within the space and with the stimuli presented there.

Custodero (2005) also posited that children’s bodily gestures indicate a connection to cognitive and communicative processes. Accordingly, children’s musical gesture can be considered functional, as they provide sensory feedback regarding their own learning. In physical responses to musical stimuli, children determine their own learning. Custodero also discussed the role of the body in relationship to musical anticipation, which I have called prediction. She discussed anticipation as a function of attunement, where “action and awareness” (p. 195) meet. Further, it is a relational attunement, as the children engage with an ‘other’ in order to respond appropriately. Finally, Custodero maintained that children’s ability to anticipate musical material indicates a sensitivity to musical structures. I observed these processes as the girls presented and responded to musical stimuli.

Campbell (1998a, 1998b, 2007) considered children’s bodily responses to be inseparable from musical experiences. She found that children respond physically to music in a wide variety of ways and with a variety of intentions. Bodily responses can indicate enjoyment of the music,
as well as physical musical knowledge. The wide variety of movements that the girls exhibited in the space and the intentions their movements held are supported by Campbell’s findings. Temmerman (2000) further concurred, finding that children enjoy doing a wide variety of movement, “such as wriggling, floating, swaying, jumping, jiving, skipping, sliding, galloping, flapping and twirling” (p. 56). Further, children indicated that they appreciated opportunities to move “in their own way” (p. 56), as opposed to teacher-directed and structured movement experiences. Others have discussed at length the integration of the body in music experiences for young children (Gordon, 2003; Jordan-DeCarbo & Galliford, 2011; Marsh & Young, 2006; Metz, 1989; Pond, 1978; Valerio et al., 1998; Young, 2003a).

The role of the body has also been addressed in the piano practitioner literature. Cash (2011) maintained that rhythmic instruction must begin with physical activities away from the piano. The girls demonstrated a natural impulse to do this, engaging in bodily interactions within the expanse of the room. Tsien (2002) told of bodily movements she incorporated into lessons for the purposes of feeling musical phrases, which the girls also did without my instruction. Likewise, Lapp (2002) and others (Bastien, 1995; Huang, 2009; Jacobson, 2006; Skaggs, 2004; Thomas-Lee, 2003; Uszler et al., 2000) pointed to the incorporation of Dalcroze techniques in the piano lesson, for whole body awareness in relation to musical stimuli. Pearce (2012) considered the balance of the body at the instrument as crucial for maintaining rhythmic stability, which the girls explored in their uninhibited approach to the piano and the bench.

Fink (2002) further supported these elements, maintaining that “coordinated movement” (p. 99) is at the core of technique, and allows students to direct their playing by listening for expression. He encouraged exploration of the entire keyboard, with associations between movements and the sounds created. He also advocated for an internalized whole body
experience of pulse and continuity of phrasing, for full understanding of the coordination of body to music. In fact, he suggested that the long-term musicality of students would be impacted by the degree of the connection of “all musical events to a personal experience of song and dance” (p. 106).

The research on movement in piano lessons shows a mixed emphasis on bodily approaches to the piano. Rhoodie (2002) found that while leading piano pedagogical authors call for the development of larger muscles before smaller muscles at the piano, the majority of beginning piano methods place an emphasis on the development of the smaller muscles first and foremost. In regard to preschool piano methods, Thomas-Lee (2003) found that emphasis was placed on movement, but that the two most common movement activities were clapping and upper body movement. Yang (1994) found that the combination of rhythmic movement and use of solfege in group piano lessons for children aged 6-8 was particularly beneficial for the children’s overall musical development. Further, she found that tests of bodily coordination to music were a strong predictor of the children’s achievement at the piano.

In summary, the role of the body in learning, musicking, and piano training is an important consideration, as this study found and as the literature supports. Young children use their bodies to communicate, sometimes in ways that are not transparent due to conflicting expressions. Active processes are important for learning and development, as children navigate learning through brain/body connections. The link of brain to body provides feedback for learning, as children engage in bodily musical gestures in a wide variety of way and intention. At the piano, the role of the body is important in terms of rhythmic stability, musical phrasing, and a whole-body technique.
Lived time. I found that the children engaged in the lesson by directing the time. Within their conceptualization of time and an investment in their own ideas, overt and covert direction occurred in productive and unproductive ways. The girls demonstrated conceptualization of time that incorporated elements of quick transition, lengthy participation, story arcs and a cycle of memory.

Tinworth (1997) found the processes of lengthy participation and the recurring ‘cycle of memory’ in children’s self-initiated learning. The children engaged in topics they deemed interesting over many weeks and/or months, even asking to continue after time away on school breaks. Given time to engage deeply in a topic, the children invested at great length and depth. Further, their interaction with the topic evolved into complex conceptual and emotional participation. Tinworth considered the children’s lengthy participation a result of the undefined duration allowed for the activity by adults. Likewise, Tegano, Lookabaugh, May, and Burdette (1991) found that when children were given time to structure their own activity their constructive play increased. When teachers imposed the structure, children’s constructive play decreased. The children richly invested in their own ideas and in their own ways when given the time and opportunity.

Berger and Cooper (2003) indicated that children invested in musical play that interested them for extended periods of time, beyond the limits set by the teachers. Further, these researchers found that the children returned to the same instruments over many weeks, indicating that the children’s attention was held in what I have termed the cycle of memory. Louis (2009) considered this to be evidence that children need that time in order to come to understand what it is they want to know. According to him, a process of organizing thoughts and making connections occurs during the lengthy participation in the play. Young and Gillen (2007)
referred to the cycle of memory as a “history of participation” (p. 93), which they saw played out in relational interactions within families. In their study, a history of participation resulted in evolution of games and musical behaviors, which I saw as well.

Many researchers have discussed the ability of children to invest in a topic that interests them over a long period of time (Dunst et al., 2001; Elkind, 2007; Louis, 2009; Sommer et al., 2010; Stinson, 2002). Tegano et al. (1996) suggested that the interaction of time with space allows children’s ideas to evolve with complexity, and that it is the complexity that maintains their attention. I observed, however, that the girls also engaged in quick transitions from one activity or idea to another. One reason for this type of transition is provided by Tegano et al. as well. In their study on children’s use of space, the researchers found that time seemed to pass more quickly for the children when the children felt small within their space. Hence, the girl’s conceptualization of the space may have interacted with their direction of the time.

I further saw that what appeared as a quick transition might in fact be connected to the purposes the child was enacting through the story arc that threaded through their behaviors, and may have added to the complexity. Despite a thorough search in the early childhood journals, I was unable to find research that addressed this specific observation. Related, however, may be behavior mentioned by Young and Gillen (2007) in their work on the “Day in the Life” project, which focused on one day with children from a variety of different countries and cultures. What they found across the participants was a tendency for children to not engage in continuous participation but to move back and forth between the musical activity and something outside of it.

I was often unaware of the story arc that threaded the girls behaviors together in a unified whole, as Gillen et al. (2007) found in the observed tendency of children to invest in what
matters to them in ways that may seem incidental to adults (Gillen et al., 2007). According to Stinson (2002), these seemingly incidental behaviors are easy for adults to miss or to consider unimportant. I found this to be the case in my interactions with the girls, and observed moments where I shifted their participation due to my misunderstanding of what they were doing. Stinson held, however, that children’s behaviors establish them as creators, which serves as a purpose for their investment. Elkind (2007) confirmed this, maintaining that “it is vitally important to support and encourage self-directed activities by the child…Even if those activities appear meaningless to us, they can have great purpose and significance for the child” (p. 92-93).

In terms of direction, I saw that the children self-directed but also directed me. St. John (2006) saw this as well, in a group music class of young children. On one occasion she introduced a new idea. One of the children called out “let’s do…!” and returned to a previous idea, transforming it to align with the new idea St. John had proposed. St. John described this tendency of the children in her class as a discovery of agency, as they transformed the ideas of the teacher for their own purposes.

The child in St. John’s class changed the words of the text in the activity he proposed to, “He stepped in a puddle and died.” In this instance, death is a topic of real-life that the child has incorporated into his direction of the activity. I saw this as well, as the girls worked out elements of their daily life within their direction of the time. Elkind (2007) referred to this “tremendous interest” (p. 135) in serious aspects of observed life as a crucial element of children’s development of reasoning skills. According to him, children’s reference to such aspects as they direct the environment is indication of a process of making sense of the world around them.

Custodero (2005) found that children’s directing behaviors became “increasingly observable through the preschool years; however there was a decrease in self-initiated activity
for the school-aged children” (p. 203). She considered the decrease to be a result of a developing awareness of others, and of a growing familiarity with formal instruction, as I saw in the case of Eden. Elkind (2007) discussed this transition in terms of play, love, and work. According to him, these three “inborn drives…power human thought and action throughout the life cycle” (p. 3). Play has to do with “our need to adapt the world to ourselves and create new learning experiences” (p. 3). Love involves our need to “express our desires, feelings, and emotions” (p. 3). Work is our “disposition to adapt to the demands of the physical and social worlds” (p. 3). Elkind maintained that these three exist as a single unit in infancy, but separate over the course of a child’s developmental journey.

Elkind (2007) considered the separation of play and work to be a “painful” (p. 4) process, yet a necessary one as a child shifts out of early childhood and into elementary school ages. In early childhood, play is the “dominant and directing mode” (p. 7). By the time a child has reached school age, however, work has become her primary focus. This discussion may provide insight into the observed productive vs. unproductive behaviors particularly found in Eden’s lesson experience. Eden was at the point of transition from early childhood to school age, and may have been experiencing the effects of such a transition.

An alternative or corollary explanation for Eden’s behavior may be found in research on children’s sense of self-concept. I perceived productive use of time as having a positive, cooperative quality. Unproductive use of time was perceived as defiant, obnoxious, and perpendicular. Cauley and Tyler (1989) investigated the relationship of these qualities (the positive of which they termed prosocial behavior) with children’s sense of self-concept. They found that the children’s level of cooperation was related to their self-concept, with lower self-concept manifesting in competitive behaviors. Further, they found a relationship between the
children’s initiation of a prosocial behavior and its effectiveness, maintaining that it was “more likely to be effective than if the child is instructed to behave prosocially” (p. 58).

Nelson et al. (2009) affirmed this, suggesting that behaviors of passive withdrawal may indicate that children are struggling with negative feelings about themselves. A reticence to participate and expression of socially mal-adjusted passive-aggressive behaviors can also indicate “an inability to regulate negative emotions” (p. 357), particularly regarding beliefs about self-competence and effectiveness within the setting. These behaviors were particularly seen in Eden’s direction of her lesson time, which raises questions regarding how aspects of the setting interacted with her beliefs about her own ability.

In summary, my findings and the literature show that children’s self-initiated learning includes aspects of lengthy participation and a returning cycle of memory. When given time and space to invest in their learning, ideas evolve with complexity. The children’s investment may not always be transparent, but is more than incidental. Direction has to do with a creator role, as children imaginatively deal with elements of daily life. A shift in behaviors occurs as the child transitions from early childhood to school age formal instruction. Unproductive behaviors may occur, and may be explained by issues of self-concept.

Lived other. I found that the children engaged in the lesson setting through multiple relationships. The children engaged in a relationship with negative behavior, which appeared as related to outside factors, as a practice of social interactions, or as a result of seeming self-consciousness. The children also engaged in a relationship with their created pretend contexts, the play objects, and me.

Elkind (2007) described children’s therapeutic play as a means of children’s coming to terms with realities of their world they find stressful. He provided the example of a child’s
dealing with a new sibling, describing the child’s regression in learned skills and insistence on returning to a baby-ish state. Both Kathleen and Eden experienced significant life changes during the time of the study, and their negative behaviors may be explained by outside factors related to these changes. Socially unacceptable impulses can also be dealt with in play situations, as the children use imaginary characters to voice their socially unacceptable thoughts and to act in socially unacceptable ways. Manifesting as apparent negative behavior, the child may be communicating deep and complex processes of coming to terms with self in the context of the environment. Eden’s behavior in particular raised the possibility that she was exploring the relationship of herself within the setting, testing appropriate boundaries by acting in inappropriate ways.

Boyer (2009) found that young children’s ability for self- and emotional regulation often is not seen by adults as the trajectory of development that it is. Children do not always have the capacity to monitor their reactions or behaviors in certain settings, and their actions can appear as negative behavior. Boyer related this to complex psychological needs, particularly of autonomy (choice in the setting), relatedness (closeness with others), and competence (effective in the environment). Interviewing early childhood educators in order to understand this development in children, Boyer’s findings grant insight into the elements of negative behavior that I found in this current study. These include: 1) If expectation for self- and emotional regulation is elevated beyond the child’s ability, children “may regress developmentally and under-regulate” (p. 177). Children’s perceptions of expectation can lead to further difficult behaviors. 2) The need for autonomy can cause children to test the boundaries of the rules. Providing them with alternative options, and allowing them to take ownership over the development of them is one way of guiding them toward self-regulation. 3) The need for competence can cause children to act out
when they feel they are being ineffective in the setting. Hence, adjusting activities to where the children developmentally are in the moment enables them to practice their skills while maintaining competence. All three of these factors appeared at play in Eden’s lesson experience.

According to Paley (2004), the main way that children assert autonomy and competence is through their fantasy play (what I have referred to as ‘pretend context’). Fantasy play also serves relational needs, as children engage in relationship with others in the process of crafting their pretend. Paley remarked that for children, fantasy is “practiced leisurely and openly in a language unique to the kingdom [of early childhood]” (p. 4). Holding great meaning, children construct complex stories in a language that is accessible to adults but is unique to the children. Often dealing with elements of danger and problems, children lead adults to the solutions, and are willing to explain the procedures of the pretend in order for the adult to be a part of it. The pretend context was a major element of the girl’s lesson experience, and appeared as the main way that they mediated their participation in the setting.

Wright, Diener, and Kemp (2013) found that fantasy play processes allowed children to practice leadership roles as storyteller and director. These researchers found that the fantasy play further allowed the children to participate as actors with ownership, experiment with social norms, self-regulate their behaviors, solve problems, and share in relationship. Since the study was conducted in a classroom of children, it differs from the situation of the girls and me, but these elements were also evident in Kathleen and Eden’s engagement in the lessons. The processes found in the classroom are not markedly different from the processes I saw in the girl’s approach to our lessons. Ultimately processes of community building occurred, as the children in the classroom shared the experience, and as the girls and I shared our experience.
Berkhout, Bakkers, Hoekman, and Goorhuis-Brouwer (2013) found that fantasy play was the most frequent and most complex form of children’s play, and maintained that during the process of the pretend the children are working out important emotional, social, and cognitive processes. Motor play was also prevalent, as the children engaged physically in their play behaviors. Further, constructive play—where children are busy with the work of creating by manipulating materials found in the environment—was “constantly present” (p. 133). These researchers found that children engage in more than one type of play, alternating from one to another in what they called a “natural flow” (p. 133), as the girls demonstrated through their weaving in and out of material and ideas.

Young (2003a) discussed children’s proclivity for drama and the use of materials within their musical behaviors and play. Imitating voices and other sounds is typical of children’s vocalizations. Using materials as agents of dramatic play is also typical. The findings of Metz (1989) support this; the children in her study were musically inspired by the incorporation of play objects. Further, according to Marsh & Young (2006), children integrate singing into dramatization and role play. I observed that the girls frequently took on other voices and used the play objects as a source of both dramatic and musical play. Elkind (2007) discussed the child’s taking on of another role as a means of making sense, the purpose of which is to further understand rules of the world around them, and to practice the concept “that one thing can be two things at the same time” (p. 134). Perhaps this definition of role-playing can also be applied to moments of negative behavior that were conflicting in their message. Paley (2004) spoke to role-playing as well, as the children under her observation assigned themselves and others with negative roles as a part of their fantasy play.
In regard to the relationship with the adult, Kugelmass and Ross-Bernstein (2000) found that adult relationship with children were influenced by the children’s verbal and non-verbal cues, a factor in the girl’s relationship with me as well. Bae (2004) investigated the role of adult-child relationship in an art class setting and found that the adults and children worked together to construct and evolve ideas, in a reciprocal process. I also found this to be a characteristic of each girl’s relationship with me within the lesson setting.

Becker (2012) explored interactions between adults and children in a library setting, and observed that children demonstrated a variety of behaviors. Sometimes they took ownership over their participation in the setting by choosing the materials with which to read or play; at other times, they relied on the adult to guide them in their choice. Ownership was also seen as the children engaged in fantasy play, and directed their caregivers as to how to participate in it. The children demonstrated a desire to be a part of the shared experience with the adult, participating by both directing and accepting the adult’s contributions. The caregivers played the role of providing “purposeful mentorship” (p. 112), as they spent time with (what I called “being with”) the children in the setting. This is reminiscent of the ways that the girls seemed to view their relationship with me within the piano setting, as they directed and accepted my contributions, exerted their ownership over the ideas, and indicated a desire for the shared experience.

In summary, my study and the literature show that children use pretend to come to understand the world around them, and that negative behaviors may be a part of this process. Negative behaviors may also be expressed as children learn to regulate self and emotion. Fantasy play is crucial to this process and to the experience of childhood as a whole. It is deeply complex, and often includes the child’s taking on the role of another. Children integrate
musicking into their drama, and drama into their musicking. Further, shared experiences with adults involve verbal and non-verbal cues, co-construction and evolution of ideas, being with the adult while taking ownership, and directing or accepting the adult’s contributions.

**Lived musicality.** I found that the children engaged in the lesson by musicking. Their musicking behaviors held a variety of intention and type. The children musicked by singing, chanting, moving, playing instruments other than the piano, and/or playing the piano. They also demonstrated awareness of real-world musical practices and engaged with musical concepts. Further, the girls expressed belief regarding the legitimacy of their musicianship.

Denac (2008) found that preschool children preferred to do music as opposed to listen to it within the educational setting. Their three highest preferences were dancing and movement to music, singing songs, and playing instruments. When at home with their parents, the children indicated that they preferred dancing and movement to music, listening to music, and singing songs over playing with instruments. These findings suggest that children’s musical participation can be context specific. Further, her findings demonstrate that children value a variety of ways of being musical. The variety of ways that the girls chose to do music within the setting are supported by these findings, and suggest that they were capable of being aware of their choice.

Likewise, Temmerman (2000) found that children musick in a variety of ways, as they respond to, initiate, and expand on musical stimuli. She found that most children preferred movement to music more than other ways of being musical. Some children indicated a preference for playing instruments, and articulated reasons of the sound produced and musical concepts of dynamic contrasts. Those who preferred singing identified togetherness as an aspect they enjoyed, as well as songs that involved actions. Singing with movement or while playing
instruments was also identified by the children as interesting. Children expressed dislike toward limited space to move in, overly loud instrumental playing, songs that were unappealing to them, and passive listening activities. Overall, the children expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to choose and direct their own musicking behaviors within the context of the music making. These findings relate to the ways that the girls integrated singing, movement, and instrument playing during their musicking. Further, it demonstrates that children are planful regarding the ways they choose to musick.

Barrett (2006) found that children’s awareness of musical structures, including phrasing and repetitive motives, increased over time. This increasing awareness was seen in the children’s invented songs, a phenomenon I also witnessed in the piano lesson setting. Barrett recounted her experiences with one particular child, who initiated and enacted musical moments, actively practiced musical behaviors, and directed Barrett in how to participate in her invented song. Barrett considered the time with this child to be a “deepening mutuality and belongingness” (p. 217) between her and the child, in what I termed a “being there with”. Further, Barrett found that the children were capable of articulating musical concepts within their creations, as were Kathleen and Eden. Finally, Barrett considered the children’s ever-changing improvisatory song to be evidence of a lack of interest in fixed ideas, and instead a focus on “elaboration, of using this practice to explore ideas and possibilities” (p. 218). I considered the girl’s rich music making to be a lack of interest in shallow ideas, and observed their ever-changing improvisation as well.

In a study on singing practices in 10 families, Custodero (2006) found that children acted in belief of the legitimacy of their personal musicianship, as they participated in the musical rituals of their family’s life. Collaboration in decision-making was seen, as were emotional and
relational aspects of musicking. Young and Gillen (2007) found similar aspects of musicking in the home, regarding decision making, emotional and relational aspects, as well as belief in legitimacy. In their findings, children expressed a broad movement vocabulary, and engaged in initiating, enacting, and practicing musical behaviors.

In summary, both my findings and the literature suggest that children engage in active musicking by employing a variety of techniques. They appreciate space to direct their own participation as they respond to musical stimuli, and initiate, enact, and practice musical behaviors. Togetherness is an aspect of the experience, involving emotional and relational elements of musical collaboration. Further, children express belief in the legitimacy of their musicality as they participate in the musical contexts around them.

**Further discussion.** Given the discussion regarding themes and sub-themes in relation to the literature, I now elevate the pretend context, the role of child-as-director, and the music making in what follows. I found these three aspects to be most surprising, and so chose them to explore further. Using the literature to make sense of these three areas of the girls’ experience of the lesson setting, I discovered that other elements of space, body, and relationships were also made clear as they wove throughout the discussion. Inter-relationships seem to be important in understanding elements of lived experience. As Van Manen (1990) indicated, elements of experience interact with each other as “differentiated but not separated”, forming “an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld—our lived world” (p. 105). The following discussion is offered as further evidence of the findings in regard to the lifeworld themes, and provides further validity to my use of this lens to view the data and report the findings.

**Making sense of the pretend context.** It is interesting to me that in all of my discussion thus far, very rarely do I use the word “play” to discuss how the children participated in the
setting. Though our time together was largely spent in what could only be described as play, the overall feeling of the time was one of work. We were deeply invested in significant moments of hands-on focus, qualities typically found in work of all kinds. Paley (2004) also experienced this in her immersion into the lives of children:

In time we discovered that play was indeed work. First there was the business of deciding who to be and who the others must be and what the environment is to look like and when it is time to change the scene. Then there was the even bigger problem of getting others to listen to you and accept your point of view while keeping the integrity of the make-believe, the commitment of the other players, and perhaps the loyalty of a best friend. Oddly enough, the hardest part of the play for [the adults] to reproduce or invent were the fantasies themselves. Ours were never as convincing or interesting as the children’s; it took us a great deal of practice to do what was, well, child’s play in the nursery. (p. 2)

Paley confirmed my own experiences with the girls as I struggled to keep up with them, and as they spun webs of fantasy in which to situate our musicking. The fantasy was their priority; the pretend was what mattered to them.

When it comes to the question of prioritizing, Young (2003a) pointed to the reality that children incorporate music “as one important strand of play” (p. 87). Hence, the fact that the girls prioritized their play over their musicking is not an element for despair; it is, in fact, an expression of their valuing the time as a place where their play could freely come to life. According to Fromberg (2002) play is voluntary; it expresses personal choice and the places where the children are looking to make meaning. The girls’ joyfully uninhibited play was
purposeful; it was a location for serious learning (Ellermeyer, 1993; Sommer et al., 2010; Whitfield, 2009).

One could say, then, that the work of children is to make sense of the variety of threads that intersect in the multiple environments in which they find themselves (Fromberg, 2002). Though the pretend the girls created reflected both musical and non-musical aspects of their lives, it is hardly surprising that they brought these real-life moments into our setting as they actively attempted to understand their musicking in safe relationship to moments of everyday life. Their pretend became a setting for them in which to situate their musicking, weaving strands together into a rich fabric of contextual meaning. By doing so, they turned my conceptions of what the space could be into a much fuller experience, in ways that I never could have designed (Paley, 2004; St. John, 2006).

I found it interesting at the least and disturbing at the most that Eden’s mouse was consistently sick or even dying. Fromberg (2002) pointed to exploration of these serious types of themes, however, as places where children “experience a sense of satisfaction” (p. 11). They find pleasure in taking the lead, in “immersing themselves in the action or emotion, or the sense of control” (p. 12) that comes with making the decisions for the play. It is also a place for them to moderate their own feelings, as I saw with Kathleen on the day that she expressed deep anger. Fromberg suggested this is even a means of validation for children, which can speak to the meaning inherently found in episodes where the pretend converges with the child’s lived emotions.

Further, expression of self occurred as the girls engaged in role-play through dress-up or by speaking as a character or role model, in exploration of self-representation (Fromberg, 2002). Kathleen’s insistence that she needed to get ready, and Eden’s consistent speaking for the mouse
demonstrated their use of the lesson time to explore the nature of self. Again, though this occurred in ways that appeared unmusical, the exploration of self within a musical context can serve to establish the child’s musical identity. Deep roots of the musical self can be found in the ways that the girls expressed their beliefs in their musicianship within the realm of pretend and role-play. Beyond ability, this exploration of self within a safe musical context prepares the child to understand music in her life in deeply embedded ways (Hargreaves, Miell, & Macdonald, 2002).

According to Elkind (2007), exploration of self is also achieved through the building of forts and private places. When Kathleen retreated to her dressing room behind the chair and when Eden built a fort for herself out of the couch and ottoman, it is possible that they were indicating a need for space as they dealt with the elements of the environment. Indicating the desire for privacy and self-sufficiency, children create private spaces for themselves so that they can “experience themselves as shapers and makers of small worlds, which contributes to making them shapers of the larger world as adults” (p. 165). Elkind considered this to be evidence of children expressing a need for time in which to grow, as they separate themselves from the environment.

The interaction of the pretend context with this development of self can be found in the rules that govern children’s play (Fromberg, 2002). The girls gave directions that indicated a solid awareness of what was supposed to occur within the play, but seemed to do so without premeditation. According to Fromberg, this lack of planning demonstrates an emergence of the rules within the framework of the play. It speaks to the interaction of deep and surface structures, what I saw as both planful and reflexive processes. This interaction occurs non-linearly, as when the girls wove in and out of ideas in ways that were not clear to me, and yet appeared as a cycle
of memory for them. Fromberg called for early childhood educators to embrace this ambiguity, and to understand that the only predictable element of working with young children was the inherent unpredictability with which they approach life.

This in-the-moment planning carries with it reflections of real-life musical practices. In their discussion of how musicians learn music, Kirchner and Abril (2009) pointed to the processes of working together in order to teach and to learn. These processes involve “serendipitous and guided learning, are loosely and intuitively planned in the moment, as the need arises” (p. 11). It is feasible, then, that a lesson framework that acknowledges children’s natural inclination to plan in the moment can pave the way for real-life musical practices that mirror these qualities. This speaks also of the work of Sawyer (2005), who pointed to the essence of musical improvisation being a process of unpredictability. In fact, the four higher order musicking skills of process, unpredictability, collaboration, and emergence of a whole from the parts which Sawyer identified can clearly be seen in the ways that the girls wove their ideas into the lesson space, and in the ways in which they lived within the setting.

The reality of non-linear unpredictability in the processes of children’s play and the purposes inherent in their work can be difficult for adults to recognize (Fromberg, 2002). Many times I was tempted to deter and detract the girls from following a thread I did not understand and in which I could not find the value, only to see in retrospect that their ideas held together, and that their concentration on one theme was far more devoted than even my level of concentration. Elkind (2007) fought for children’s right to play as they deem necessary for purposes that only they might understand, arguing that self-directed activities of a child “are not random, [and] allowing the child time and freedom to complete these activities to her personal satisfaction nourishes that child’s powers of concentration and attention” (p. 93). Instead of
assuming that the teacher is the one to be watched in order for learning to occur, Elkind says it is the learner we need to be watching.

*Making sense of the director.* If we are watching the learner, we cannot separate, then, the child’s role in the pretend context as a director. Nor can we deny that the children’s direction speaks to their making of meaning and of their learning. What I observed in the girls’ participation in their musical learning was a very easy unfolding of musical behaviors, which they already possessed and which took more and more shape as the year progressed. The piano setting functioned as one of the places in their lives where they actively made music, but it was specifically a place for them to foster their own musical learning within the musical choices they made. Though encouraged by me, the girls demonstrated time and again that their musicking was for their ownership, not mine. Instead, they participated in their own way and on their own timeline. What I watched occur was a progression of comfort in stylized forms, as they incorporated tonalities, worked on their meters, and structured their improvisations (Velez, 2011; Young, 2003a; Welch, 1998).

This process of learning was actively pursued by the girls, and was not a passive reception of my handing down musical information (Dunst, et al., 2001; Hannon and Trainor, 2007; Hornbach, 2012). Yet it was not exclusive of my participation, as we made music together in the space. I perceived my necessary role to be to provide a rich musical environment for the girls’ participation, inserting music into their play when they chose not to (Hornbach, 2011; Trainor & Corrigall, 2010; Velez, 2011; Welch, 1998). The fact that sometimes they incorporated my contributions and sometimes ignored me causes me to wonder what their perception of my role was.
Regardless, my presence with them in the space provided me with an opportunity to interpret their direction as an indication of where their understanding and ability was at the moment. Hornbach (2011) saw this occur in an early childhood music group class when the children directed the order of songs and materials, and initiated and/or contributed tonal and rhythm patterns to the musical conversation. The children’s freedom to direct and to contribute allowed the teacher to assess each child’s developing musical vocabulary, which “seemed to remove the pressure of the situation for some children” (p. 74). Hence, allowing the children to direct opens a window into their level of understanding and incorporation of musical knowledge. It then allows the teacher to watch and to respond in ways that further the child’s musical journey, in ways that limit the possibility for self-consciousness (Papalia et al., 2006).

The relationship of child to adult and child to the setting seem to be crucial. Encouragement and proximity are factors for children’s free response, while judgment and fear keep children from engaging fully in the musicking (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; Berger & Cooper, 2003; Dansereau, 2011; Hornbach, 2011; Marsh & Young, 2006; Young, 2003a, 2005). In my “being with” the girls, I strove to provide encouragement by my participation and modeling. Young (2003a) indicated that these are the appropriate practices of an adult in relationship with a child in a musical setting. Kathleen’s responses seem to confirm this; her play was entirely uninhibited, and her musicking flourished in the setting.

Eden’s experience raises more questions regarding the interaction of adult modeling with the child’s participation. Her negative behaviors leave me questioning what her perception of my participation was, and causes me to wonder if there is a point when the child becomes aware of the adult as an other beyond a play partner. Some of her ways of participating, which I
perceived as negative, could be explained simply by the nature of childhood exploration. Young (2003a) referred to children using potty language in their re-wording of texts:

All children enjoy changing song words enormously—it is a form of language play—particularly subverting the song words to something less reverent. If one purpose of singing is to dissipate tension, then word-changing may help this process. (p. 89)

Explanation for her behavior may also be found in therapeutic play, which helps children to work out “impulses that are socially unacceptable” (Elkind, 2007, p. 114). Therapeutic play also “gives children strategies for dealing with stressful life events” (p. 103), and may explain Kathleen’s behavior when she became an angry horse.

Sutton-Smith (1976) also spoke of the tendency of children to act in ways that are uncomfortable for adults, but which actually indicate that transformation of knowledge is occurring. According to him, as children’s competence becomes more and more secure, “there is usually a transition to increasing variability, and sometimes to nonsense. It is at this point that the traditional educator grows uneasy” (p. 8-9). It is possible that Eden’s behavior was an indication that she was in a place of transformation.

Further, Papalia et al. (2006) described children’s instrumental aggression as being “the hallmark of the preschool period” (p. 395). Instrumental aggression is not aggression with a violent purpose, but a deliberate purpose. It is intended by the child to achieve a goal, occurring most often in situations of social play for the purposes of gaining or maintaining control of the space. It seems likely that Eden’s behaviors were of this type of aggression, possibly stemming from unclear expectations and wrestling with her rights to ownership. According to Papalia et al., these behaviors will fade if not rewarded, and if the child is encouraged in how to better express her desires.
I find it interesting that Kathleen displayed none of this aggression, nor did she struggle with taking ownership or question her belief in her own musicianship. The only time she explicitly refused to participate at the piano was when she knew she could not read what I had written—awareness of her inability in a non-musical skill caused her to deny a musical moment. She did begin to articulate awareness, however, that the playing of the piano was for me to do, and that she was not ready to truly perform. Given her personality, this did not seem to condemn her; instead, she seemed aware of the capacity for growth. This may be accounted for in what O’Neill (2006) referred to as a characteristic of “mastery children [who] tend to choose learning goals which emphasize the need to increase their competence” (p. 82).

Eden, however, seemed to experience a shift in her awareness of her ability in comparison to mine, combined with a confusion of what was expected of her in the space and a fearful unwillingness to be subpar. This interaction may have led to some of her negative behavior. Some insight may be found in the work of McPherson and Davidson (2006), who reported that some children display *maladaptive helpless oriented* tendencies:

A tendency to focus their attention on their existing level of performance with the result that they could not see that the difficulties they were having now could be overcome in the future. Because of this, they tended to feel that any further effort would be futile. (p. 336)

According to McPherson and Davidson, when these children perceive “that the situation is out of their control and that nothing can be done to alleviate [it], they tend to avoid further challenges, lower their expectations, experience negative emotions, give up, or perform more poorly in the future” (p. 336). Eden demonstrated this tendency in other areas of her life, and articulated to me
that she did not think she would ever be able to read during a season where—according to her mother—Eden was refusing to participate in any kind of reading activity.

My gut response to any struggle of a child is to take the struggle away. My life has taught me, however, that a) overcoming struggle is something we need in order to make us more fully who we are, and b) we need strong people with us as we go. Hence, my relationship with Eden in even the difficult moments held purpose. Young (2003a) expressed this purpose as an emphasis on “the qualities of musical interaction, [and] affective communication through music, rather than musical performance” (p. 74). She considered music to be a vehicle for relationship, just as much as the relationship was a vehicle for the musicking. The purpose of relationship in musicking can also be seen as one of transmission and appropriation—“receiving and making meaning of transmitted information” (Kerchner & Abril, 2009, p. 9).

Ultimately, though the girls were invested in directing the setting, the relationship they had with me was a real-life interaction that bred reciprocity and required adaptation (Custodero, 2009; de Vries, 2012). As in the nature of all learning, the girls needed to deconstruct and reconstruct their understandings of their relationship to music, the piano, the setting, me, and themselves (Hedegaard, 2009). Custodero spoke eloquently to this:

Like a kaleidoscope, oftentimes the results are beyond what can be imagined, the musical pathway of each student and teacher landing for a moment alongside relative others, the interactions between qualities giving meaning. Through the shared experience, “what is” leads to new conceptions of “what could be”. (p. 88)

**Making sense of the music making.** Shared experience and the “what could be” is ultimately a process of enculturation, as the girls and I worked together in the musical environment (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005; Kerchner & Abril, 2009; Walsh, 2002). The girls
demonstrated evidence that cultural forms of music making had been appropriated when the
tonal, rhythmic, and structural aspects of their singing and moving refined over time to more
consistently match cultural models. These models were found in a variety of places—the lesson,
but also their schools, churches, and homes. Whether or not their music making would have
changed without the lesson setting is impossible to say; I can assert, however, that the girls
engaged in more and more consistent cultural models of tonality, meter, and form during our
time together.

The lesson setting provided a place where they could act musically as they chose to,
engaging in what they wanted, when they wanted (Marsh & Young, 2006). It was a place where
they could introduce their own music, as well as participate in mine. In essence, they shared
their culture with me as I shared mine with them. I borrowed from their ways of being, I sang in
snippets and revised my texts. I used the stuffed animals to play the piano, and embraced
pretend. As the girls become further and further enculturated in the musical practices of their
society (Campbell, 1998a), will these early experiences of direction and sharing influence the
ways that they contribute to their culture as a whole? In their full expression of creative thought
and musical participation—woven together in ways that cannot be separated—the girls
demonstrated a willingness to invest where they found themselves, in the moment.

Keil (2002) called for the nurturance of full expression of creativity in what he called the
Participatory Consciousness, pointing to creative people over time. Referencing the work of
Edith Cobb, he argued that the unifying thread in the childhoods of well-known creative
contributors to society was one simple fact: “they were not shut down” (Keil, 2002, p. 47). In
the moments when the girls were free to weave their strands of pretend and music through the
lesson time with uninhibited joy, they demonstrated Keil’s point:
Each of us is born to groove, born to be a prolific poetizer, musicker, dancer throughout life. Most children in the industrialized world, but now ever more globally, are being shut down, stopped, pushed off this path of creativity and full expression. But we are still, all of us, in and of nature, in and of each other. Participatory Consciousness...[is] still what give[s] us whatever enthusiasm we have for full expression—the ability to maintain some of the...vision of childhood. In the here and now, Participation gives us the best answers to the oldest questions about the meaning of life. (pp. 40-41)

Burnard (2006) suggested that a child’s creative development cannot be separated from “membership within various social and cultural units” (p. 354). Hence, the girls’ membership in our lesson setting provided an opportunity for creative contributions to be explored and evaluated against cultural norms. Though I was not seeking to evaluate their contributions, their participation in a variety of contexts provided them with a backdrop with which to understand their contributions. The setting provided a place for them to gather musical information, in preparation for acquisition of tools for evaluation.

Preparation, however, is not the only purpose that the setting provided for them. The music that they made carried weight as significant in and of itself within the context of our space (Burnard, 2006). The variety of modes and expressions that the girls used in their musicking demonstrated an innate capability for the processes of musicking as seen in adult musicians, both amateur and professional (Campbell, 1998a; Trevarthen, 2002). As such, their experiences in the lesson setting provided them with an alternate space in which to be creative without focus on phases of development (Burnard, 2006; 2007).

The music that Kathleen wrote down, for instance, held great meaning for her within the musical context. Similarly for Eden, when she used the music book to play her guitar song. I
saw limitations from my adult experience and perspective, but the girls were demonstrating novel solutions to the problems of needing to capture our songs and to perform. Their novel solutions stood as codified creative moments within the context of our setting, in ways that demonstrated ownership and agency. Their solutions also spoke to their need to reconcile their placement in a musical context in ways they had witnessed as valid. Hence, the question of creativity is related to identity formation, as the girls worked to solve their problems in the context of their pretend (Campbell, 2007; Papalia et. al, 2006).

Identity is also related to the beliefs that the girls held regarding their musicianship. Confirming the work of Lamont (2002), the girls demonstrated belief in their official role as competent musicians. As the year moved forward, however, Eden in particular demonstrated awareness of her limitations in comparison to my ability. Nonetheless, the girls consistently situated themselves in the lesson space as musicians. Lamont classified musicians into categories of non-musician, participating musicians, and trained musicians. In this space the emphasis was on the participating and not on the training, and the girls demonstrated the most freedom to express their beliefs when they were free to participate as they chose.

Often their choice involved their bodies, as the girls moved throughout the space. Fink-Jensen (2007) pointed to movement as an articulation of musical attunement and meaning, and early childhood educators have been calling for movement as a form of music and a part of music instruction for a long time (Gordon, 2003; Davidson & Malloch, 2009; Marsh & Young, 2006; Moorehead & Pond, 1978; Valerio et al., 1998; Young, 2003a). What I saw in the girls’ movement, however, was more than mere ‘movement’; the fullness of the use of their bodies expressed a deeply embedded way of being that could not be separated from their musicking or any other aspect of the lesson time. The girls used their bodies to communicate, for purposes of
connection and belonging (Davidson & Malloch, 2009; Keil, 2002; Young, 2005). This embodied communication occurred in the moment, in reciprocal continuous motion, “evolving and transforming within the ongoing exchange” (Young, 2005, p. 284).

Further, their use of their bodies demonstrated that musical meaning was found in their bodies, as they bounced and grooved along to the music, or in musical relation to the space (Davidson & Malloch, 2009; Keil, 2002). Music can be defined as weight, time, space, and flow (Davidson & Malloch, 2009; Valerio, et al., 1998), and the girls demonstrated these in their physical interactions in the space. Their demonstration of sophisticated bodily expression is a necessary precursor to lifelong musical expression, as Davidson and Malloch argued that these bodily grammars of musical communication are necessary for affective music making as well as collaborative music making in the long-term.

Ultimately, embodied musical expression is a necessary way of knowing, where the mind and the body intersect (Koch & Fuchs, 2011). Cognitive awareness is not the only way of knowing, as the body and mind work together in unity. I have experienced this myself in my piano playing, during definite moments in the flow of performance where I actively turn off my mind and turn my awareness to the part of my body that knows the musical gesture best. Hence, the girls’ experiences of embodied music making functioned as rehearsal for lifelong musical skill and a precursor for formal musical training. Further, greater musical expression is found in embodied musical gesture (Davidson, 2005).

Sung song was another means of making sense in which the girls chose to engage during the lesson setting. Using song to communicate their thoughts, emotions, and desires, the girls changed words and improvised melodies (Barrett, 2006, 2009; Kerchner & Abril, 2009; Young, 2003a). They used their song as a part of their pretend, and mixed it within their movement
Their singing demonstrated the intermingling of thought and action, as they used it for commentary and communication (Barrett, 2009; Young, 2005). My interactions with the girls as vocal model and a co-participant provided a variety of singing experiences using neutral syllables and emphasis on a tonal center within a musical context, which they incorporated over time (Gordon, 2003; Mang, 2005; Reynolds, et al., 2007; Valerio, et. al., 1998). Further, the reciprocal and continuous process of our sung conversations laid the groundwork for “internalized templates of interactive processes which can become a generative source of musical ideas” (Young, 2005, p. 283).

The girls’ instrumental choices were varied, but did include the piano. The piano, however, was not their main priority. I found this distressing at times, leaving a lesson feeling as if the girls had not even touched the piano and wondering what this spoke toward their overall perception of the piano. In watching the video, however, I often saw that the girls played more than I had realized in the moment. My desire for meaningful piano moments colored my ability in the moment to see their interactions at the piano as meaningful to them. It also colored my ability to see that the piano functioned as just one of many important features woven into the fabric of the whole lesson (Young, 2003a). Though we called the lessons “piano lessons”, the girls seemed unconcerned with spending our time at the piano, weaving it in as they chose. Due to my desire for the piano, other behaviors seemed to be significantly more prevalent, when in reality they may have functioned on an equal plane. The literature offers some explanation here as well, indicating that in spontaneous musical moments children are less likely to choose instruments than they are to sing and to move (Marsh & Young, 2006).

The girls’ use of the piano looked different at different times. Sometimes they used it as an object existing as a part of the environment. At other times, they played it with exploratory
pretend, with improvisatory intention, or in specific relation to song material (Marsh & Young, 2006). There is a difference in purpose for each of these ways of being at the piano. Though the girls did not yet have the aural awareness or the tools to connect distinct pitches to actual keys on the keyboard, all of these levels of playing the piano held meaning for them. Their perceptions of sound existed as music, without judgment for lacking cultural norms (Kerchner & Abril, 2009; Marsh & Young, 2006). Further, at all times, the girls followed their own bodily intuitions at the piano, and did not participate in prescribed ways of being at the instrument (Csurgai-Schmitt, 2002; Fink, 2002; Lister-Sink, 2002).

Ultimately, the musical play of the girls within the pretend context was characterized by weaving a variety of strands, in a process and not product oriented manner. It demonstrated an interaction of personal choices and social practices as they directed our activities (Marsh and Young, 2006; Stinson, 2002; Young, 2003a, 2005). The girls demonstrated belief in their participation of real-life roles, showing sophisticated capability through exploration, improvisation, and analysis (McCusker, 2007; Tinworth, 1997). Further, their musicking demonstrated a growing incorporation of musically cultural norms, demonstrating a developing internal logic and intuitive understanding of tonal and metrical properties (Trainor & Corrigall, 2010; Welch, 1998). Finally, the fullness of expression they invested in provided in-the-moment rehearsal of life-long musical practices (Crafts, et al., 1993; Davidson & Malloch, 2009; Keil, 2002).

**Conclusions regarding the findings.** The existing literature supports the themes and sub-themes found regarding the ways that the girls engaged in the setting. Further, interpretations regarding the ways the girls made meaning and found value in the setting can be explained by the research on early childhood and early childhood music education. It is evident
that the girls were able to engage in the lesson in ways that have been found consistent with young children’s behaviors in a variety of contexts and settings.

According to Walsh (2002), development involves more than skill acquisition. Development has to do with change, but begins with an awareness of self within a situated domain, where “the unfamiliar must first be tied to children’s sense of what the world is, how it works, and their part in the whole process” (p. 107). As the girls engaged in the lesson in the ways described above, they demonstrated a need to do just this. They explored the boundaries of the setting, using their bodies and their ability to control and direct. They situated their time in the pretend context, and invited me into their development of it. They musicked in a variety of ways within it, and ultimately wove strands together that could not be separated out.

When I consider what stands out to me the most from my immersion into the data, I am struck by the complexity of the weaving strands, and the existence of a “both/and” instead of an “either/or”. I approached the lessons as a place where either one thing would happen or another; what I learned is that elements of the girls’ ways of being in the setting were sometimes dichotomous and yet did not exclude each other. I also was struck by the level to which the girls believed in the worth of their ideas, and the time they spent investing fully in them according to their own conceptions of how they should go. As such, I learned that what might have appeared unproductive to me was actually an expression of productivity. While the productivity might not have always been transparent to me, unproductivity was more of a quality of being than a lack of achievement. Productivity was ultimately defined by the process that the girls invested in and the purposefulness of their ways of being. I was also challenged to remember that when the girls were only able to engage in a concept as far as their understanding would allow it, it did not mean that the concept would never be grasped.
The level of mindfulness that the girls demonstrated on both reflexive and planful planes also stands out to me. I was amazed by how complex their direction was, despite the fact that they often showed little to no premeditation. They approached the lessons with clear and purposeful plans, which demonstrated sophistication and complexity I would not have expected. Further, I was struck by the fullness of expression the girls entrusted to me. Real life emotions of anger, frustration, sadness, excitement, joy, and more wove their way into our time together. The “being with” in all aspects of life indicate to me a capacity for love and nurture that goes both ways, and that is a necessary part of the shared space.

Finally, I realized the girls’ approach to the piano was richer and deeper than I might have expected, but that it also looked different than I wanted it to. Though I approached the space in what I perceived as flexible ways, I often left lessons feeling as if the girls had not even looked at the piano, wondering if the setting was working. In retrospect, the video and the data analysis enabled me to see that their experiences at the piano were one thread of a richly woven tapestry, and that they participated much more than I had perceived in the moment. Without the piano, the setting would have not been what it was. In the end, the piano was an aspect of the setting that they approached with intention, and on their own terms.

Ultimately, the setting existed as a place where patterns of “both/and” occurred, as dichotomies of action, thought and being existed in conjunction with each other (McCusker, 2007). Uninterested in musical “correctness”, narrow ideas, or shallow music making, the girls expressed a need to believe that they were an important part of a musical culture. Ultimately, the themes of lived experience explicated here weave together to express that the girls engaged in the setting in multiple roles and ways that project a “life-long relationship with music as independent musical thinkers and active music makers” (McCusker, 2007, p.55).
**Considering possibilities for readiness.** As discussed in the rationale for this study, readiness for formal piano lessons may be need to be reconsidered given what research in early childhood has shown to be appropriate for young children’s musical development (Huang, 2009). Given my findings regarding the girls’ experiences of the informal setting, which indicate the places they found meaningful in regard to their learning, I suggest that we can consider piano lesson readiness experiences for young children that blend elements of early childhood music classes and piano familiarization. Processes of readiness can involve allowing children to actively participate in and direct their own learning, during a lesson that is made up of creation in the moment. Providing a flexible space for children to use as they are inclined to allows for whole bodies to be engaged in ways that are beneficial for learning. Tools for musicking, such as singing, moving, chanting, and a variety of instruments in addition to the piano can be provided under the guidance of a musical specialist. Guidance should focus on aspects of togetherness and the processes of doing music. Further, allowing the children to invest in their ideas and to develop complex contexts for the musicking to occur within grants children the time they need to grapple with new information and to incorporate it as their own. Finally, the collaboration of music making and the children’s ownership over their experiences as they partner with the adult can provide children with an opportunity to exercise their belief in their own musicianship.

The literature regarding piano lesson experiences and early childhood supports the redefinition of readiness for young children. Duke (2011) described the goal of all music instruction in his *Intelligent music teaching: Essays on the core principles of effective instruction*: 

*Intelligent music teaching: Essays on the core principles of effective instruction:*
The real goal—the meaningful, substantive, far-reaching goal—is for students to become superb musicians, doing all of the things that superb musicians do, irrespective of what is being played or sung at the moment. These far-reaching goals for music instruction do not change from lesson to lesson, rehearsal to rehearsal, week to week. The far-reaching goals remain the same from the first day of instruction to the time when the student reaches the highest levels of artistic musicianship. In this sense, the goals in the lesson plan never change, regardless of the skill or experience level of the students you’re teaching. Only the contexts in which the goals are taught (i.e., the activities, the music) change over time. (p. 29)

As Duke suggested, the music-learning contexts in which children engage will change as they develop musically, cognitively, physically, and emotionally. Within a context for young children, then, what does it mean for children to—in Duke’s words—“[do] all of the things that superb musicians do” successfully in the present moment? There is implication here that within the context of their contemporary musical ability, children can engage in a lesson setting as a superb musician, which the findings of this study support.

Reconsidering the emphasis of a piano lesson for young children means reconsidering elements typically focused on in piano lesson settings. For older children, beginning piano lessons typically place an emphasis on note reading, pre-determined repertoire, technical development, and practicing (Agay, 2004; Albergo, 1990; Bastien, 1995; Chappell, 1999; Clark, 1992; Daniel & Bowden, 2008; Davidson et al., 2001; Duke, Flowers, & Wolfe, 1997; Jacobson, 2006; Koopman, 2002; Mackworth-Young, 1990; Ranke, 1989; Uszler et al., 2000). In early childhood, I suggest that the emphasis of these four elements can be replaced with development of musical literacy, creation of collaborative repertoire, movement, and play as processes of
readiness (Barrett, 2006; Burton, 2007; Gordon, 2003; Marsh & Young, 2006; McCusker, 2007; Valerio et al., 1998; Young, 2003a, 2006), given the ways that the children engaged in the informal setting and appeared to make meaning.

**Musical literacy.** There is a tradition in applied beginning lessons to teach note-reading from the very beginning (Chappell, 1999; Fredrickson, 2007; Henninger, Flowers, & Councill, 2006; Koopman, 2002; West & Rostvall, 2003). If a child does not have an established aural and/or kinesthetic foundation, however, she does not have the ability to place isolated notes into a tonal and/or metrical context, and mechanical playing can be the result (Davidson et al., 2000; Koopman, 2002; McPherson, 1994; Ranke, 1989). Fink (2002) was succinct in his understanding of this situation:

> The traditional study of note reading often interferes with the freedom of the ear to focus on pure sound, and of the freedom of the body to create and respond to rhythm. We set students up for failure as musicians when we deny them these freedoms because they will never find joy in transferring music from the printed page to the levers of the keyboard without an intermediary, audiated, musical experience. (p. 98)

One of the benefits of working with pre-reading young children is that there is time to develop the aural/kinesthetic foundation before reading experiences begin (Gordon, 2003).

Reading experiences for very young children are unnecessary and even inappropriate (Gordon, 2003; Koopman, 2002; Mills & McPherson, 2006). Instead, “children need many varied opportunities for exploration and self-expression through music before the more abstract skills involved in formal note reading are introduced” (McCusker, 2007, p. 50). The reasons for this are based in processes of musical literacy, which reflect the processes of language literacy. As Mills and McPherson (2006) considered, “Children should become competent with spoken
verbal language before they grapple with written verbal language” (p. 158). The same can be said regarding musical language (Gordon, 2003; Reynolds, 2006; Reynolds et al., 2007).

One of the purposes in introducing children to notation early on in their piano lesson experience is a perception that in order to learn the piano, children need to learn specific and pre-determined repertoire, which is most readily transmitted through notation (Koopman, 2002). Traditionally, piano lessons involve method books containing songs chosen by the author/publisher, and children are expected to play them without consideration of what is authentic to the child’s culture (Campbell, 1998a; 1998b). According to Barrett (2006), however, there is a difference between music for children and music of children. While it is appropriate to introduce children to new music, educators should also be aware of incorporating repertoire that is from the children. As Campbell (1998) maintained, “if at least some of the music that children are learning to play in their first (and later) lessons should be familiar to them, then we must gauge the familiarity of this music to children so as to pique their musical interest and motivate their practice” (p. 214).

Further, the focus on elements of reading notation and technique development for the purposes of decoding repertoire (Chappell, 1999; Koopman, 2002) is based in a perceived need to develop “repertoire and skills that aim towards adult models of skilled musical practice…[discounting] the playful and generative qualities of invented song making” (Barrett, 2006, pp. 202-203). Allowing children to bring their musical ways of being into the lesson requires a broader definition of what valid music is, in order to start with where the child is (Welch, 1998). Collaboratively created repertoire between young children and adults can be a means for exploration, and for bringing the unfamiliar to the familiar (Barrett, 2006).
**Collaborative repertoire.** The focus of collaboratively created repertoire is on exploration and creativity, and not on precise renditions of prescribed music. Bartel (2007) warned against restricting children with expectations of precision:

>[When] replication of prescriptions with accuracy, the mere learning of songs and music as prescribed by someone before…becomes the only focus of early education the memes of the child are formed to limit music and musical expressions. When the child learns that pitches can be freely strung together to form melodies, that existing melodies can be altered, that the rhythms of melodies can be reorganized, that sounds can be found in many places and employed with known songs or new sound collages, the child learns to understand music at a deeper level than mere replication, and begins to develop the expressive and communicative potential with sound that encourages ongoing engagement. (p. 76)

Developing the practice of collaboration between musicians is a life-long musical practice that can be re-framed within the context of early childhood, as a part of the child’s musical journey (Sawyer, 2005; Young, 2005). Further, the focus on exploration within the relationship of adult interactions influences the child’s musical understanding and internal musical logic (Welch, 1998).

In the process of creating the repertoire together, the child and adult will share meaning in ways that motivate participation and communication, the adult will model musical behaviors, and the child will have the opportunity to use her own abilities in “real and meaningful ways” (Bartel, 2007, p. 67). As musical literacy develops, the child given opportunity to take risks will not learn rigid parameters to her music making, but will have an understanding of the possibilities within flexible parameters. As the child becomes progressively enculturated, her
creative efforts will “draw increasingly on the musical forms of [her] culture” (Barrett, 2006, p. 204), in a process defined by active exploration and learning.

**Movement.** Early childhood is an ideal time for developing a whole body technique in that young children’s bodily movements are a natural part of their musicking. Movement to music in general develops agility and control, necessary “precursors for the playing of musical instruments” (Bannan & Woodward, 2009, p. 476). Allowing the child to approach the piano with her whole body means not restricting her to the bench, since “what might appear, initially, to be random and sporadic play is generated and structured by patterns of bodily movement that are gestural or stimulated by the structure of the instrument” (Marsh & Young, 2006, p. 295). Bodily engagement for young children is more important than precision because, ultimately, bodily engagement is about expression (Bartel, 2007; Davidson et al., 2001). A lack of experience with movement as musical expression before direct instruction of piano technique “denies children the opportunity to focus on musical performance and communication, leaving them dependent on notation, imitation, and adult intervention, and making their playing superficially expressive, rather than genuinely rooted in their own bodily awareness and intentions” (Davidson et al., 2001, p. 58).

The development of technique is necessary for playing the piano, but initial training often focuses on small muscle finger movements from the outset of lessons (Rhoodie, 2002). This can lead to an inability to create full tone at the very least and serious injury at the worst (Csurgai-Schmitt, 2002; Fink, 2002; Lister-Sink, 2002). Fink (2002) maintained that “a pure finger technique should be taught only after several years of study” since “the premature introduction of complex coordination often creates unwanted tension” (p. 100). Fink defined technique as “purposeful movement towards musical ends” (p. 99); Csurgai-Schmitt agreed, suggesting that
“learning the right *movements*” (p. 250) is more useful than focusing on precision of the fingers. Developing awareness and coordination of the whole body at the piano can be beneficial for long-term healthful piano technique (Csurgai-Schmitt, 2002; Lister-Sink, 2002).

**Play.** According to Trainor (2004), adult expertise on an instrument is associated with “fewer hours of formal practice at an early age, perhaps allowing a more positive attitude toward practice to develop, and a positive social context for musical development” (p. 274). Hence, granting young children time to play with music at the piano in an informal setting may help to develop a love of and foundation for long-term playing (Batt-Rawden & DeNora, 2005). The time needed for intensive practice can occur later, as children develop their aural and kinesthetic coordination (Gordon, 2003; Valerio et al., 1998). Creating positive contexts for musical play on an instrument while foundations of musical literacy are developed through playing, listening, moving, and interacting is appropriate for young children.

While practicing is a necessary hallmark for learning an instrument (Trainor, 2005), Bresler (2008) recalled, “the drudgery of music drills in preparation for the weekly lesson” (p. 1) as a situation with which many young musicians can empathize. The weekly assignment typically involves specific songs and technical exercises necessary for developing a piano playing technique (Jacobson, 2006). Practicing often involves repetition for technical mastery and correct interpretation of the notation (Boyce-Tillman, 2004). Without explicit training in how to practice, however, beginners are in danger of mindless practicing; further, mindless practicing can also be due to un- or under-developed ability to *think* musically (Gordon, 2003; McCusker, 2007). Necessary for mindful practicing is an aural and kinesthetic underpinning to musical processes, which children need time to develop (Bartel, 2007; McCusker, 2007; Welch, 1998).
In summary, incorporating elements of a developing musical literacy, collaborative creation of repertoire, movement, and play into informal child-oriented piano lesson settings for early childhood is a means of granting young children opportunity to do “all of the things that superb musicians do” (Duke, 2011, p. 29) while maintaining the goal of developing strong musicianship. Prioritizing these elements above note reading, pre-determined repertoire, technical development, and practicing is appropriate when working with young children (Barrett, 2006; Bartel, 2007; Csurgai-Schmitt, 2002; Davidson et al., 2001; Fink, 2002; Gordon, 2003; Lister-Sink, 2002; Marsh & Young, 2006; McCusker, 2007; Welch, 1998; Young, 2003a, 2006).

Ultimately, elements of developing musical literacy, collaboration in musical material, movement and play can be incorporated for reasons of helping a child be ready for more formal piano training. Further, allowing time for the children to explore by their own direction, to participate in active repetition within the environment, and to have opportunities for success at their own pace is crucial for their development (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; Gordon, 2003; Hannon & Trainor, 2007; Welch, 1998; Young, 2003a). Honoring their music-making as a valid starting point in their enculturation process is beneficial as a foundation for further participation in the music of their culture (Barrett, 2006; Campbell, 2007; Whitfield, 2009; Young, 2003a). Finally, partnership with an experienced adult in a child-oriented and not teacher-driven process of doing music grants children an agency of ownership within a scaffolding of their developing ability and skill (Bartel & Cameron, 2007; Koopman, 2002; McCusker, 2007; Reynolds, 2006; Reynolds et al., 2007; Smith, 1996; Valerio et al., 1998; Whiteman, 2008; Young, 2003a).
Moving Forward

**Remaining questions and future research.** This study served as an initial inquiry toward understanding how the girls experienced and valued the setting. It provided me with much to ponder, and enabled me to see more clearly what this setting offers young children. For as much as I learned, however, the study also opened up new areas for consideration, of which I had not been aware. What follows is a discussion of my remaining questions as I continue along this trajectory of work.

The themes and sub-themes provided clarity, but each one could now be approached individually in order to understand it more fully in the context of this setting and to incorporate it fully into the musical guidance of young children. Further, these themes emerged in this specific context, but would they be found and could they be applied in a studio setting? Teaching the children in their homes provided certain conditions that may or not be found in a studio setting. Alternatively, a studio setting may provide other challenges and insights.

This study focused solely on two girls. In order to build a comprehensive understanding of children’s development at this age and within this context, I need to access stories of additional children of both male and female gender for deep analysis and interpretation. I will include boys, and children with other demographic characteristics such as race, family situation, and socio-economic status in my future work. It would be very interesting to look further into how family characteristics influence and intersect with children’s experience in the lesson setting as well.

What I found to be most perplexing, and was unsure of how to handle, was Eden’s episodes of negative behavior and expressed hatred of the piano. I need to explore how the format of the lesson might have encouraged these behaviors or even caused them. I also need to
look into how I as the adult in the room should respond appropriately, and in ways that lead to
fruitful productivity. Is it simply a question of development, or is it a season that could be
avoided?

This leads me to the question of how to transition a child from an informal “play as you
will” setting to a formal structure that requires the child to respond to more teacher directed
activities. The question of transition is one that has been raised in my experiences with other
children as well, and is an important element of understanding the value of this lesson setting.
What does it look like to transfer them well, and in ways that are meaningful for their
developmental journey? What I saw in Eden was a readiness for more formal activities that she
resisted, digging her feet into non-productive and silly play. Was there meaning for her learning
in this behavior, or was she simply testing the boundaries? What is an appropriate response from
me? Do I allow her to remain where she is, or do I force her to move forward? I wonder if there
is a relationship between her resistant behaviors and her developmental journey, and I wonder
what I would have seen had Kathleen and I continued our lessons for a longer period of time. I
would like to investigate this transitional stage of learning further.

Beyond transition, I would also like to engage in a long-term study of a child who has
participated in this setting. While looking closely at the setting gives me some indication of
what is valuable during it, I wonder how the girls’ experience may influence their overall
musical journey at the piano. It is impossible to know at this juncture if the setting is beneficial
for their development of life long piano ability, and/or how the elements seen here will evolve
and contribute in both positive and negative directions to their future piano and music learning.

I chose in this study to look broadly at the children’s experiences in the setting, but there
is need to look closely at their specific musical journey. While I saw development in their
musical abilities, I did not focus solely or deeply on how this occurred and how it unfolded over the course of the year. I used the principles of preparatory audiation (Gordon, 2003) as a loose guide for the design of the setting, but did not assess the children’s behaviors within the stages of preparatory audiation. To do so, however, would bring insight into both the usefulness of the setting for musical development, and the construct of preparatory audiation overall.

Ultimately, I would like to look at the changes over time, emotionally, cognitively, and musically. Eden was six months older than Kathleen, and demonstrated different behaviors of awareness than Kathleen did. Was this due to being further along in her maturity and development? Can it be attributed simply to individual differences, or a combination of factors? What does the process of emotional, cognitive, and musical maturity look like, and how does it influence the children’s participation in the setting? I did not feel that the design of this study allowed me to fully ascertain the changes over the course of the lessons, but understanding the interactions of these changing dimensions with the lesson context would be informative and purposeful. Questions of a developing theory of mind (Fromberg, 2002) and musical development might emerge here and could be framed by the action/decision making/dimensions of being aspects, which I used to interpret the data of this study.

Further, this study focused on the children and not on my role in the setting. I would like to seek deeper understanding of my role, looking into the ways that I help and the ways that I hinder the children’s development and growth. Where do the lines blur between my being an adult and a child-like adult? How did my role and the children’s understanding of it contribute to confusion and misunderstanding? I wonder how the children viewed me in regard to my role, and what trustworthiness of an adult means to them. What is the process of trustworthiness and relationship between us in this setting? How do they develop and demonstrate trust in me? I
also wonder if I am musical with them in the ways that they are musical, or if I inhibit them by my highly stylized cultural forms of music making. On the other hand, how do I move them forward into the fullness of their musicianship within a specific musical culture?

**Recommendations for practice.** When I consider what this study offers in terms of recommendations for practice, I think of what it is that I have learned from these children. What do I take away from it in order to meet my desire to teach my students in the ways they desire and even need to be taught? Further, what do these children say to the field of piano pedagogy as a whole; how do they contribute to our overall goal of raising future generations of musicians and pianists?

I recommend that children need to move, and suggest that their moving benefits the cohesiveness of their learning. On occasion I am asked by piano teachers about recommendations for students who “just can’t sit still”, and I consider this to be rooted in an assumption that a fruitful and productive lesson is one where the child does indeed sit still, “behaves,” and quietly consumes the information being transferred. I recommend that as the adults in the setting, we need to be aware of our desires to limit the movement of the children entrusted to us. The girls were musical in their movements, rehearsing and replicating their musicianship in their physical being with the music and at the piano. As adults we focus on the bench and on how to sit on it; the children, however, focused on climbing on it, leaning on it, resting on it. Their familiarity with the bench and its relationship to the piano was organically woven into our time, and it did not hinder them from “proper” posture. In fact, Kathleen demonstrated beautiful piano posture toward the end of the data collection period without any explicit verbal direction from me, and her body was deeply connected to the process.
I suggest that we allow children to direct their participation in the lesson, even when it is difficult to see the worth in where they choose to focus. The girls led us—themselves, and me—to moments of deep and rich music making that would not have occurred had I held to my conceptions of productive behaviors. For the girls, productivity meant engaging in processes that I did not always understand. As the adults, we need to be comfortable with feeling uncomfortable; we need to be able to live in a suspended state of “product” making, in order for the ultimate product to be rich and whole. There is a difference between a child being able to produce a surface level representation of some form of music making, and being able to take ownership over a deeply meaningful product with complexity and sophistication that is derived, not taught. Moments that we may deem unproductive, may actually be deeply significant to the child’s ultimate ability to produce within cultural norms.

Duke (2011) articulated the common expectations of piano teachers when faced with student’s performance and ability:

Experts assess students’ performance and formulate decisions about what-to-teach-now on the basis of (1) the importance of each incorrect aspect of the students’ work in relation to (2) its potential effect on the students’ overall performance and (3) the probability that the students are actually capable of effecting a positive change in the short term. (p. 91)

There is certainly a place for this type of assessment in settings of formal instruction with older children. I suggest, however, that we set aside this conception of what it means to be a “teacher” when working with our youngest students. The girls demonstrated an ability to regulate their own participation, in blissful ignorance of ever having been “incorrect.” Further, incorrectness did not inhibit their music making, nor did it result in lasting inaccuracy.
Hence, I recommend that we look closely at the places our students choose to focus and bring our expertise to join them there. Children are experts at being children; we are experts in music and the piano. Melding our expertise together can lead to richer relationship, as the children are given the space to speak. Ultimately, giving children the authority to develop their personhood in relationship to their music making can only benefit the authenticity of their music making. The cost to the adult occurs when we expect predictable and linear progression; children’s progression can be non-linear, and the more we sit comfortably in their process, the more we will see their ownership take root and unfold.

In my encounters with piano teachers over the years, I have heard the phrase “I learn so much from my students!” frequently. Hence, it is not ground-breaking to suggest that in our teaching of young students we look to them for ideas. This study offers insight, however, into the potentially confusing times when students contribute ideas that are not transparent in their usefulness to us, or when they seem to be wasting the time. Based on my work with these children, I would encourage us to watch and to listen, and to allow the ideas to unfold. There is great possibility that the child will surprise us with the coherency of her thought after all.

This approach requires us to broaden our understanding of appropriate play, becoming child-like in our incorporation of pretend. I suggest that we allow children to make sense of the piano and of their role as a pianist in the context of pretend. We need to think deeply about how to open the doors for children to engage in the piano in a richly imaginative way, and provide them the space to unfold the pretend as they see it unfolding. We need to become comfortable with the overall fruitfulness of this process, and not assume that it reflects a waste of time.

The girls also taught me that being a musician involves more than simply playing the piano. Their desire to include instruments of all kinds and the emphasis they placed on their
singing suggests to me an understanding that musicking is much broader than being able to sit at the piano and play. Further, their inclusion of me in their music making suggests an inherent understanding that music making is about more than solitary performance. Instead of placing the majority of our focus on the children’s ability to perform a solo with the occasional duet, I recommend that we play with our students frequently. The elements of listening and of internal monitoring organically unfold as the children experience the fullness of music making with an ‘other’.

In his essays on piano teaching, Stewart Gordon (1995) expressed a need for students to develop these inner processes of listening and internal monitoring when he wrote of the realities of “weak underlying rhythmic perception” in students, where “there is, in short, no [inner] conductor, and the result is that technical difficulties dictate tempo change and interpretive license has no elastic limits” (p. 35). He looks to counting as a solution for rhythmic problems, failing when there is no inner conductor. I think of Kathleen, counting me off as she bounced through the room; I think of Eden, uniting her body to the beat as she coordinated her movement to the meter. Once again, I return to movement, and to the freedom of children feeling their way into possession of an inner conductor. Hence, I recommend that we find all ways possible of encouraging children to take ownership over the development of their “inner conductor.” Further, I recommend that we do not fear their failure and jump to correct them, aiming instead for their personal monitoring of their rhythmic responses in relation to a musical stimulus.

I suggest that a significant part of this development occurs when children are given license to freely sing. S. Gordon (1995) suggested that a piano student’s ability to sing is indicative of their inner hearing, the importance of which,
[is] referred to with some degree of frequency by good musicians and teachers, but seldom do we give more than lip service, an occasional dutiful reference to their mysterious ways in a lesson, or our blessing while relegating the hard work of nurturing them to the aural skills classroom. (p. 32)

Indeed, how can we expect our students to be able to sing when we have not made room for them to develop this skill? I recommend that we sing more than speak to our students, and provide them the opportunity to sing back. I never once required the girls to sing back to me; they often did, however, simply by nature of the allowance being made for in the setting. When given permission to do so, their singing strengthened over time and demonstrated sophisticated understanding of melodic and harmonic properties.

This brings me to another of S. Gordon’s (1995) “neglected rudiments” (p. 31) in piano teaching—harmonic function. If we model for our students the basics of harmonic function in our singing to them, they will be given an opportunity to a) hear such functions, b) absorb them, c) imitate them, d) practice them, and e) own them. The girls often sang to me in chords, without my expressing to them any such concept as “chord.” Their aural understanding of harmonic function appeared to be well in place by the end of the data collection, which prepares them for a discussion later in their musical journey regarding what those chords mean in theoretical terms.

When embracing an early childhood approach to piano lessons, it is important for teachers to communicate with and educate parents on the purposes of a setting that allows for process over product. We live in a product driven society, where learning is measured by what a child is able to do, and how they are able to perform. There is a time and place for such an expectation, but with young children we need to provide alternative understandings of what it
means to be successful. When the parent and the teacher are operating under different philosophies, the conflicting expectations may be confusing for the child.

Further, I recommend we listen deeply to the needs of each individual child. I recognize the assumption I hold that this setting is highly beneficial for all children; I also recognize that each child is different in her needs. Looking beyond our assumptions, can we see what the child is expressing to us in her verbal and non-verbal ways of being in our lessons? Can we adjust and be honest about what the child needs, and how we might meet her where she is, in order to move her forward? Ultimately, I recommend sensitivity to all possibilities with our students, considering options instead of moving religiously forward in what we have always assumed to be true.

Instead of waiting for children to ‘be ready’ for formal piano experiences, I suggest that we consider building a process of readiness into lesson settings for young children. A process of readiness can be informed by the ways that these children chose to engage in the informal child-oriented lessons. I am not looking to insist that the informal child-oriented setting is the ideal setting for early experiences with all young children. I find that my personal ways of being interact nicely with the philosophy of the setting, and so I choose to guide my young student’s musical journey in this manner. I am not, however, willing to recommend it as the only approach for all teachers or even all children. Far more work needs to be done investigating the efficacy of this approach in order to make such a claim. What I do suggest, however, is that all teachers of young children consider the ways that these particular children engaged in their learning. I suggest that we open eyes, ears, and possibilities for similar expressions of meaning and value regarding each child that we teach.

Conclusions
The themes and sub-themes that emerged in this study suggest that the children engaged in a variety of experiences they found to be meaningful and valuable within the informal, child-oriented lesson setting. Though the children’s ideas often needed time to unfold, this study shows that musical moments result. Further, though I may not have always understood where the children’s ideas were leading, they had more intention than I frequently gave them credit for. When given space to use, the children developed their ideas and directed the development in far richer contexts than I could ever introduce to them. The provision of flexible space was also important for elements of free movement, as the children demonstrated by using their bodies in a variety of ways and with a variety of intention. The freedom to direct and to create led to musical moments of richness both at and away from the piano, as the girls directed their own musicking, participated in aspects of real-life musical practice, and interacted with musical concepts.

The extent to which the children interacted with the space and even the space beyond (in the case of Kathleen), used their bodies in multiple ways and for multiple reasons, directed the time with such confidence and clarity, and incorporated elements of relationship in their lesson process surprised me, and stand out to me as expressions for my attention. Further, as a music specialist and piano teacher, the wide extent of the children’s musicking behaviors indicate to me that I can be comfortable with setting aside my agenda. The variety of ways that the girls engaged in the lesson setting suggest that children can be trusted to invest in their own learning, and I can exchange teacher-driven conceptualizations of the lesson space and time for inclusion of their ideas and ways of being.
Postlude

When I consider all that the girls and I experienced together, and all that was revealed as I combed the data and attempted to make sense of what I saw there, I cannot help but think of parallels I have encountered in my daily life. I think of gathering with friends in my living room, informally singing and playing our instruments as a way of being, our music weaving in and out of our conversation. I think of American Idol contestants, who demonstrate stronger musicality and ownership of their ability by the end of the season, simply by doing music in the context of the show for week after week. I think of a little 5-year-old girl I observed as an audience member at a year-end piano recital, who played her pieces precisely and correctly, but stiffly, without facial expression, and with little musical interest. I think of that same girl who, moments later, bounced up and down in her seat with wild-eyed joy when a woman came on stage and played her castanets. I cannot help but wonder—How could we have helped this child capture her joy and pour it into her own experience of playing the piano?

I think of my own experiences of writing this document, and remember how mess often preceded any kind of clarity, that working it out meant just diving into it, living in it, being in it, uncomfortably. I remember that there were chunks of time spent in paralysis, in massive unproductivity. And I see how those moments of unproductivity led—eventually—to clarity, and intense periods of thinking faster than I could write. I reflect on how I expected productivity to be the way it should go, and how easily unproductivity threw me. I realize that I could have chosen many roads to take as I thought and organized and wrote, and I find that this final product is just one way. I think of how even this product is simply a step toward the next one.

I consider the vulnerability of allowing myself to sit inside of my heart and to share it, the fear of judgment and failure. I remember how easily the fear of judgment could shut me down,
and how the feeling of success could make me fly. I think of the panic when I thought I was running out of time to achieve the potential I knew I was capable of. I think of the hard work that it is to be fully invested in creativity, the bravery and the courage it requires. I think of how the people around me supported me, and were with me in my mess. I am reminded of how my community functions as a place to live together, grieve together, help each other, listen to each other, speak truth to each other, and work out our understandings of our place in the world—no matter the cost or the difficulty to our personal selves as we “be together” through all of it.

In all of these things I see reflections of the girls, as they wove music in and out of our being together, and became stronger simply by their doing. They made music with uninhibited expression and freedom of movement. Moments of rich music making embroiled us without warning, moments where time seemed to stop, and where all that we knew was the music as it was occurring. Productivity and unproductivity co-existed, and often what appeared as mess and chaos to me was really a process of meaningful investment for the girls. There were weeks that made me feel as if nothing worthwhile was occurring, and weeks where magic seemed to happen. In all of this, they shared their time with me, they shared what was important to them and allowed me to be a part of it. They did not keep themselves from expressing real emotions, either negative or positive. Sometimes they recognized their limitations and chose not to participate due to them; sometimes they believed in their possibility, and soared. They invested in their ideas, and worked to achieve them with energy and passion. And through all of it, they accepted my being there with them, and allowed me to stand alongside of them.

I compare our lesson time to more traditional lesson settings, where order and good behavior are prioritized, and realize how my time with the girls might appear chaotic and disorderly from an outside perspective. But then I look at the stack of books on my table.
Starting out neatly stacked, they have become a jumbled mess as I have gotten deeply inside of my writing. The mess demonstrates to me that I have actually gotten work done, and I take great comfort it. It is evidence that those books have become a part of my journey, and I have learned from them. The mess means I have been moved forward, my task has been moved forward, my purpose has been clarified.

The togetherness that the girls and I experienced, and the “being there with” made the lesson experience what it was. My experience with the girls leads me to think of myself as a musician, how I am my most free when I am improvising, how I am sucked in when I am playing in reciprocity with other musicians, and how I am inspired to better ideas when bouncing off of theirs. Further, I consider the words of Campbell (1998), suggesting that we have made an idol of the idea of “musical talent” and instead need to look at the ways that children express “a widespread human capacity to listen, perform, and create” (p. 169). The girls and I were uninterested in talent; we were simply interested in being musical. Without effort—we listened, we performed, we created, together.

In *The Soloist*, Steve Lopez (2008) recounted the tale of a Julliard trained bassist named Nathaniel who ends up homeless, on the streets of Los Angeles. His mind broken by schizophrenia and his musical career an impossibility, Nathaniel’s passion in life is playing a broken down violin on the street corner in front of the city’s Beethoven statue, or in the Second Street Tunnel. Not for money and not for acclaim, his playing and his love of Beethoven are the very things that keep him going. I read his story, which causes me to reflect on what it means to love something to the point where it is the only thing you have when you have nothing left. And I recognize in him a childlikeness that the girls taught me to embrace—to just do, because you love it, and because it meets you where you want to be met.
Ultimately, I consider the human needs of mutuality, belonging, finding and making meaning, hands-on competence, and elaboration (Dissanayake, 2000); I consider the interwoven musical elements of materials, expression, construction, values, and spirituality (Boyce-Tillman, 2004). I consider how the girls engaged in the setting, and see that they confirm what both Dissanayake and Boyce-Tillman have specified as what it means to be human, and what it means to be musical. And I understand Lopez (2008), who expressed gratitude for being allowed into the world of Nathaniel, and for all of the ways that the interaction changed him. My place in this study was to observe, it was to reflect, it was to interpret, but the girls gave me much more than that. With them, I experienced my own child-like joy, my own freedom and fullness of expression; I experienced a space where I could just be, with them, in the working out of my place in the world. For this, I am truly grateful.
References


*Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 4*(1), 51-60.


*American Music Teacher, 60*(1), 20-23.


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APPENDIX A

Example of a Lesson Framework
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Meter/Tonality</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello Song</td>
<td>Duple/Mixolydian</td>
<td>With stuffed animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chant: My Mother, Your Mother</td>
<td>Duple</td>
<td>With finger puppets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row your Boat</td>
<td>Triple, Major</td>
<td>Sing and improvise an instrumental duet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beanbag Toss</td>
<td>Triple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Pictures</td>
<td></td>
<td>Explore high/low on piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wild Horses</td>
<td>Duple, minor</td>
<td>I play piano, she dances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>Triple, minor</td>
<td>With scarves, to CD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

Descriptions of Possible Lesson Activities
In Chapter Four I refer to a variety of activities in which the children and I participated, using the materials included in the children’s boxes. What follows here is a description of these activities for reference sake. With the exception of the Alphabet Snake (Yurko, 1979), these activities are of my own derivation and have evolved in my piano studio over the course of my piano teaching career.

**The alphabet snake.** The purpose of the Alphabet Snake (Yurko, 1979) activity is to familiarize the children with the order of the “piano alphabet”, A-B-C-D-E-F-G cycling over and over. I prepare 4.25x5.5 cards with one letter on each, for four repetitions of the music alphabet. When I introduce the activity, I demonstrate it as cards linked vertically:

A  
B  
C  
D  
E  
F  
G  
A  

Etc. Variations include placing the letters in backwards or skipping order.

**Key sticks.** The key sticks are small pieces of construction paper, cut to fit easily on each white key of the piano. I prepare different colors, for the purpose of using a different color for each different key [i.e., D vs. E]. I begin this activity by having the children place the stick on the white key in the middle of the group of two black keys. The children then play each key that holds a stick.
**The composer book.** The composer book is a book containing page after page of pictures that suggest a story. The purpose is to spark imagination in the children, in a way that connects to sounds we produce on the piano.

**Beanbags.** The purpose of the beanbags is for the children to experience weight on the keys as they use them to manipulate the keys on the piano keyboard. They can also be tossed back and forth for rhythmic purposes, while counting or singing.

**Stuffed animals.** I use a stuffed mouse and a stuffed bear to prompt the children toward thinking about high sounds and low sounds. They are also for the purpose of allowing the children to experience weight on the keys and to use large arms as they approach the keys with the animals.

**Animal pictures.** The purpose of the animal pictures is to encourage the children to consider high and low sounds on the piano, and to imaginatively make sounds that express the animal’s characteristics.

**Elastic bands.** The purpose of the elastic bands is for the children to feel the inherent ‘stretch’ within a musical phrase, and to connect the rhythmic space with the extension of their bodies. The bands can be individually, or we can each hold one end. When we share the band, I am able to connect to them in a metrical pulse.

**Finger puppets.** The purpose of the finger puppets is to encourage rhythmic conversation, but also to place fingers on the keys with focused weight and intention.
APPENDIX C

Example of Data Analysis Process
Kathleen, Episode 6

I am at the piano playing Are You Sleeping as Kathleen meanders around the room with a smile on her face, doing a little jig as she walks toward the window, swinging her arms with purpose as she walks away from it. As I reach the last phrase, she sings “Time to get ready!” in harmony with the melody, and disappears behind a chair. She calls out “I know! This could be where I get ready!” I turn to her and agree, suggesting that this could be her dressing room, and she agrees. I ask what she is dressing up as today, and she replies “um, you’ll see!” As she prepares her dressing room, I turn back to the piano and borrow her adaptation of the song, saying “I’ll sing the Time to Get Ready Song” and sing “Time to get ready, time to get ready, here we go, here we go!” to the same tune. At the end of the verse, I ask if she is ready; very simply, she says “no”. I play the song again, and this time she joins me, singing on “na” when I drop out. Ultimately, she rhythmically announces on the resting tone “I am coming out, of my dressing room!” She enters undramatically from behind the chair, goes immediately to something on the floor, and then wanders around the room, humming quietly, thoughtful. When I ask, she tells me she is Tinkerbelle, though she is not dressed any differently. I sing in a new dorian melody that Tinkerbelle is very pretty and begin to improvise around it on the piano. She walks to the middle of the room and lifts her leg behind her, dancing slowly and gracefully. I continue to play as she works to adjust the video camera, in order to see my face. She walks to the box and takes out a scarf, leaps to the middle of the room, waves the scarf in a circular motion with eyes half-closed. She then returns to her dressing room area.
Kathleen, Episode 6

1. I am at the piano playing Are You Sleeping as Kathleen meanders around the room with a smile on her face, doing a little jig as she walks toward the window, swinging her arms with purpose as she walks away from it.

2. As I reach the last phrase, she sings “Time to get ready!” in harmony with the melody, and disappears behind a chair. She calls out “I know! This could be where I get ready!”

3. I turn to her and agree, suggesting that this could be her dressing room, and she agrees.

4. I ask what she is dressing up as today, and she replies “um, you’ll see!”

5. As she prepares her dressing room, I turn back to the piano and borrow her adaptation of the song, saying “I’ll sing the Time to Get Ready Song” and sing “Time to get ready, time to get ready, here we go, here we go!” to the same tune. At the end of the verse, I ask if she is ready; very simply, she says “no”.

6. I play the song again, and this time she joins me, singing on “na” when I drop out.

7. Ultimately, she rhythmically announces on the resting tone “I am coming out, of my dressing room!”

8. She enters undramatically from behind the chair, goes immediately to something on the floor, and then wanders around the room, humming quietly, thoughtful.

9. When I ask, she tells me she is Tinkerbelle, though she is not dressed any differently.

10. I sing in a new dorian melody that Tinkerbelle is very pretty and begin to improvise around it on the piano. She walks to the middle of the room and lifts her leg behind her, dancing slowly and gracefully.

11. I continue to play as she works to adjust the video camera, in order to see my face.

12. She walks to the box and takes out a scarf, leaps to the middle of the room, waves the scarf in a circular motion with eyes half-closed.

13. She then returns to her dressing room area.
When looking for the nature of engagement in a lesson, this sentence shows that…

**Kathleen, Episode 6**

1. The child is physically free to move around and to express connection to the music.
2. The child listens and comments musically in conjunction with her crafting a pretend scenario that stems out of real life.
3. The child accepts adult contributions to her pretend.
4. The child governs the pretend.
5. The child is absorbed in her activity, to the point of overtly ignoring the musical stimulus.
6. The child is absorbed in her activity, but is aware of the musical stimulus to the point where she joins in and continues on her own.
7. The child is immersed in the musical environment, and attaches music making to the pretend.
8. The child appears disinterested in her own play, yet is absorbed in her own world, which includes making music, under her breath.
9. The child is connected to an outside pretend world.
10. The child is listening to the contributions of the adult, and attends to them physically.
11. The child is interested in her work, making sure the camera is adjusted for what she feels is important.
12. The child is aware of the materials in the environment, and uses them to physically connect to the music that is happening in the environment.
13. The child remembers her pretend setting, and returns to it after an extended time away.
Eden, Episode 4

Eden is sitting on the piano bench while I kneel behind her on the floor. We had been singing with a family of her stuffed dogs, and Eden is now holding the smallest dog, bouncing him with a large and buoyant arm on the keys. I am playing my own patterns. Suddenly she stops and says “Let’s pretend this dog can only speak piano.” I agree, and she plays a two-macro-beat pattern. I play in response, but she turns to me and points at my chest saying “you’re supposed to not play piano because you don’t play piano.” “Oh”, I say. “I can speak but I can’t speak piano?” “Yep”, she says. I ask if I can only speak drum, and she says “yeah”. I get out the drum, as she turns back to the piano. I settle on the floor behind her. She plays the dog with a weighted and buoyant right arm, very intently, her head tilted, her body moving behind her arm. Her back is to me, and she plays for an extended period of time with a complex rhythmical structure. When I interject with the drum, she doesn’t stop playing, but spins around to look at me and then spins back. She continues to play, and when she reaches a long held note that sounds like it might be the end of a phrase, I beat my drum. She stops, turns, and looks at my drumming with a blank stare. She is frozen in place, but snaps out of it the moment I finish my phrase. She smiles, spins herself off the bench, and comes over to me, making dog sounds. She plays the dog on top of the drum, and takes the mallet from me. I hold the drum in the air, and she beats the dog with her mallet, saying in a high voice “ouchie!” I say “seriously!” and sing “ouchie ouchie ouchie” to the tune of our Hello Song. Eden just laughs. The dog falls off the drum and down the front of me, into my lap. Eden laughs and drops down onto the floor in front of me, saying “the dog went down your throat!” as she pushes the dog underneath my leg. I clear my throat, and sing the phrase again....I take the frog finger puppet out of the box as we talk about where the mom and dad are. She leans up on my legs, poking underneath my leg where the dog is, looking for it. I sing “ba-ba-ba” as I wave the frog at her, and she puts her hands out to the side helplessly, saying to the frog “well, I couldn’t find the pink poodle today! My music teacher must have swallowed her!” The frog says “Imagine that!” and Eden falls back on her hand with a quiet “hm” and a smile. I say [as the frog] “what are we going to do about it?” and she says “I think we need to find a way” and, pointing at the frog very intently, “for you to walk down into her throat and get the doggie”. She points her finger emphatically to emphasize the importance of this. I laugh, and look at the frog. “Walk down in my throat little froggie!” She is leaning toward me, smiling up into my face. I say “I wonder if the frog could play a magical song on the piano...” Eden pats the back of one hand emphatically into the palm of the other and says that it needs to happen “quick, or the puppy dog will turn to stone!” I say “the puppy dog will turn to stone? Then you’d better go play the magical song quick!” She gets up and goes directly to the piano, playing before she’s even on the bench. I sing “the magical song is working...”; Eden keeps playing, but turns to watch me. I am pulling the dog slowly out of its place under my leg, as I continue to sing “I hear the puppy arriving, hooray, hooray!” She takes the dog from me and I go to the piano, singing “now we play a celebration!” She takes one of the princess toys that are on the piano and plays together with it and the dog. I play a chromatic pattern in contrary motion and then transition into Hot Cross Buns, while she bounces her body on the bench, lifting the toys in the air with a squealed “eee!” and dropping them on the keys in a rhythmical pattern. Her playing provides a rhythmical backdrop for my melody, and makes the structure of the whole quite interesting. On the second time through Hot Cross Buns, Eden turns to watch me. She is still playing her own keys, but sparsely. She is attending to me more than to herself. On the third time through, she
drops her toys, and—though she doesn’t attempt the same keys—imitates what I am doing by playing with her fingers on the keys. On the fourth time, she picks her toys back up and sings an improvised melody in a high-pitched “doo doo doo” as she spins them through the air. I decide to try a “formal” activity, and sing “play after me” on the melody of Hot Cross Buns. I keep a beat going with my singing and playing; she doesn’t pause but does what I ask when I sing “your turn”. She watches me as I play, and is ready to play when it’s her turn.

Her melody is mostly correct, though she adds a few extra repetitions of keys, and does not keep a consistent beat in part three. We finish and I sing “do you know what song that was?” She looks at me and says “Hot cross buns.” I sing “let’s play it again” and begin, but she takes the dog and bounces aggressively on the keys. She puts the dog down on top of my hand and will not let me play, and when I continue to try, she lifts my arms into the air. I say excitedly “what? You’re not going to let me play my song?!” and she laughs, continuing to push my hands into the air. I keep trying and she keeps laughing, keeps flinging my hands in the air. Finally, she takes my arms and holds them down with her hands, one on each side of her. I say “oh dear”; she laughs, and I sing “this is the saddest day of my life” a few times, leaning my head on hers. She is still, waiting. Finally, I say “ok, I guess Eden’s going to have to do all of the piano playing today.” She looks at me, laughs, and lets go of my hands to play on one key.

I turn around and say “I’ll just have to play the bells.” I take the bells out of the box; she turns around on the bench and says “but you don’t even have your hands free!” I wiggle the bells onto my wrist; she laughs and says “that might be good!”, turns to the side and plays some keys. I pick up different instruments, and for each, she comes over to me, reminds me that I don’t have arms or hands, and returns to the bench, smiling mischievously and laughing.
Eden, Episode 4:

1. Eden is sitting on the piano bench while I kneel behind her on the floor.
2. We had been singing with a family of her stuffed dogs, and Eden is now holding the smallest dog, bouncing him with a large and buoyant arm on the keys.
3. I am playing my own patterns.
4. Suddenly she stops and says “Let’s pretend this dog can only speak piano.”
5. I agree, and she plays a two-macro-beat pattern.
6. I play in response, but she turns to me and points at my chest saying “you’re supposed to not play piano because you don’t play piano.” “Oh”, I say. ‘I can speak but I can’t speak piano?” “Yep”, she says.
7. I ask if I can only speak drum, and she says “yeah”. I get out the drum, as she turns back to the piano. I settle on the floor behind her.
8. She plays the dog with a weighted and buoyant right arm, very intently, her head tilted, her body moving behind her arm.
9. Her back is to me, and she plays for an extended period of time with a complex rhythmical structure.
10. When I interject with the drum, she doesn’t stop playing, but spins around to look at me and then spins back. She continues to play, and when she reaches a long held note that sounds like it might be the end of a phrase, I beat my drum. She stops, turns, and looks at my drumming with a blank stare.
11. She is frozen in place, but snaps out of it the moment I finish my phrase.
12. She smiles, spins herself off the bench, and comes over to me, making dog sounds. She places the dog on top of the drum, and takes the mallet from me. I hold the drum in the air, and she beats the dog with her mallet, saying in a high voice “ouchie!”. I say “seriously!” and sing “ouchie ouchie ouchie” to the tune of our Hello Song. Eden just laughs.
13. The dog falls off the drum and down the front of me, into my lap. Eden laughs and drops down onto the floor in front of me, saying “the dog went down your throat!” as she pushes the dog underneath my leg.
14. I clear my throat, and sing the phrase again….I take the frog finger puppet out of the box as we talk about where the mom and dad are. She leans up on my legs, poking underneath my leg where the dog is, looking for it.
15. I sing “ba-ba-ba” as I wave the frog at her, and she puts her hands out to the side helplessly, saying to the frog “well, I couldn’t find the pink poodle today! My music teacher must have swallowed her!” The frog says “Imagine that!” and Eden falls back on her hand with a quiet “hm” and a smile. I say [as the frog] “what are we going to do about it?” and she says “I think we need to find a way” and, pointing at the frog very intently, “for you to walk down into her throat and get the doggie”. She points her finger emphatically to emphasize the importance of this.
16. I laugh, and look at the frog. “Walk down in my throat little froggie!” She is leaning toward me, smiling up into my face. I say “I wonder if the frog could play a magical song on the piano… “ Eden pats the back of one hand emphatically into the palm of the other and says that it needs to happen “quick, or the puppy dog will turn to stone!”
17. I say “the puppy dog will turn to stone? Then you’d better go play the magical song quick!” She gets up and goes directly to the piano, playing before she’s even on the bench.

18. I sing “the magical song is working…”; Eden keeps playing, but turns to watch me. I am pulling the dog slowly out of its place under my leg, as I continue to sing “I hear the puppy arriving, hooray, hooray!”

19. She takes the dog from me and I go to the piano, singing “now we play a celebration!” She takes one of the princess toys that are on the piano and plays together with it and the dog.

20. I play a chromatic pattern in contrary motion and then transition into Hot Cross Buns, while she bounces her body on the bench, lifting the toys in the air with a squealed “eee!” and dropping them on the keys in a rhythmical pattern.

21. Her playing provides a rhythmical backdrop for my melody, and makes the structure of the whole quite interesting.

22. On the second time through Hot Cross Buns, Eden turns to watch me. She is still playing her own keys, but sparsely. She is attending to me more than to herself.

23. On the third time through, she drops her toys, and—though she doesn’t attempt the same keys—imitates what I am doing by playing with her fingers on the keys.

24. On the fourth time, she picks her toys back up and sings an improvised melody in a high-pitched “doo doo doo” as she spins them through the air.

25. I decide to try a “formal” activity, and sing “play after me” on the melody of Hot Cross Buns. I keep a beat going with my singing and playing; she doesn’t pause but does what I ask when I sing “your turn”. She watches me as I play, and is ready to play when it’s her turn.

26. Her melody is mostly correct, though she adds a few extra repetitions of keys, and does not keep a consistent beat in part three.

27. We finish and I sing “do you know what song that was?” She looks at me and says “Hot cross buns.”

28. I sing “let’s play it again” and begin, but she takes the dog and bounces aggressively on the keys.

29. She puts the dog down on top of my hand and will not let me play, and when I continue to try, she lifts my arms into the air.

30. I say excitedly “what?! You’re not going to let me play my song?!” and she laughs, continuing to push my hands into the air. I keep trying and she keeps laughing, keeps flinging my hands in the air. Finally, she takes my arms and holds them down with her hands, one on each side of her. I say “oh dear”; she laughs, and I sing “this is the saddest day of my life” a few times, leaning my head on hers. She is still, waiting.

31. Finally, I say “ok, I guess Eden’s going to have to do all of the piano playing today.” She looks at me, laughs, and lets go of my hands to play one key.

32. I turn around and say “I’ll just have to play the bells.” I take the bells out of the box; she turns around on the bench and says “but you don’t even have your hands free!” I wiggle the bells onto my wrist; she laughs and says “that might be good!”, turns to the side and plays some keys.

33. I pick up different instruments, and for each, she comes over to me, reminds me that I don’t have arms or hands, and returns to the bench, smiling mischievously and laughing.
Eden, Episode 4:

1. The child is comfortable at the piano.
2. The child brings toys from her life into the lesson setting, and uses them musically, in pretend scenarios and on the piano.
3. The child and the adult play together but separately.
4. The child incorporates the piano and the toy into one play event.
5. The child is attuned to musical structure.
6. The child has clear ideas about the play, and directs the adult.
7. The child allows the adult to participate in the play, and to contribute ideas.
8. The child uses the animal to explore her physical approach to the piano.
9. The child is immersed in her idea, and uses complex musical structures.
10. The child is aware of the adult’s contribution, and notices it.
11. The child is attending to the musical contribution of the adult.
12. The child is drawn to the adult’s play object, and changes her play to incorporate it.
13. The child creates a pretend scenario spontaneously.
14. The child is physically comfortable with the adult, and their interaction is easy.
15. The child continues to evolve the pretend scenario, and has a clear picture of what is happening.
16. The child and the adult are enjoying the scenario, and work together to continue its evolution.
17. The child accepts the adult’s contribution to and direction of the pretend scenario.
18. The child is interested in the adult’s contribution to the scenario.
19. The child plays the piano in the context of the scenario and using toys in the environment.
20. The child uses the toys in the environment to play the piano in a rich and complex manner.
21. The child contributes musically interesting and complex ideas.
22. The child is aware of the adult’s musical contributions.
23. The child imitates the adult’s approach to the instrument.
24. The child remains childlike, even after noticing the adult is doing something different, and after exploration of it.
25. The child is able to feel the placement of the downbeat.
26. The child is able approximate the adult’s contribution, though not in complete imitation.
27. The child recognizes the musical material.
28. The child uses the toy to communicate her desire.
29. The child uses physicality and not words to communicate her desire.
30. The child is insistent in her choice.
31. When the adult acknowledges the child’s choice, the child participates freely.
32. The child turns the previous events into a new pretend scenario.
33. Despite behavior that would suggest she is unwilling to let the adult participate, the child is willing to let the adult participate.
34. The child evolves the pretend scenario, and is committed to it.
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Academic Preparation

2013 Doctor of Philosophy in Music Education
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
2004 Master of Music in Piano Performance and Pedagogy
Westminster Choir College of Rider University, Princeton, PA
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2009, August Gordon Institute of Music Learning, Winston-Salem, NC

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Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology Online
2010 Informal Piano Lesson Settings for Children Ages 3 to 5
Nurturing Children’s Musical Lives by Building Bridges,
ISME Conference Proceedings
2010 Music: An Option for Reducing Stress in Pregnancy and Labor
Perspectives
2010 The Development of Musical Thinking: What Learning Theories can Tell Us
Audea