

**Music Lessons for At-Risk Youth:  
Volunteer Teacher Perspectives**

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By

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## **Abstract**

A basic interpretive qualitative research design (Merriam, 2002) was used to explore the perceptions and observations of volunteer piano teachers providing weekly piano lessons to at-risk youth. Four volunteer piano teachers from two prairie cities who volunteered teaching three twenty-minute piano lessons a week for at least one year in a local school-based program, *Heart of the City Piano Program*, were interviewed. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings included three themes about the perceived benefits of piano lessons for the students – student self-motivation, student confidence, student sense of accomplishment – as well as three themes about distinguishing characteristics of the piano lessons – student focussed lessons, allowing students to be themselves, and positive role model relationships. Findings are discussed in relation to current research on at-risk youth and music education, and recommendations for further research and implications for practice are included.

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“Music is one of the greatest tools we have to reconnect ourselves to our inner spirits. If you feel frustrated, angry, or negative about certain areas of your life, you can use music to reenergize you from the inside out.” -Gabrielle Bernstein

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
The Present Study.....	4
Purpose and Research Question	
Rationale	
Definition of Terms.....	5
Thesis Organization	
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Background to Problem: Youth At-Risk of Leaving School.....	8
Music Education and Youth.....	10
Music Lessons.....	15
Type of Music.....	18
Summary.....	21
Present Study.....	21
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	22
Qualitative Research.....	22
Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research.....	23
Procedures and Participants.....	23

Data Collection Strategies.....	24
Trustworthiness.....	26
Social Validity.....	26
Subjectivity and Reflexivity.....	27
Adequacy of Data.....	27
Adequate amounts of evidence.....	28
Adequate variety of evidence.....	28
Interpretive status of evidence.....	29
Adequate disconfirming evidence and adequate discrepant case analysis....	29
Adequacy of Interpretation.....	29
Researcher Self-Reflection.....	30
Music.....	30
Books.....	30
Teaching.....	31
Assumptions.....	31
Ethical Considerations.....	32
Chapter 4: Results.....	34
<i>Heart of the City Piano Program Program</i> .....	34
How Students Are Selected.....	35
Program Challenges.....	36
Findings.....	38
The Participants.....	36
Common Vision of the Purpose of the Program.....	39



Volunteer Teacher Motivations.....	41
Views on the Value of Music and Music Study.....	42
Themes.....	45
Theme 1: Self-Motivation .....	46
Theme 2: Confidence .....	47
Theme 3: A Sense of Accomplishment.....	48
Theme 4: Student Focussed Lessons.....	50
Theme 5: Allowing Students to be Themselves.....	53
Theme 6: Positive Role Model Relationship.....	55
Negative Effects.....	57
Summary.....	59
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	60
Summary of Findings.....	60
Integration of Findings with Existing Literature.....	62
New Findings Not Reported in the Literature.....	62
Findings in the Literature but not in the Present Study.....	60
Findings Confirmed in the Literature.....	64
Preparation to Teach At-Risk Youth.....	67
The Importance of Music.....	67
Strengths of the Current Study.....	68
Limitations of the Current Study.....	69

Implications for Future Research.....	69
Implications for Educators and <i>Heart of the City Piano Program</i> .....	70
Music Educators.....	70
Classroom Educators.....	71
<i>Heart of the City Piano Program</i> .....	71
Researcher Reflection.....	72
Conclusion.....	73
References.....	74
Appendix A: Letter of Invitation.....	78
Appendix B: Call to Participate.....	79
Appendix C: Consent Form.....	80
Appendix D: Data/Transcript Release Form.....	82
Appendix E: Interview Questions.....	83

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **“Make love to each other... through the music” – Don Harris**

When you hear a good speaker speak, they often touch on your previous experience and emotions. Such was the case with Don Harris, a former professor of music at the University of Saskatchewan who presented to a group of high school students on a music retreat in fall 2002. I was in the audience, and one thought he presented has stuck with me ever since. Don said, “Make love to each other...” followed by a long pause in which I hung onto his words, “...through the music.”

Music is a way for humans to portray raw human emotion in a way that all can understand. Words cannot describe emotion in the ways that music can make people feel it. Music has had a significant impact on my life, and the lives of many others who choose to experience it by listening, playing, composing, conducting, improvising and more. I know this because music is something that I have continued to enjoy and be a part of throughout my life. When I think about the most impactful moments of my life, the majority of them involve music. In circles of musicians, a common topic of conversation is music that has been significant in your life and for your growth as a musician.

Looking back on my own life, there were a number of music moments that have led me to the path I am on today. At age five I began to study music, specifically electronic organ. As I grew older, music allowed me to experience feelings more deeply, and dedicate more time to the quest of perfection, which can never be fulfilled. By high school, music became a way to deal with situations that I had never experienced before. Music became a way to experience and deal with emotions.

My friends who are musicians often talk about having a “musical experience.”

Personally, I describe a musical experience as a natural high that may contain an out-of-body experience, intense emotional sensations, euphoria, or a sense of fulfillment. During this kind of experience, I feel like I transcend time, becoming unaware of anything outside of the musical experience. Afterwards, I often experience feelings of fulfillment, being cleansed, and having a sense of calm. The first strong musical experience I had that involved listening to music occurred at Banff where I had been vigorously preparing for a music festival. I had been prepared to participate in almost every musical group from my school. One requirement was to complete a number of listening assignments, and although I was exempt from most of the assignment due to how much I was performing, another student and I chose to attend the festival while the other students participated in other activities. The highlight of that experience was listening to a choir from Edmonton who sang *When David Heard* by Eric Whitacre. This music is texturally dense, with a large range of pitch within the bottom and top lines. Something special happened with those performing and listening that day. The vocalists, in addition to the packed audience, were in tears. For some, the religious content and lyrics of the music may have contributed to the intense emotional experience that was collectively experienced (as illustrated by tears and expressions of other audience members). Personally, I had the experience of being consumed in the present moment, which combined with heightened emotions, tears included. The experience lasted for almost the entire piece of music (15 minutes) and I was fully present in the room as emotions were heightened. Although this was not my first intense musical experience, this was the first time that I had such an intense experience while listening to music.

In addition to heightened emotions, these musical experiences have often included experiencing the chills, or having the hair rise on one’s arms and according to the research

literature, there are different contributing factors (e.g., Privette, 1983; Salimpoor et al., 2011). First, the vibrations of the music are felt by the body. For example, with the pitches of extremity, as well as intense volume of music, I can consciously feel the vibrations of music. I relate this to the experience of relaxation time during a Kundalini Yoga “gong bath” (playing of the gong for long sustained periods of time) where you can feel the vibrations of the gong throughout the body, which causes intense relaxation. According to Salimpoor et al. (2011) there is a significant increased dopamine response during music experiences. The physiological response to music such as the chills, are an evident part of the peak experience of music. Peak experiences with music helps to explain why music is so important to many people and cultures. Privette associated three key things with heightened music experiences: peak performance, peak experience, and flow. Peak performance is a high level of functioning during an activity: e.g., a musician really learning and being able to perform a piece of music at a high level can lead to intense musical experiences. Peak experience involves great joy, or ecstasy that is extraordinary. Flow is the term coined by Csikszentmihalyi where one has an intrinsically rewarding feeling. For a flow experience to occur, the right circumstances must be created such that the challenge of the activity matches the skill. Regardless of what might cause musical experiences, they are powerful, and these experiences have helped to engage me in music. Music is a way to cope with emotions, and a way to experience emotions.

Music has also been a way to experience culture, and learn about people from different places, or different times in life; that is, to authentically be able to think from the perspective of someone else in a different situation. Music allowed me to consistently pursue a higher standard. There are no borders, no limitations except for time, and experience. Music was somewhere to learn about reading what was on the page, but also working on improvisation and exploring

making up music on my own. Music also assisted me in self-exploration and building self-esteem.

The act of teaching at-risk youth is one which requires much patience and an appreciation for the unpredictable. Through my experiences as a resource room teacher working with many at-risk youth, I aspired to know more about what could be done to build resiliency within these teenagers. I noticed how these students often had heightened emotions, experienced frequent upsetting situations and often lacked coping mechanisms for what they are going through. I have seen dramatic changes in these youth that resulted from identifying and being encouraged to pursue a passion. For example, there was one student who was not at all engaged in being in school but was able to engage in the sport of wrestling and subsequently that positive involvement in a school activity was helpful in engaging the student in school. I have observed students becoming more self-confident when they find something that they are good at, such as beading or art. Teachers can see and note these changes in the youth that they instruct. Teachers can perceive changes in their students, and are often watching the impacts of interventions which they utilize with youth. My experiences as a musician and educator helped lead me to the present study.

## **The Present Study**

### **Purpose and Research Question**

The research study looked at the introduction of classical piano study with at-risk youth from the perception of those who teach these elementary students. Those who are at-risk of leaving school without graduating from Grade 12 may experience many challenges throughout their life, including unemployment. By mitigating the risks that children and youth experience, which lead them to leave school, perhaps strains on support systems in society can be lessened.

Music is a unique and promising medium for engaging youth. The present study investigated the following question: How do volunteer piano teachers providing classical piano lessons for at-risk youth describe their experiences with the children?

## **Rationale**

Music research has often focussed on the academic benefits of studying music. This includes the cognitive benefits such as improved linguistic abilities (e.g., phonological processing), second language acquisition, and in some aspects of reading (Schellenberg & Weiss, 2013), as well as general skills such as discipline which can be developed through music (Savage, 2012). Although these focusses are often cited as important reasons that people should study music, it is important to recall the significance of music as an aesthetic medium that is worth studying for its aesthetic benefits. Just as music has had a positive impact on my education and development, music could be a positive factor in the development of other youth. This study focused on at-risk youth and their involvement in the study of classical piano lessons taught by volunteer teachers as a part of the *Heart of the City Piano Program*.

## **Definition of Terms**

### **At-Risk Youth**

Students who are at-risk are youth who struggle at school, and are at-risk of not completing school due to a behavioral crisis that can create physical, social or psychological harm. This definition combines contributions from Ingersoll and Orr (1988) – “For most young people who have a behavioral crisis that places them at-risk for physical, social or psychological harm...” (p. 7) – and Bloch (1989) who indicated that at-risk youth are those who are likely to drop out, or have dropped out of high school.

## **Classical Piano Lessons**

Classical Piano Lessons are one-on-one lessons using a piano method book in order to learn the piano. The music studied is typically common tunes (e.g., *Mary Had a Little Lamb*) to classical pieces of music (e.g., *Theme from the Ninth Symphony*). According to Uszler (1996), independent music teachers focus lessons on classical music training rather than general understandings of music:

Classical music training...requires knowledge of multiple music styles and performance practices...(and) focus almost entirely on Western classical art music. Since such music represents high artistic achievement that cuts across several cultures and many centuries, it rightly forms the bulk of serious music study...To most people, "music" means country and western, rock, blues, soul, and easy listening. (p. 25)

## **Music Education**

Music education includes all courses involving music that are taught in schools with the aims of developing musical communities, transforming musical traditions, enriching culture, benefitting society, and ennobling people (Jorgensen, 2002).

## **Music Therapy**

According to the Canadian Association of Music Therapy:

Music therapy is the skillful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Music has nonverbal, creative, structural, and emotional qualities. These are used in the therapeutic relationship to facilitate contact, interaction, self-awareness, learning, self-expression, communication, and personal development. (CAMT, 1994)

## ***Heart of the City Piano Program***

The *Heart of the City Piano Program* was formed in Saskatoon in 1995 by a Saskatoon music teacher Richard Dubé with the purpose of providing structured one-on-one piano lessons



to at risk youth. The program has grown to six branches across Canada all with the shared goal of providing an opportunity for students to participate in piano lessons. The board of directors and piano teachers are all volunteers who assist in providing the lessons.

### **Thesis Organization**

In the following chapters I look at the research literature which is available on these topics (Chapter 2). I then describe the research methodology and procedures that were used in this study (Chapter 3). Findings are presented in Chapter 4 followed by a discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The following chapter overviews literature in the pertinent areas of youth at-risk for not completing high school, the importance of keeping youth in school, and possibilities for music education, specifically music lessons.

### **Background to Problem: Youth At-Risk of Leaving School**

According to Statistics Canada (2010), 8.5% of Canadian students aged 20-24 did not complete high school between 2009/2010. Although the percentage of students who did not complete high school has dropped since the previous statistics collected for 1993/1994, Saskatchewan has a lower graduation rate compared to the national average (Statistics Canada, 2010). For the population in Saskatchewan who are between 20 to 24 years old, 88.4 percent of the population has graduated from high school compared to the national average of 89.5% for the same age group (Statistics Canada, 2010). Aboriginal students are disproportionately represented in the group of students that do not complete high school. According to Statistics Canada (2011), 34.5 percent of aboriginal people in Canada aged 20-24 did not complete high school. This is an even more critical issue for aboriginal people in Canada because the average wage for those students who do not complete high school is lower and therefore they experience a higher rate of poverty (Howe, 2011).

There are implications to Canadian society when students do not complete their high school education. In 2004, Canadian students who did not complete high school had a higher unemployment rate than those who did complete high school (Bowlby, 2008). These students are also at risk for losing their jobs in times of recession and are more likely to be looking for work. In the United States it is reported that higher educational attainment levels correlated with “lower rates of incarceration, single motherhood, and joblessness” (Gewertz, 2009). In terms of

USA dollars, it was calculated that those who do not complete high school cost society over \$5,000 per year, whereas a high school graduate contributes approximately \$287,000 to society per year (Gewertz, 2009).

In 1992, it was reported that about 30% of Canada's youth do not graduate from high school, which at the time was believed to cost Canada about \$4 billion dollars a year in "lost earnings, forgone taxes, and increased spending to address related social problems" (Lafleur, 1992). In 2008, Hankivsky, currently the director of the Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy at Simon Fraser University, Canada and a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Gender and Health Research Chair, estimated that the annual earning loss to these students is \$10.3 billion. Hankivsky further estimated that additional annual health costs were approximately \$23.8 billion dollars; additional annual social assistance costs were approximately \$969 million dollars, and additional annual justice system costs were approximately \$350 million (Hankivsky, 2008). Even though the goal would be for all students to complete high school, Hankivsky (2008) suggested that even a one percent increase in graduates would have a large fiscal benefit to Canada of saving over \$7.7 billion dollars. Within the group of students leaving school before graduation, there is a higher percentage of aboriginal students, and also a higher percentage of male students (Hankivsky, 2008). In addition there are more rural students who drop out, and a higher number of students from Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta (Hankivsky, 2008)

According to Howe (2011), aboriginal people stand to have larger gains associated with higher levels of education than non-aboriginal people. With high school completion, aboriginal people have a lower average wage than non-aboriginal people. However, the wage gap shrinks,

and eventually at the highest levels of education, aboriginal people have higher wages than their non-aboriginal peers.

Hankivsky (2008) suggested there are many benefits to completing schooling. The more education a person has the longer the life expectation. With a higher amount of education, there is a correlation with more effective contraceptives and attainment of the desired family size. Tied to this, with increased education there is a decrease in family size. With increased education, there comes a decrease in crime. There is a correlation between an increase in education and an increase in savings rate. As well, an increase in education has a correlation with increased donations of money and time to charities. The single handed, best way to aid society is to have more of the population complete high school.

Each student who does not complete high school has a different story, and a different pathway which led to an unsuccessful attempt at graduation. For every student who does not complete high school, there are other at-risk students who do graduate. At-risk youth who are identified early, may participate in a variety of programs. Students may gain skills such as self-esteem (Schuler, 1992), and attitudes such as engagement in schools (McMahon, 2007) through their experiences in these programs which can help to influence their ability to complete school.

### **Music Education and Youth**

As a group, teachers have an important perspective in terms of working with all kinds of youth including those at risk of leaving school before graduating. Music teachers are a group of teachers who have a unique position given their musical interactions with youth. Music has many qualities that may specifically help to engage students in the classroom, increase resiliency and keep students in school. For example, music can help provide coping mechanisms to manage

stress. In 1994, King and Schwabenlender reported that through music, students are able to develop self-control and have a way to deal with frustration. Based on a survey of the literature on how to support students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) as well as at-risk youth, King and Schwabenlender identified several strategies: socio-emotional management, bibliotherapy, expressive arts, and leisure (i.e., time spent by the students' choice) were some of the different ways reported in the literature. Music was identified as helping to support these students through expressive arts and leisure. These authors argued that it is important that students with EBD as well as at-risk participate in music as music allows the students to develop emotionally, as well to express their emotions.

More recently, Saarikallo, and Erkkila, (2007) conducted a grounded theory study with 8 Finnish adolescents to look at music and emotional regulation in adolescents. Selected with purposeful sampling, four females and four males were divided into two groups each with an equal number of males and females: adolescents who played music and those who liked to listen to music. Data were collected using two group interviews that included each adolescent selecting and bringing a piece of music to one of these sessions. Participants also completed follow up forms documenting their participation in a musical activity; a total of 120 forms were completed. Grounded theory analysis generated a model showing how adolescents can use musical activities for emotional regulation. The adolescents selected specific music based on the situation at hand, and listening to music was selected as the best method of emotional regulation. However, the adolescents also had physical experiences of the music when the music promoted dance or was listened to at high levels so the adolescents could feel the music more strongly. Importantly, in order for any of the musical activities to be helpful they had to be voluntary and fit the adolescents' current state of emotion. Saarikallo, and Erkkila, (2007) further found that there

were three ways that music helped to aid in emotional regulation: valence, intensity and clarity. Valence referred to music involvement that creates positive emotions and helps to abandon negative emotions. Intensity is the level of strength of the emotional reaction, and clarity is the ability for the adolescents to form emotions from the music. The reasons that music was helpful in emotional regulation were varied, however the main goal was improving mood. Music was not only helpful in allowing emotional release but also encouraging reflection. Teens are able to reflect on their life in the framework provided by the music, musically and also through the lyrics in songs.

Music education in elementary and secondary schools offers an opportunity for students to systematically study and experience music. Robinson (2004) interviewed seven master music educators, who were held in high regard among their colleagues, about their experiences teaching at-risk youth. The purpose was to identify personal qualities and teaching strategies for working with at-risk youth. Robinson (2004) found that the teachers identified different strategies: ensuring the curriculum was relevant to students, developing personal relationships with students, treating students with respect, ensuring students experience some success, being hard but fair, and being sure to take into account what students were dealing with outside the classroom. Robinson indicated that the teachers believed there were intellectual and emotional benefits to music education. For all youth, music is valuable because it allows the youth to experience their inner self in a special way. Although the individual teachers approached youth differently in the classroom; all the teachers observed that music can build self-esteem. The teachers also indicated the importance of maintaining high standards with at-risk youth, an observation also noted by Schuler (1992) who identified that high expectations in music were helpful for at-risk youth

Music teachers may also be well positioned to engage students with a particular learning style. Responsiveness to learning styles is an important way to develop resiliency with youth labelled “at-risk” (Hanson, 1991), and according to Vacha-Haase and Thompson (2002), students with a particular learning style, a sensing-feeling type, are more likely to leave school before graduation. A learning style is a way that a person best learns, and there are many theories of learning styles. Vacha-Haase and Thompson (2002) drew on Carl Jung who described four types of personalities: sensing thinking, sensing feeling, intuitive thinking and intuitive feeling. Feeling is a part of the Judgement style, which means that people interpret their perceptions by the feelings they invoke (Vacha-Haase, & Thompson, 2002). These students tend to be very concerned about personal relationships and are excited by listening to others personal experiences. Presumably, music teachers are well positioned to help engage sensing feeling types due to the subject matter at hand, music, which is strongly associated with feelings.

A large scale study by McMahon (2007) provided evidence that might be interpreted as supporting the importance of incorporating music and other art forms into schools. Over six thousand Canadian students, parents and principals participated in the study, which compared Learning through the Arts (established by the Royal Conservatory of Music), with a control school. Findings indicated that at-risk students in the Learning through the Arts program seemed to enjoy school more and were more engaged in school than at-risk students in the control school. The pre/post design of this study looked at student attitudes in regards to arts, extracurricular activities as well as student engagement. The types of instruments used in this study were both qualitative and quantitative. These assessments included standardized assessments, scored writing samples, surveys, and interviews. The engagement results were particularly true of females (McMahon, 2007).

The potential contributions to be made in music education were noted as early as 1991 when Duerksen and Darrow wrote about various risks that inhibit at-risk youth, and suggested that there are numerous ways that a music classroom can help to mitigate these risks. The risks included: poor self-discipline, shaky self-esteem, low motivation, ineffective learning, use of alcohol and drugs, and lack of rudimentary survival skills. Music education and music therapy were proposed as a means to help mitigate these risks. For example, students learn and practice self-discipline within the music classroom as they develop and master musical skills. Providing the opportunity to use music for self-expression can help to develop the feelings of self-worth. As one of the risks is motivation, music can be used to motivate but also reinforce. Music can engage youth who are not learning effectively; serve as a means for comfort, and help communication with others. Instead of turning to alcohol and drugs as a way of feeling good, these youth may find that good feeling through the study of music. The authors, a music educator and a music therapist, also believed that music therapists and music educators have complementary skills. Music therapy is a process of using music to accomplish a goal meant to “improve, maintain or restore a state of well-being” (Duerksen & Darrow, 1991, p. 47). The work that music therapists do can also be classified as educational when they are able to help students master content or skills which are relevant to the curriculum. Music educators can employ music therapy techniques to help promote a positive affect for the students in the classroom.

Seventeen year later, Olson (2008) suggested that although there is a general belief that music can help enhance the resiliency of at-risk youth, there has been little research to back up these statements and that a body of research is needed to support these claims. In 2004, Hodges reported that the information often cited as proof of music being advantageous to at-risk youth is



not based on sound research. Hodges proposed that further research be conducted on music and at-risk youth; specifically, if music can help to promote resiliency in at-risk youth.

### **Music Lessons**

Several researchers have focused on the extra-musical benefits of classical music lessons. Schader (2002) investigated parental attitudes about music lessons and found that parents believed that music lessons are associated with extra-musical benefits. Parents reported more intrinsic benefits to studying music than extrinsic benefits, and expressed beliefs that music would allow the development of positive attributes such as intelligence, self-discipline, diligence and academic performance. Interestingly, although parents of students who were studying music were initially most interested in these general education gains, Schader found that as students progressed in their music lessons, the parents became more focused on the development of musical skills

Some research has focused on acquisition of academic skills through music lessons. For example, Piro and Ortiz (2009) looked at the effect that music lessons had on second-grade students. A quasi-experimental study was completed contrasting an experimental group who received two years of music lessons with a control group that did not receive music lessons. Results showed that there were significant differences in scores between the two groups. Those who had the music lessons scored significantly better on vocabulary and verbal sequencing according to two subtests from the Structure of Intellect measures.

Portowitz and Klein (2007) explored scholastic achievement and social adaptability associated with MISC-MUSIC, an approach to music education used in Israel. The MISC-MUSIC approach is meant to increase intelligence, sensitivity and social compliance of students

identified as at-risk or with special needs. Based on data collected over a two year period with eight participants in the program, the researchers concluded that there is a very strong link between music education, scholastic achievement and social adaptability. The participants were between 4 and 10 years of age, and included six student with Down syndrome and two children with learning disabilities. While working with children, the researchers noted that the students engaged and were interested in music, and that interest carried out into their lives. The involvement in music was seen at the program as well as at home. As well there were significant increases in the specific cognitive function of these students. The researchers presented a number of ways that one can utilize music to assist students such as listening to music as a way to develop focus, encourage complex thinking, and express feelings, as well as creating music in order to encourage creativity and help with self-regulation (Portowitz & Klein, 2007).

Walker and Boyce-Tillman (2002) used a case study to investigate the potential therapeutic impact of music lessons for four students with anxiety disorders aged 7-16 years. Four students were selected based on their willingness to participate, ability to get to lessons, being school aged and over 7 years old with non-violent behaviour, as well as having the involved medical team recommend music lessons as an appropriate intervention (Walker & Boyce-Tillman, 2002). The students chose the instrument they wanted to learn. Data were collected from the music teachers who kept anecdotal notes. In addition, the therapist kept record of any changes they perceived. The parents, students and teachers were interviewed at the end of the lessons. Following the thirty weeks of half hour lessons, three of four of the students required no further treatment for their anxiety symptoms. Findings also indicated that throughout the study there were improvements in the anxiety related symptoms.

Vocal music lessons have been shown to reduce stress level in university level students (Wiens, Janzen, Mott, & Claypool, 2003). In a study of vocal music lessons, 11 graduate students in counselling and school psychology were recruited, plus one undergraduate engineering student. All the students reported high stress levels, and all had tried a type of stress reducing activity. In terms of singing skills, some of the participants had difficulty with pitch matching, as well as a lack of self-confidence in their singing ability. All participants participated in pre- and post- questionnaires, vocal lessons as well as post-interviews. Some of the participants were a part of a post-study interview and debrief. The students participated in two half hour lessons each week for fourteen weeks. However, two participants with scheduling difficulties had one longer lesson per week. The study results from the questionnaire were analysed using a *t*-test to look for correlations in data. Interviews provided rich qualitative data that was analyzed thematically. The quantitative data showed a statistically significant reduction in stress. Qualitative findings included twelve themes: enjoyment of the experience, greater meaning in life, sense of community, increased skill development, positive physical health changes, paradigm (cognitive) shift, voice identity, finding one's own voice, positive self-expression and self-growth, increased emotional sensitivity, generalizeability of the skill to other areas, and having a holistic experience (Wiens et al, 2003).

Of course, if youth are to benefit from music lessons, they must stay with them. Mackworth-Young (1990) used action research to explore pupil-centred learning in piano lessons because of her interest in the fact that one of the main reasons students quit piano lessons is that they did not enjoy the music or they did not enjoy their teacher. The conventional piano lesson was described by Mackworth-Young as being one where the teacher directs the lesson, and the student is a dependent learner. Conversely, pupil-directed lessons involve the student directing

the lesson. She stated that, “The piano lesson may be a place of high emotional intensity...music itself affects the emotions.” (Mackworth-Young, p. 74). Last, she talks about pupil-centered lessons where the student’s emotions and interests are the central focus in the lessons. The teachers are responsive to the student’s indications of preferences in the lessons. Findings led her to advocate for pupil-centered piano lessons. The study had four students, two who were female, and two who were male. They ranged in age from 11-14 years old. They were monitored over 10 weeks of lessons and throughout three different lesson styles: teacher-directed lessons, pupil-directed lessons and pupil-centered lessons. Teacher-directed lessons are those where the teacher is in control, the pupil is subordinate. The teacher directs what they do in the lessons including the materials and any help or information needed. The pupil-directed lessons placed the pupil in control: “The pupil decides what to do, when, how much and asks the teacher for suggestions, materials, help or information as he wants it” (Mackworth-Youth, p. 76). Finally, pupil-centered is when the pupil’s emotions and interests are the major consideration and the teacher is responsive to the pupil. For all but one of the participants the pupil-centered lessons were more enjoyable, featured more interest, positive attitudes, motivation and progress. All participants reported a better relationship with their teacher.

### **Type of Music**

Classical music, in general, has been shown to have cognitive benefits on the people who study it, or utilize it in listening (e.g., Costa-Giomi, 1999; Dege et al., 2011; Piro, & Ortiz, 2009; Schellenberg, 2006; Schellenberg, 2004; Wetter, Koerner, & Schwaninger, 2008). Schellenberg and Weiss (2013) have provided a comprehensive review of the research in this area. In brief, they concluded that music aptitude is associated with improved linguistic abilities such as phonological processing, second language acquisition, and in reading. They also identified a

strong association between music aptitude and performance in school. Their summary of research indicated that evidence does not support what is often known as the Mozart Effect, and that the cognitive benefits of listening to music are actually associated with emotional aspects of music listening that allow the listener to better engage in cognitive tasks. The benefits of listening are not limited to classical music; instead, the listener benefits when the music is music that they like, music that is favored by the listener. Schellenberg and Weiss (2013) also reported that although there are potential benefits, there are also potential detriments associated with cognitive benefits which are more prominent in children. Further details of particular studies are available at <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/~w3psygs/SchellenbergWeissPoM.pdf>

Other research has focused on the impact of using different types of music. Based on a study conducted with 125 elementary students participating in a six-week music program, Ward-Stenman (2006) concluded that at-risk children related better to music of their own cultural background. Ten university students took part in consecutive weekly lessons which included general music, one choir class, and one recorder class. The students were 55% Hispanic, and 45% African-American and the majority (90%) were eligible for the free lunch program. Family background surveys, exit questionnaires and teacher questionnaires provided data that included asking the students about their favourite times of music, as well as the favourite pieces which they studied in their music classes. Findings indicated the importance of familiar cultural music.

Learning popular percussive music or choral non-classical music was the focus of Shields (2001) study. A pre-post rating scale was completed by 150 youth identified as at-risk who participated in either a percussion ensemble or choral music over 16 weeks. Findings showed significant positive changes in musical competence and social acceptance as well, a correlation between self-perceptions of musical competence and global self-worth. Shields (2001)

concluded that music is an important intervention for at-risk youth from an urban center. Shields found that the mentorship as well as performance aspects are important components of the program. Throughout the experience, the teacher acted as a mentor for the students in the program, paying attention to the musical and non-musical needs of the student and when an opportunity presented itself, used mentorship strategies in order to work with the students on the areas of need (Shields, 2001, p. 277).

A case study of students engaging in a drum circle reported increased self-esteem, increased interest and longer playing times for the youth (Snow & D'Amico, 2010). The ten youth (6 females and 4 males) who participated were labelled at-risk because of criminal issues or difficult homes. The participants had 12 drumming sessions, of which half were recorded and transcribed. In addition, there were written observations and questionnaires. Researchers noticed that over time the participants would play for longer periods of time during drumming circles, and were less hesitant.

Rap music was used in study by Wang (2010) to help aboriginal youth living in Edmonton, Canada attend school more regularly and after leaving the program many students engaged in assisting within their community. Between 2003 and 2006, one hundred and fifty students attending the Boyle Street School took a combination of academic and elective classes. In one class, they learned about rap music and were able to create their own rap music. Data were collected using attendance records as well as interviews with participants, and analysis showed that students who were a part of the music class attended school more regularly. Following their involvement with the rap class, many of these students continued to work in the inner city and some received awards for their participation. Their involvement in the community included

mentoring other at-risk youth and even sharing their knowledge of hip-hop culture through facilitation within university classes.

### **Summary**

High school graduation is something that has important implications for society. As a group, students who fail to complete high school have higher rates of poverty, incarceration and unemployment, as well as place an increased financial burden on society. Music has been found to be impactful in a variety of ways. For example, research shows that music has been used with at-risk youth to successfully engage them in school (Wang, 2010). Other research has focussed on the academic benefits associated with classical music (Schellenberg & Weiss, 2013), and the impact of using other types of music (Shields, 2001; Snow & D'Amico, 2010; Ward-Stenman, 2006). This study looks at the gap between these two key areas of research focussing on traditional piano study and at risk youth.

### **Present Study**

The present study looked at the introduction of classical piano study with youth identified as at-risk for leaving school before graduation from the perspective of those who teach these elementary school students. The guiding research question was: How do volunteer piano teachers providing classical piano lessons for at-risk youth describe their experiences with the children?

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The following chapter provides information about the methodology used for this study. First, qualitative inquiry within the constructivism paradigm is discussed, followed by an overview of Merriam's (2002) research approach of basic interpretive qualitative research. In addition, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis are presented. The chapter ends with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

#### **Qualitative Research**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) described qualitative research as “a broad approach to the study of social phenomena” (p. 3), specifically the intricate and complex nature of human phenomena. Qualitative researchers tend to “view social worlds as holistic and complex, engage in systematic reflection on the conduct of the research, remain sensitive to their own biographies/social identities and how they shape the study” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 8); furthermore, qualitative researchers “rely on complex reasoning that moves dialectically between deduction and induction” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 10). Qualitative research also focuses on research as a snapshot of a particular time and place and within a specific context (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research is focussed on the context in which the phenomena occurred, as the phenomena is always changing and evolving throughout the process and is interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 2001). Many qualitative researchers focus on understanding phenomena with the assumption that “meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 2002, p. 3). This assumption represents a constructivist paradigm. A constructivist paradigm understands knowledge as occurring through interactions between people, co-constructed and then interpreted (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). In a constructivist paradigm, the researcher plays a critical role in developing an understanding and knowledge. Thus as the



researcher in the present study, I played an important role in terms of intentionally using my own experiences and perceptions to understand and interpret findings. This differs from objectivism in that objectivism focuses on the researcher being removed and separate to the study (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).

### **Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research**

This study was designed using Merriam's (2002) basic interpretive qualitative research. Basic interpretive qualitative research has a number of characteristics including interest in "understanding the meaning" of phenomena (p. 4); having "the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis..." (p. 5); using inductive analysis; and reporting findings that are "richly descriptive" (p. 5). The present study incorporated these characteristics. As researcher, I was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. There was no prior hypothesis, and the research process was inductive, which means that data were used to generate and determine the categories, rather than starting with pre-decided categories (Patton, 2002). Finally, the findings were intended to provide a thick description of the phenomena which reveals a more accurate reflection of the phenomena and how the participants experienced and interpreted the phenomena.

### **Procedures and Participants**

Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is selecting participants who are able to "provide the most information rich data possible" (Morrow, 2006, p. 6) because of their experience with the phenomenon being studied. There were two criteria for inclusion: (a) that the person had taught in Saskatoon or Regina's *Heart of the City Piano Program* and (b) had taught for at least one year and within the past five years.

I contacted the board members from the Saskatoon and Regina *Heart of the City Piano Programs* for approval, and they distributed a letter to potential participants. The potential participants were welcome to pass on the information to other qualified participants, in a snowball sampling strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I received emails from two teachers at the Regina site, and went to Regina in February 2013 to conduct those interviews. Following no additional participant interest, ethics approval was gained to post an announcement on the University of Saskatchewan's student server in order to try and recruit more participants. Within two days, I heard from two participants who had previously taught within the Saskatoon *Heart of the City Piano Program* site. All interviews were conducted prior to the end of April 2013.

In total, four participants were interviewed and included in this study. This provided for some range of experiences as well the opportunity to spend time acquiring detail and depth. I hoped for a larger group of participants, and tried a variety of different recruitment methods over six months. However it was challenging to recruit participants and only four participants came forward and volunteered.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

Individual in-depth interviews were used to generate data. An interview guide (see Appendix A) was used, that is, I prepared a list of topics or questions ahead of time (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The purpose of these in-depth interviews was to acquire a thick description of the phenomena in question, that is, the volunteer piano teachers' perceptions about the impact of classical piano lessons for students who are identified as youth at risk for leaving school before graduation. The interview guide included questions about teachers' observations and perceptions of the students they had taught.

A pilot interview was conducted with a friend so I could practice the questions, and receive feedback from the friend. The pilot interview did not identify any areas of concern, and therefore no modifications were made to the interview questions.

The classroom where the volunteer piano teacher taught was the preferred location of the interview because I thought it would be convenient to the teachers, and might also assist in the teachers remembering details about teaching the lessons. In actuality, two interviews were conducted at coffee shops, one interview in a student lounge on a university campus, and the fourth was conducted over Skype. As two of the participants were not currently teaching in the program, it was not practical to conduct the interview in a former teaching location. For the current teachers, the interviews were conducted on the weekend and therefore it was not ideal to conduct the interviews at the school where they volunteered as a piano teacher.

The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, and then were fully transcribed. The transcription focused on words and emotional reactions. As well, I had a notebook where I took the time to jot down important ideas heard during the interview. These notes were supplementary and were used to help with the researcher journal I completed after the interviews. Throughout the interview I used member checking by paraphrasing, summarizing, and using direct clarification through questioning to confirm what was being said by the participants. Interviews ranged from 45-90 minute with the majority of interviews being around 45 minutes. This time frame allowed for adequate rapport to be generated with participants as well they had time in order to provide information and tell the stories about their personal experience in teaching. After each interview, the interview was transcribed, and a copy of the transcription was provided to the participant, along with a number of clarification questions. The transcription of the interviews was given back to the participants to confirm acceptance about my

understanding of what they said. The participants authorized a release of their transcripts form for use in analysis and write up by signing a data release form.

Data were analyzed thematically. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), this kind of analysis involves identifying themes in the interview transcripts that are consistent across the teachers' interviews. This thematic analysis identified what is common among all of the teachers who are interviewed, as well as themes that are common amongst a few teachers. Data were compared from one interview to another, and coded so that different categories were identified. These categories are analysed to determine if there are larger themes that the categories fit into; in which case, findings were described in terms of main themes and sub-themes. There were two broad themes: the benefits for the students, and the nature of the lessons. Each larger theme incorporated three smaller themes.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is based on identifying criteria that help readers determine if the results of the researcher are believable (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Morrow (2005) suggested that there are a number of universal criteria that can be used to determine the trustworthiness of all qualitative research studies. These criteria include: social validity, subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data, and adequacy of interpretation.

#### **Social Validity**

Social validity refers to how relevant the study is to today's society. If a study is not pertinent, then the purpose for conducting the study is questioned (Morrow, 2005). The study has social validity because of the number of students at-risk of not completing high school,

which has a significant effect on society. Therefore, if this study can help to provide insight into ways to help keep students in school, it will be beneficial to society.

### **Subjectivity and Reflexivity**

The concepts of subjectivity and reflexivity are unique to qualitative research. Within qualitative research, it is to be expected that there is researcher bias, or what many qualitative researchers call “subjectivity.” Within the constructivist paradigm, it is expected that the researcher participates in the co-construction of meaning (Morrow, 2005). Bracketing and reflexivity are two ways to work with subjectivity, or what Ahern (1999) describes as “fruit from the same tree” (p. 410). Bracketing involves a “monitoring of self” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20) that is done in order to set aside one’s subjectivity as much as possible and increase one’s openness to participants’ perspectives. Reflexivity, on the other hand, involves incorporating and using one’s subjectivity to strengthen the analysis. Reflexivity is self-reflectiveness (Morrow, 2005, p. 5). Writing in a researcher journal, and utilizing “peer debriefers” (p. 254) and a “community of practice” (p. 254) are ways to provide different perspectives and encourage the researcher to think through the analysis (Morrow, 2005). In the present study, I utilized a researcher journal, and bracketed and monitored myself throughout the research. I also used peer debriefing by seeking out “knowledgeable and available colleagues” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 211) to get feedback on the thematic analysis and using a community of practice, that is, engaging in critical discussion with someone knowledgeable in the area (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

### **Adequacy of Data**

Morrow (2005) suggested that one should consider five aspects of adequacy of data which are: “adequate amounts of evidence, adequate variety in kinds of evidence, interpretive status of evidence, adequate disconfirming evidence, and adequate discrepant case analysis.”

(Erickson as cited in Morrow, 2005, p. 255). A limited population to recruit from and a limited response to recruitment as well as my limited resources as a graduate student constrained my efforts but I considered these criteria in doing the best I could to meet these standards. The variety of the research subjects allowed for further adequacy of data. Also, each teacher taught multiple students and was able to provide information based on at least a year of experience which led to the participants having what I judged as adequate data to present.

**Adequate amounts of evidence.** Within qualitative research, the importance lies on the quality of data that is acquired more than the quantity of data. Morrow suggested that the quality, length and depth of the interviews is the key factor in generating an adequate amount of evidence (2005). It is important to have a specific strategy in interviewing which is articulated prior to the commencement of research (Morrow, 2005). Providing multiple interviews for example allows for the richness and depth which is required for the adequate amount of evidence (Polkinghorne, 2005). The present study utilized semi-structured interview where basic questions were used to provide the structure and follow up questions were used to encourage the desired depth and richness of data. I also followed up with specific questions after transcribing the first interview.

**Adequate variety of evidence.** Morrow (2005) suggested that multiple sources of information or literature are necessary in order to have adequate variety of evidence. Using just one source of information creates limitations in the study (Morrow, 2005). Other sources of data can include observational data, or field notes in addition to interview data (Morrow, 2005, p. 255). In this research, observational and jot notes from the interview were utilized. In addition I used a researcher journal to generate more information based on myself and my own experiences and understandings.

**Interpretive status of evidence.** The interpretive status of evidence is partially built through the interview process when you also observe the interviewee (Morrow, 2005, p. 256). As well, establishing rapport, cultural sensitivity and context of an interview helps with the interpretive status of evidence (Morrow, 2005, p. 256). In this research, it was important to develop a rapport with participants and therefore the comfort and conversation with the participants was critical. The context in which they approach the phenomena is important in understanding and interpreting their perceptions. Ideally, the study would have conducted the interviews for the teachers in the environment (classroom) where they teach students piano lessons. However, due to when the interviews occurred (on weekends) and that two of the teachers no longer taught in the program, it was impossible to do the interviews in the context in which they approached the phenomena.

**Adequate disconfirming evidence and adequate discrepant case analysis.** These terms refer to seeking information that may disconfirm the researcher's natural bias or conclusion. As a researcher, it is natural to seek the information which confirms the opinion of the researcher, so it is essential to the trustworthiness of the study to seek out contrary information. Within this study, I included a question that asked about any detriments to the piano lessons.

### **Adequacy of Interpretation**

During the interpretation phase it is important to be immersed in the data (Morrow, 2005). Planning is crucial to this phase, with a specific method of analysis being used that compliments the methodology being used (Morrow, 2005, p.256). The final written representation of findings should be a balance of interpretations illustrated with quotations from

the participants in order to demonstrate the outcomes of the study (Morrow, 2005, p. 256). I strove to do this to the best of my ability.

### **Researcher Self-Reflection**

As a qualitative researcher, it is important for readers to understand how I have come to this topic. My personal experiences and background influence the way that I understand the phenomena.

#### **Music**

Personally, music has been a powerful and meaning making activity in my life. Often times when I am stressed, or frustrated I turn to music as an emotional outlet. As a young musician, it was through music that I was able to approach spiritual and emotional development in a way that was healthy. Through a variety of experiences I have found personal importance in using music to help students who are at-risk for a variety of reasons. For the past six years I have worked with a youth organization and have encountered youth who would be deemed as at-risk. As this youth organization's program has no cost, youth who are from lower socio-economic status are able to participate in these activities. As well, youth with disabilities, and those with a variety of personal and familial challenges are part of this inclusive youth program. By working with some of these youth as part of the band program I have seen the positive impact that music education can have on at-risk youth.

#### **Books**

A variety of books have been influential in this research study. Rachael Kessler's book, *The Soul of Education*, illustrates many of the areas where school systems may be failing our students (e.g., connection, compassion, character). Music instruction and music education



programs can help to address these issues that Kessler believes are important for students. As well, Bennett Reimer's book, *A Philosophy of Music Education*, indicates some of the reasons that music is a powerful instrument that can be used to develop resiliency (Reimer, 2002). As a teacher in a school with a large number of at-risk youth, there is a need to think of other ways to meet the needs of these students within our school. These personal reasons, plus my knowledge about the percentage of students who drop out and face many challenges, informed my belief that this was an important topic to research.

## **Teaching**

As a teacher, I have monitored student changes while instruction is being conducted: for example, when a student finally understands a concept which has been taught multiple times, or when a student is grateful for learning something important such as a life skill that they can use in their life. I believe that education can be transformative, and, as teachers, we can observe and make sense of these changes within students. When viewing education as transformative, we experience the essence of what it means to teach. Music is a subject which enables the experience of something much larger than the individual, and therefore it expands students' experience.

## **Assumptions**

The research was a qualitative inquiry. The reason why qualitative research was selected for this study is the potentially rich data which can be collected about the human experience of teaching, and observing youth. The interview method was used in order to capture what the teachers thought their students gained from music lessons, as well as the teachers' experience working with at-risk youth. The paradigm in which this study was conducted was

constructivism. As the teacher interacts and works with the students they are constructing within them, knowledge about the situation. This study helped to look at the knowledge gained by these teachers.

As a researcher, I have my own personal beliefs and values when it comes to approaching any situation. As a feminist, I inherently notice inequality between males and females. I am a middle class person and have completed post-secondary education. I am biased towards the importance of education. As a musician, I also am biased towards the importance of music education and the role it serves in the lives of teenagers. As these preconceptions can influence the study, it was important that the interview was semi-structured, allowing the participants to guide and illustrate the aspects of their experience and their perceptions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics approval was sought and received from the University of Saskatchewan's research ethics board. Standard issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, freedom to withdraw without penalty were adhered to. Teachers were reminded of the confidentiality of the study, and each teacher was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. As well, teachers were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time up until they sign off consent without negative repercussions. Teachers were reminded that the researcher wanted to protect their identity, by providing pseudonyms for those participants as well as modifying demographic or program information to be less identifiable. The process of member checks was outlined to the participants at the first interview. I provided contact information to the participants in the case that they have any questions about the research study. The data will be stored at the University of Saskatchewan for a five year period and then subsequently it will be destroyed. In

return for their participation in the research, each participant was offered a \$10 gift certificate for iTunes. This was offered in recognition for their time.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of this study. First is a description of the *Heart of the City Piano Program* followed by a description of the participants. Then thematic findings are presented. The names of specific people, and distinguishing information were altered and quotations were edited to increase readability. Any omissions have been notated by ellipses, and any additions have been notated by square brackets.

### *Heart of the City Piano Program (HCPP)*

This piano program began in 1995 under the direction of Richard Dubé in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Richard Dubé was an elementary music educator at the time, and he believed that participating in such a program would empower the students to make healthy life decisions. In 1999, the program expanded to Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, and Regina. Further programs were later initiated in Edmonton, Ottawa, Quebec, and Vancouver. According to the *HCPP* website, the mission of the *Heart of the City Piano Program* is “To enhance the lives of and learning opportunities for at-risk youth through a structured music program that continues throughout the school year. The *Heart of the City Piano Program (HCPP)* encourages students to make positive lifestyle choices.” (*HCPP*, n.d.). Volunteers commit to teaching for one hour a week, and in that time they teach three 20-minute one-on-one piano lessons to students within schools in the inner city. In addition to the lessons, the students have the opportunity to perform in recitals throughout the year, participate in the local music festival and when held, participate in the Festival of the Heart which allows the students in Saskatoon and Regina to participate in a festival together alternating between both cities. In order to volunteer, people must have completed their grade 6 Royal Conservatory of Music in piano and have a clear Criminal Record Check. The program’s Board of Directors includes a program coordinator and each school has a

school coordinator. The board works to provide volunteers, funding, and awareness of the organization. Once volunteers are recruited, the Board of Directors provides training to those volunteers and assigns them to a school. The training varies depending on the program but can include things such as structure, confidentiality, pedagogy and more. In one of the program sites the volunteer training involved pedagogy training with a professor of piano from a local university. There was a discussion about at-risk youth, and concerns that had come up for some of the students in the past. As well, the volunteers were introduced to a variety of method books which the program had. At the other program site, the volunteer training focussed on expectations including what the week would look like, having to remind students of their lessons due to busy schools, what type of method books were used and more. There was also a focus on the comments that previous volunteers and students had about the benefits and impacts of the program. Volunteers were also introduced to the history and purpose of the program. The board of directors also went over the behavioural expectations and what should go on in the lessons. The school coordinator liaises with the volunteers in order to provide the lessons within the school. The school coordinator also ensures that the students are practicing (which is a requirement!).

### **How Students are Selected**

One of the study's participants was a program coordinator in one of the program locations. She described the process of how students are selected to be participants for the program. One of the misconceptions which volunteers have is that every student selected for the program has financial need. This may be the case in the majority of the students who are participants however, it is not the sole deciding factor in determining which students are able to participate in the program. The schools that *HCPP* operate in are in areas where there are high

numbers of at-risk students. Many of these students come from lower socio-economic status. Students may represent diverse backgrounds, with a high number of students with aboriginal ancestry, as well as new Canadian immigrants. Due to the limited volunteers at the program sites and the large number of students who wish to participate, there is a process to determine who can participate. The program coordinator described the process as follows:

The principal would sit down with the school coordinator and they would look at a variety of different factors. A lot of people think it's just financial need and it often is. They can't afford to take music lessons but we also open it up, so if a child is being bullied, they could practice piano at recess and it gives them a different community at school and different friends... There are so many different circumstances where a child might need a program like this. Maybe they are going through something at home, and they need something like this. So it's not just restricted to financial situations. Although that's what it is most often.

The program coordinator indicated that it is important that students are not singled out because they have been selected for the program. She wanted to ensure that people knew that being included in the program does not necessarily indicate financial struggles. However, the reasons that students are selected are primarily due to areas which would classify those students as being at-risk. Although there are many different music programs and different ways that students can access arts education within her local center, the program coordinator talked about how the *Heart of the City Piano Program* fills a void within the community: "I think *Heart of the City Piano Program* comes into place where parents wouldn't really care if their children were doing music, or wouldn't take the initiative to go sign them up to do music." All of the study's participants reported having a sense of the background of the students they worked with.

### **Program Challenges**

Unfortunately, in recent years it has been a challenge for the program in Saskatoon to recruit volunteer piano teachers and volunteers to serve on the Board of Directors for *HCPP*. An

earlier program evaluation of *HCPP*, conducted by myself as part of a school assignment, revealed three strengths of the program and three areas for improvement.

The three strengths identified were the goal-oriented nature of the organization, the fundraising and money management, and the people. It was evident that everyone on the board of directors knew the purpose of the program, supported and felt passionate about the program and its purpose. The organization was able to fundraise and receive grants, which allowed for the organization to participate in all types of activities. One of the participants in the present study mentioned how much the community supported the program; people often called about pianos to donate to the program (however, the logistics of moving and storage of these pianos made it difficult to accept these offers). The final strength was the people involved with *HCPP*. The Board of Directors are volunteers and their passion for music and the *HCPP* teacher volunteers who provide music instruction was an area of strength.

Areas for improvement included record keeping, volunteer recruitment, and communication. The areas for improvement illustrate some of the struggles that the program has had over recent years. First of all, the record keeping of the organization could be improved. Although the organization kept consistent financial records and copies of record checks, it was difficult to find out other information. For example, when inquiring about the numbers of volunteers who have participated to the number of students who have gone on to do Royal Conservatory of Music exams, I found that there were no records kept about these areas. Second, there has been a challenge in recruiting volunteers. In the past, most of the volunteers have been recruited within the post-secondary institutions, but not from those who are majoring in music. One of the participants in the present study spoke about changing the program so that it was run

by university students. Finally, communication was a challenge. The multi-level volunteer structure of the program has made it is a challenge to communicate with everyone involved.

It was also discovered that the programs in Canada that have been most successful are those that rely on university music students as the central volunteers for the board and as piano teachers. The programs in Saskatchewan do not have this currently in place despite a passion and clarity about the program's objective. One motivation for the current study was my hope that findings might help in recruiting and maintaining the program within its many locations.

## **Findings**

### **The Participants**

There were four participants in the study, three females and one male, who were given the pseudonyms of Jessica, Gabrielle, Danielle and Nick. Two were located in Regina and two were in Saskatoon. Two were current volunteers, and two were former volunteers. Of the four participants, one was a graduate of a Masters' degree program in Music, and three were studying one of a variety of sciences (Nutrition, Environmental Studies, and Math and Statistics). Three of the participants taught in the program for more than one year, and one of the participants taught for only one year. Participants ranged in age from 22-26 years old. The participants had a variety of musical backgrounds. One participant began studying music in group piano lessons where there was a focus on participating together. The other three participants began their study of music in one-on-one lessons, starting on either piano or cello. All four participants had completed their grade six Royal Conservatory of Music level. Participants grew up in both urban and rural areas, further increasing the diversity in the sample.



## **Common Vision of the Purpose of the Program**

The volunteer teacher shared a common vision about the purpose of the program. They all talked about the importance of providing music lessons to those who could not afford it. Jessica talked about being able to provide lessons to students who might not otherwise have the opportunity but also talked about the potential benefits for the students she taught:

Well I think part of the purpose I think, is to provide free piano lessons for peoples families who can't afford it otherwise and I think another aspect of the program is to help at-risk youth by giving them an opportunity to like learn something new, and maybe excel at something and feel good about themselves and learn about self-esteem and stuff like that.

Similarly, Nick described the purpose of the program as being an opportunity that they may not get a chance to experience if it weren't for the program being in place. He also related the program to his own positive experience learning to play the piano and that other youth might enjoy the experience too.

The thing I like best about it is it gives under privileged youth a chance to do something that they wouldn't get a chance to do. And, something that I find to be really enjoyable when I was young, and there is a chance they will like it too. That is the case with a lot of them.

For Danielle the purpose of the program was directly related to some of the potential benefits that she saw for her students. Danielle related the purpose to the positive outcome of accomplishment.

I think it's to get children who don't have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities that chance. I also feel that it also gives them a sense of pride and something they can accomplish and do.

Gabrielle had a broader idea of the purpose of the program. Her passion for the importance of all aspects of this program was apparent in the details she provided and the different parts of the program she saw as an important purpose for offering these lessons. She saw it as being so much more than about music. Her ideas actually suggested that the most important part of the program

was not the music, but rather, the structure of one-on-one lessons and the new skill they were learning.

This is not a program to just teach them how to play the piano well. It is a social program. It's about having a mentor, a person you have one-on-one time, you have positive role model in your life...they are learning a new skill. I think music is really important, for something these kids can keep with them for the rest of their lives. It might spark an interest in for them to go on and pursue something in music but that's not the point of it, it's to give them a creative outlet.

Gabrielle went on to talk about the significance of simply having an activity where the students have something to do in their spare time. She related it to previous information about the El Sistema program which offers music lessons to children in Venezuela for free. There are some similarities and differences between the El Sistema program (which utilizes paid instructors, and more time learning music) and the *Heart of the City Piano Program* (which uses volunteer instructors, with limited contact time per week)

I think it's important that they do something. It doesn't have to be music... Dr. Abreu [creator of El Sistema] says the structure of their program matters and it is a music program but it could really be anything. It could be a reading program, it could be a sports program, it could be anything. I think kids just need a focus, but it's not necessarily music. For me, I liked participating in the music side of an activity to help kids because I'm a musician so it makes sense for me to use music as my outlet to do that. But I think as long as kids are involved in something, um, that really helps them. Especially kids who are labelled as at risk.

Jessica also talked about how it was important for students to do something that they are good at and are able to be successful. For her, it was important that positive feedback be provided to the students because they may not receive that feedback other than in a program such as the *Heart of the City Piano Program*.

I think it's really just about having something that they feel that they are good at. Sometimes the problem with at-risk youth is that they don't get, they might not have enough support and emotional support so um like if they don't get it at home or something like that. So what's important about *Heart of the City Piano Program* is it's somewhere where they are doing something they feel like they are supported in, something they can

do well in and somewhere where they are receiving positive feedback. So it's kinda important for self esteem.

Gabrielle talked about other skills that the students develop by participating in this program.

These skills go beyond what they learn about music, but are skills that can be applied to success in life.

I think it teaches kids a lot about life...things like teamwork and putting a lot of hard work into something you can achieve something really great and... it just gives them a lot of life skills that they probably wouldn't get if they weren't doing these activities. And it also gives them an outlet outside of school. I think kids tend to get in trouble if they are bored and don't have anything to do. So if they can go to an activity after school and put their energy into something positive and productive...they have a better chance of being positive and productive individuals when they grow up.

The volunteer teachers spoke fondly of the benefits they saw for the students who were participating in the program, but they also often experienced positive benefits for themselves as volunteer teachers.

### **Volunteer Teacher Motivations**

It would be inaccurate to only focus on the benefits the students received in the program. All the volunteer teachers spoke of the benefits they personally experienced and continued to have while working with at-risk youth in this piano program. The volunteers perceived that there would be benefits to participating as a volunteer for the program through what they would see in their students, and potential benefits to themselves as well. The volunteer teachers experienced a sense of accomplishment through teaching these students. They also saw that the lessons made a difference in the students that they taught. Nick talked about the value of seeing students benefit:

It's partly the fact that I just really love sharing something that I enjoy doing with others. I get the chance to help them learn a creative skill, and it's a good opportunity they probably wouldn't have had. The students seem to love it too for the most part, so when I see that what I do can have a positive effect on the kids, it makes me want to keep coming back.

Jessica found there were a number of benefits to herself as a volunteer:

The benefits for me were that I felt good about helping out with the program which I saw as very worthwhile and beneficial. Another benefit for me is that I have put it on my resume as volunteer experience.

All of the participants demonstrated a commitment to the program, and a desire for the program to grow and be able to support more students. They saw value in what they were doing, and that the program was serving an important role in the lives of these at-risk youth. Unfortunately, because the volunteer teachers in this study were mostly students who were studying at university in demanding science programs, the volunteer opportunities of the *Heart of the City Piano Program* didn't always fit into the students' schedule. Jessica talked about the difficult decision to quit teaching these lessons:

I did find it hard to stop volunteering there because I felt like especially with {student name} who seemed at-risk, I felt like he needed some continuous, some continuity and I felt kind of guilty about stopping volunteering.

### **Views on the Value of Music and Music Study**

Participants described a variety of benefits of studying music, and those benefits ranged from those which could be classified as skills based and those that were therapeutic. All of the participants described different skills learnt through studying music. These included self-discipline, developing cognitive skills, and strengthening academic performance. Only Nick focussed in on the psychological therapeutic benefits. Danielle referred to the benefits of music and music study for herself:

I feel like I learned a lot of important skills through music as I also learned in school but I feel music enhanced them. Like I feel my memory skills improved, my memory and learning. My math skills, because if you are counting and figuring out time, rhythm, and measurements. I think if you definitely take the theory side of music then will definitely teach you math, language, reading skills, too.

Gabrielle related to music being something that strengthened skills in commitment but also the provided an opportunity to try types of music which is part of an inclusive social process that involves each child as an important part of the final product.

With piano and with cello and different things it is a lot...of time by yourself practicing. So it does teach you, you have to commit personally to what you are doing because you are not with a team all the time. But I think group music making is a fun aspect for a kid, and...[a] child in an orchestra or band, or group piano classes...each person is important. Whereas in a sports team maybe [each person is] not [important], maybe people are benched a lot. Each person in the orchestra or each person in the band is really important and a key player and that. I think it does teach a lot of skills you wouldn't get in other things.

Nick talked about piano study and learning piano as allowing students to practice skills which are applicable in life outside of the piano lessons.

I think it's a good skill because you practice learning piano, you practice things like commitment, working towards something, like trying to master a song, or a concept in theory, and... that sort of commitment you can apply anywhere to anything in life. I think music is a really good one because the product of all your work is a song... You might be inspired by something you hear on the radio, or...from the symphony or something like that, or a movie or video game soundtrack even...It gives you your motivation, something to work towards. Then you get motivated by that, spend all that time practicing. Develops commitment, develops character and then that's what you have to show for it. You have that skill. You can play for your own enjoyment because you like to listen to it, or you can play for the enjoyment of other people, because they like to listen to it

Nick also talked about how learning about different genres of music and listening to music can help you learn about things beyond music. This can help to broaden the horizons of knowledge and learn about something outside of the students normal experiences. He talked about this in the context of his own learning, and music learning.

... if you...study a wide variety of music, if you study it indepth even more than, just listening to it. Like studying it critically or analyzing it in context, historical perspective if it's an older piece, or even a modern piece analyzing a pop song. Like what context it's written in, like if it's a reaction to something. So, if you study it in a critical way like that. ...maybe you become...more cultured. Also, well listening to different genres of music, not just mainstream genres of pop, like world music, from around the world like

different instruments or from different historical periods... I think you can learn more stuff outside of music itself. Like what it sounds like and being able to describe what it sounds like. You can learn more by studying music critically.

Danielle believed that piano lessons are an activity that can teach you a lot of skills. She said that if you want to improve and you are dedicated to piano lessons, you will want to practice and through that you develop skills in patience and self-discipline. These skills are essential for success in other aspects of life and can be taught through the study of music. She also went on to state what she feels is the important thing for a child to learn through music.

I think the most important thing a child can learn from music is how to learn for themselves. Learning the basics of music (e.g., notes, time measures, counting, etc) provides you with the 'tools' to play but essentially you are the one who uses these tools and knowledge to learn a song. I think if anything, it's the process of self-learning that is the biggest benefit from learning music

Danielle eluded to the fact that the tools can be learned but they also need to be practiced in order for them to be helpful. Jessica related to this by talking about how working at something over a long period of time can assist in developing patience and the value of regular practice of a skill, which is required by the students to remain in the program. She went on to express many other ideas about the benefits of piano lessons. She thinks that "it's really important...learning to read music and learning to play an instrument is really good for development and like it really helps your cognitive development..." Jessica also believes that it helps you exercise your brain by having to think about multiple things at the same time, and mentioned hearing about research showing that music makes you smarter. Jessica further talked about the importance of the performance aspect of piano lessons, and becoming more confident being in front of people and performing. She explained that you have to work with the nervousness you have when you perform in front of people, and that sometimes you do really well and sometimes you don't.

Sometimes you are able to win at competitions and sometimes you aren't. She believes that you learn through that process.

I think it makes you have to realise that it isn't really about winning. Sometimes you win, and sometimes you don't and it depends on the circumstances. You can't invest that much in winning and I think some kids get really upset if they don't win at the festival that they wanted to, but its more about yourself and its more about if you think you did your best, or if you were happy with your own work"

Nick described music as something that he finds therapeutic for himself, "I just find it a relaxing break to play piano and well listen[ing] to music in general." He went on to talk about some of the aspects of music making that you can't put into words:

Immerse yourself in the music beyond that practice or listen to it intently, listen to it carefully and different kinds of music. Then you sort of see how it has for me anyways, how it has a positive effect to my life. . . Music has some strange powers that I don't think anybody fully understands. It can inspire you, it can excite you, it can recall memories, it can make you sad, angry, scared, happy or any other emotion you can think of. We all have different ideas of what types of music "sounds good" or "sounds bad." I guess the fact that it can have such a strong effect on your emotions is a good enough argument for music. And it's amazing how everyone has different tastes. Part of being human and part of life is to experience these emotions and learn how they affect you as an individual. And music can help you do that.

### **Themes**

The four volunteer teachers' descriptions of the students and the experience of teaching them piano lessons were analyzed thematically. The themes that I identified included three themes about perceived positive changes in the youth – self-motivation, confidence, accomplishment – and three themes about the nature of the lessons themselves – being student focussed, allowing students to be themselves, and providing a positive peer role model relationship. A last finding focused on identified negative effects of the piano lessons.

## Theme 1: Self-Motivation

One of the key aspects to the program is that the students want to be participants in the program. This means that there is self-motivation within those students who are a part of *HCPP*. This was evident in the ways that the volunteer teachers talked about the students they taught. Nick had previously taught private lessons before becoming a volunteer for the *HCPP* program so he noted that there is a difference between the types of students he had in both situation. Nick said that, "The ones in the *Heart of the City Piano Program* are mostly there because they signed up to be there, they want to be there." Jessica talked about noticing the enthusiasm and passion of one of the students who she taught and about piano she said, "it was something she was really invested in." There are benefits to having self-motivated students. One of the benefits as described by Nick, is that the shorter lesson times which are provided by this program still allow for feedback to be given.

If they are motivated, well then that's all they need is like 10 min every week just to, I go hear their songs and say, this is some stuff you could work on with this song, this is some stuff you are doing good with this song, this is some stuff you can improve on, this is some theory we can do as well. And then that's all they need.

Danielle was asked to teach more than the typical three students due to the motivation demonstrated by one of the students at a program school. The demonstration of that self-motivation encouraged the school coordinator to ask Danielle if she would be willing to teach another student.

[the student] started playing the first year of the program...the program specifies that we only teach for an hour three students, twenty minute lessons each. {the school coordinator} had approached me if I would be willing to take on a fourth student, but she knew I was already giving up an hour of my time. But this student, who was in grade two had brought a little mini... like play keyboard to school and played like six songs for her teacher by memory... she told me she was really artistic that she made these really amazing drawings and paintings in their art class, and she felt that she could really benefit from the program.



Gabrielle described one of her more challenging students as being very self-motivated. Although within the lessons it would take him some time to warm up to her and playing the piano, and he would not practice at school, only at home on a piano that his family owned, she talked why she thought he was self-motivated.

I think he was doing something that he was really interested in. He liked the piano and he liked figuring it out and he was really smart boy...He knew he was a good pianist too. I think he wanted to play well and he wanted to learn. So, he would become engaged. It just took a while for him to get there.

Nick commented that one of his students “was completely self-motivated you wouldn't have to tell him to practice. He definitely wanted to do [it].” He also talked about how self-motivation was striking in one of his other students to the point where she exceeded the expectations that he had of her:

She practiced all the time, like amazingly hard. I would give her a song expecting to work on it for two weeks and she would have it done by the next week and... she always and still always does go above and beyond...and she really challenges herself to really learn the instrument.

Self-motivation is a critical factor in the success of this program, and for the learning that the students demonstrated as a result of the piano lessons.

## **Theme 2: Confidence**

The biggest change that was reported by the volunteer teachers was an increase in confidence in the students that they taught. This was directly related to being more confident in the piano lessons but extended outside the piano lessons and was observed in the students interactions with peers. Danielle talked about how although she was not sure about one student's improvement in learning to play the piano, she could definitely say that the student's confidence improved: “I feel like I don't know how much her skills improved over the two years, but I feel

that her confidence in playing and performing in front of her classmates and peers really improved.” Nick spoke about confidence with a variety of students he taught but with one in particular:

One of the other things about why I think music is important, and that learning music is important and relevant to the program is that...when you learn a song. Like one of the songs he wanted to learn was *Dynamite*...the pop song, from a couple years back, and...when he learned, when he masters one of his songs...he gets really excited. You can just tell, they get, to the point where they can play the song comfortably their confidence goes up. A lot. And it’s kinda like when they start opening up and they start being more friendly and everything. They are always really friendly but that’s when they, you can really start seeing their confidence showing. I think it really does help, a lot with their confidence...

Gabrielle talked about how she noticed the improvement in confidence during one of their recitals with one of her students.

She was very withdrawn so I wasn't sure how it was going to work, and she had memorized her piece *Ode to Joy*. She got up there with [a] ton of confidence, she played it and had a big smile at the end. So I was just, I was really proud of her for doing that, because I don't think she has a lot of opportunities to do something like that, and she was really proud of herself in the end.

For some of these students, music provided an outlet that allowed for them to be successful when they were struggling to experience success in other aspects of their life. Nick talked about how one of his students experienced change in the confidence around her peers.

She's a very shy girl. She was very shy at the start, and I think actually think that the last time I saw her was at the Christmas recital, to and it looked like she was getting more talkative with other kids around there. Compared to how she was when I first met her.

### **Theme 3: A Sense of Accomplishment**

All of the volunteer teachers in this study talked about the sense of accomplishment that was evident in the students that they were teaching. Their enthusiasm as volunteers showed that the successes meant as much to them as for the students. Danielle was especially excited about

the accomplishment and positive change in the skills that her students developed through their lessons. One of the students participated in the music festival and did very well, "She was so proud, I think she was surprised like she didn't really, she wasn't expecting it or wanting it. But she was like "Wow, this is so cool." For Nick, his satisfaction as a teacher was related to the sense of accomplishment he saw in his students:

When the kids are clearly enjoying it, that's when I enjoy it the most. I really like when a student is so motivated to learn a song that they practice very hard on their own for the week, and when I come back for next week's lesson, I see that they have accomplished so much on their own.

As the lessons went on Danielle was able to see a change in one of her students who started to experience success more quickly

She was able to pick up on things, like she was able to pick up on patterns easier. So sometimes we were working through a song, she could almost anticipate what would happen next if it was a song she was familiar with. There was music she often requested to play, so we tried to adapt songs to her level.

Accomplishment was also related to the students' self-motivation as well as previous experience with music. Danielle said,

[she] was able to improve with her technical skills better than most of the participants, um at the beginning of the program, she I think she knew a little bit about music because she would go into the room with [her cousin] at lunch time and recess when she practiced. I was able to get her to play with both hands at the end...

Although a sense of accomplishment was important, it was not sufficient to keep students interested in lessons. Danielle spoke about one of her students who eventually withdrew from the program, "She actually improved. I am not sure why she wasn't so interested in it, she was really good at it."

Jessica talked about how a sense of accomplishment was helpful with a student who had some behavioural issues because the piano lessons was a great place to receive some positive feedback that he might not receive in the classroom.

I think he had like some behavioural issues and like was like always getting in trouble and stuff and they wanted him to I think feel like he was good for something and get praise for something. Because if he is always getting in trouble he might be always getting negative feedback and so, I felt like it was really helping him because he you know, he was doing well and this festival and he got first in his age category and he was really happy about it, and I think it made a difference for him.

She went on to talk about how receiving positive feedback contributed to being proud of himself which was important, "I think just like he seemed like when he would get positive feedback he would be really happy about that, and proud of himself so that was a nice thing."

Although a sense of accomplishment is important, sometimes it was overcoming challenges that lead to the most satisfaction for a student. Gabrielle talked about an experience she witnessed at a recital:

We had one little girl who got up and forgot her piece partway through usually they play it by memory and she sobbed up at the front and her volunteer teacher had to come and she wasn't able to finish the piece but at the final concert she played the piece again, and got through it and she was proud of it. But I know that must have been a tough moment.

The student was able to overcome a negative situation, continue, and then succeed and have a sense of accomplishment at the end of the year when she did something that she wasn't able to do earlier.

#### **Theme 4: Student Focussed Lessons**

Volunteer teachers were focussed on providing lessons that met the needs of the students and teaching in a way that engaged the students. The needs of the student changed what type of

music was studied, if theory was pursued, as well as the pedagogical methods used. Some students came to lessons with expectations about what they would be taught and how the lessons would go whereas others were open to the teacher guiding the learning experience. Nick clearly articulated how he approached the lessons:

I focussed more on the present keeping them interested in it rather than long term learning the technical stuff of piano, which I try to incorporate in, but I just try and focus on what they're looking for...Making sure they are enjoying it and having a good time. Still trying to teach them the technical stuff of course, but more emphasis on enjoying it.

The *Heart of the City Piano Program* has a variety of different methods books that the teachers can use in the instruction of their students. Most start with what is traditional for individual piano lessons, music that is classically based, and starts with many different folk tunes. Gabrielle spoke about the type of music which was the focus of the lessons at the start and how it evolves: "At the beginning it is classical based, it's... folk tunes and arrangements of classical tunes that they would know... as they go along what they show an interest in is what we do." Nick talks about how sometimes the requests from students aren't verbal and that he would respond to non-verbal signs when determining what the student might like to work on with the lessons. He noted that there were non-verbal signs, "like have a hint of a smile. Ok, you so they might want to learn to play that one, even if they don't want to say it." The teachers would adjust their teaching methods in order to engage the students they were teaching. Nick had a student who had very clear ideas of what he wanted to learn in his piano lessons.

He had some songs he really liked to hear that he had heard from the radio or movies. His goal, main focus was to learn these songs he really liked. He wasn't just about learning music but he wanted to learn these songs, and he always tried to find these songs that he wanted to learn and he was very dedicated to learning them... So he kept challenging himself with harder and harder pieces, and did some stuff from Lord the Rings, so, he got pretty high up. I remember he practiced hard. All the time.

Nick clearly enabled his student to learn the music that he wanted to learn and therefore was being responsive to the student's needs. Students may have difficulty learning music in the way that it is commonly taught. Danielle had a student who had great difficulty reading music and learning how to read music as it is written on the staff. She decided to try to help the student by writing down the notes in ABC form and found that the student had a lot more success in playing when they were written in that way. Jessica had a similar situation with one of her students:

I just had to learn how to teach him because he wasn't willing to learn how to read music and focus on doing it that way. So we kinda started like doing it like you know just like, he really liked playing the piano, but he didn't have the will to learn music or do that slow process. He liked just playing little tunes and stuff.

Danielle also adjusted to teaching a student by ear, due to frustrations with written music. The student was able to understand and excel with music when playing by ear; however the written music created a barrier to access music.

Sometimes student focussed learning meant that volunteers would focus on something external to the music and would be working on something that was more applicable in life then directly in regards to the music. Jessica worked with a pair of sisters one year in the program, and had different experiences with each of the sisters.

The younger one would get really mad at herself when she messed up. I mean, they were all kinda like that, I guess kids are really hard on themselves, I didn't really realise but...this younger girl she would get really upset with herself when she messed up even just a little bit, so I just tried to teach her that, its ok to mess up and that it's a really important part of the process, you can't get upset with yourself if you make a mistake, it doesn't matter and that's how you learn things. And I still make mistakes when I play the piano, everyone does, you don't have to get upset with yourself you know? She had a lot of trouble with that, it kinda ended up being a focus for each lesson.

The teachers talked about the importance of the lessons to the students and that seemed to be a driving factor in ensuring that the student is the focus on the lessons.

## Theme 5: Allowing Students to be Themselves

There are many reasons why a student would be a part of the *Heart of the City Piano Program*. One of those reasons may be to allow the student to have a creative outlet – something they might not find in other aspects of their life. For most students who access piano lessons privately, parents or guardians are funding those lessons and engaged in the lesson process. Parents of one of the students that Nick worked with weren't supportive of their child having piano lessons, which made the *Heart of the City Piano Program* a good fit.

He wasn't that into sports, he wasn't into it, he's into bowling, he's in a bowling league, but... he really likes doing the piano. I think after a couple of years of doing it, and after his parents seeing how hard he was working and some of the stuff he could play on there. .. I remember, because I remember him when he first told me about that, his mom kinda wanted him to do sports not music and was discouraging. He practiced hard and showed her what he could do.

Nick went on to describe that the mom was more open to the son engaging in music after seeing her son's commitment and the type of accomplishments that he achieved from practicing. The piano lessons helped the student to become more of himself and show that part of himself to his mom. Gabrielle worked with a student who had a reputation in the school for being a problem child. But he was different in his piano lessons. Gabrielle described what a lesson would be like with him.

He...was interesting to see... at each lesson. He would come in and he would have his hood pulled up, and he is an angry boy. It's sad to see. Probably grade five or six, and he would sit there at the piano and slumped over, and not [that] I didn't think he wasn't happy to be there. I thought he was happy to be in the room. You could tell there was a lot going on with him. I would ask him how he was, but I would just get straight into the lesson with him. And, eventually he would take down his hood and he would begin to play and by the end of the lesson he was just completely engaged in his piano playing. He would start talking to me. It was interesting to see that process happening each lesson.

Gabrielle was able to engage this student in the piano lessons but also had to defend his spot in the program. He didn't do the mandatory practice at school so the program coordinator had suggested he be removed, but Gabrielle was able to convince them to allow him to continue in the program. Gabrielle knew the student was improving enough each week that he must be practicing outside of school at home on the family piano.

Other times, music was chosen due to the student's seeming aptitude with music. For some parents, it is a last resort suggestion for a child with ongoing problems such as one of Jessica's students.

I'm not sure exactly why music lessons were chosen. It sounded like they may have tried other things in the past, and because I got the sense that he had a natural ear for music maybe his parents had noticed the same thing, but maybe not. It was probably chosen because the benefits of studying music and learning an instrument as a child have been studied and publicized, and the parents likely knew that there was a free music program at their school. They may have also thought he might be good at it and that could help with his self-esteem, or maybe they thought studying piano would help him learn to focus.

For that student, the engagement in something different, it allowed for a different perspective in learning and a chance to be himself. Jessica also talked about a student who needed to feel good about something, and a chance to do well at something:

I think he had like some behavioural issues and like was like always getting in trouble and stuff and they wanted him to I think feel like he was good for something and get praise for something. Because if he is always getting in trouble he might be always getting negative feedback and so, I felt like it was really helping him because he you know, he was doing well and this festival and he got first in his age category and he was really happy about it, and I think it made a difference for him.

Gabrielle described a unique experience that was an interesting example of allowing students to be themselves. One of the students she taught in the program was new to Canada and



was an English as an Additional Language Learner. This led to an interesting experience for Gabrielle as they were not able to communicate using English.

...at first music was, it was cool to communicate with her because through music we could do stuff still. So I would just show her on the piano and she would copy me. And she did understand some of what she was talking about. Um, and now we can just have conversations. It was really cool to see that development happen with her and I think she likes coming to piano lessons too because she didn't have to communicate through English.

Gabrielle talked about how it was a rewarding experience and how they were able to connect even though they did not speak the same language. In a sense, music served as a language which was able to connect with this student in a way the student couldn't through English. In her piano lesson, this student was free to be herself (a non-English speaker) because her teacher was willing to accommodate and work creatively with the language barrier, rather than insist on using and practising English. The chance for students to be themselves during their piano lessons also helped develop the positive role model relationship..

### **Theme 6: Positive Role Model Relationship**

One of the key positives to the program, which was noted by all the volunteer teachers, was the opportunity for students to have one-on-one time with an adult and to develop the positive role model relationship. Danielle noted that she felt that the students looked up to her, and that they had a chance to talk and learn about each other. Asked to explain further Danielle said:

In regards to being a role model... "Definitely, I feel that for [this one student] especially she seemed to really want to do the things I was doing, she wanted to, I felt like this is something that she would want to do in her future

Nick talked about how one of his students really started to open up to him as they were able to develop the positive relationship: "And in relation to me, he did start to come out of his shell. He

was a really shy kid at the start, but then by the end he was way more talkative." The relationship is one that is built over time and trust within the lessons. Danielle talked about developing that kind of relationship with one of her students:

I think as she got to know me more, she was more comfortable around me. The first few times I tried to ask her questions, to kinda make her more comfortable around me, and she really wasn't as responsive. As the lessons continued and more so in the second year she would just open up and tell me stuff. Like I didn't have to ask her, she would tell me something that they were doing in school or that she did things like that.

Developing a situation where students are being pressured to share was not the purpose and Nick stated that "I don't try and dig it out or force it or anything." However, the nature of one-on-one lessons lends itself to a situation where students may share what is going on in their life. Nick said,

I have had a couple, like if their family is going through a tough time, someone is sick or just died. They would tell me about that. Or if someone is fighting with their friends, they would tell me or if they have a hard test, that they are worried about or just finished.

Gabrielle was surprised in her first year of teaching when a student really opened up to her to talk about what was going on in her life.

She told me about her foster family and I wasn't prepared for that. And, we didn't really play the piano that day at all. That is when I learned it is more than just piano program, it is a mentorship program as well for the kids.

Nick structured his lessons so that students have the opportunity to share if they want to, but that the focus eventually turns onto the piano lessons, and it naturally flows depending on the needs of the student for that day.

If it is something that they really need to get off their chests, if they are venting or they are very excited about it, I'll let them talk for a bit. And then, let them feel comfortable and calm down before we start.

One of Gabrielle's students talked about sharing her experiences with the piano program, and Gabrielle noticed an increase in trust in their relationship.

She told me she would always tell her aunt and uncle about what she was doing in her piano class and they actually came and saw her final performance but, I noticed she started to trust me a lot more. I think that was really good that she could start to trust someone, and um, she also opened up about things that I don't think she was opening up a lot about.

Nick summed up how he viewed himself as a role model to these students as follows:

One day these kids will be adults, and growing up can be very scary, since there's no "right" way to do it. Having some sort of a basic idea of what an adult "should" be like can make growing up make a bit more sense. And that's not to say that I know what's best by any means, but there are some traits that I feel it is important to try and pass on. For example I try to have a good sense of humor with the kids, which isn't too hard with most of them. I also try and show them that their hard work can pay off and that they can accomplish a goal (like learning a new song) through their hard work.

The participant who was also a program coordinator at one of the *HCPP* sites stated that during the training session for volunteer teachers there was a discussion about situations that might come up with the students. Although, the volunteer teachers do not receive specific training in how to be a mentor or a role model for the students, it was something that she believed naturally occurred within the program. The program coordinator stated that:

We mentioned it at the pedagogy session, we talked about it a little bit at the end. We had an open discussion about it but it's such an individual case by case, that it's hard to prepare people for that. They know they are working with at-risk youth, but what that means for each individual person is completely different. So, they don't get a lot of training in that area.

### **Negative Effects of the Lessons**

As part of the research process participants were asked if they saw any negative effects of the piano lessons. Most of the participants thought for a while before responding to this question. There were a few pieces of disconfirming evidence. Nick stated that he had one student who eventually had to transfer schools. The student told Nick that the reason he needed

to switch schools was to focus on math. Nick believed that his involvement and interest in music may have been a contributing factor to the struggles that the student was having in math.

Although this is not conclusive, one can suggest that an increased involvement of arts may make it difficult for students to focus entirely on all of the academic areas in their life, if they aren't interested in that area. Nick talked about how there are students who don't practice and therefore aren't able to continue to participate in the program. That potentially could have negative effects on the students who are no longer allowed to participate in the program due to their lack of engagement.

Danielle reported that the only negative effect that she noticed was that the students had free access to the piano room and that the room was always really messy. The students would bring their friends into the piano room and that it was consistently in a state of disarray. This was the only potentially negative situation that came to mind for her.

Gabrielle reported that she had a student who couldn't have his festival form signed. This meant that he could not participate in the group activity and that was really hard for him. He had worked really hard to prepare for the festival but was unable to participate and that was a negative for him.

Jessica did not report any disconfirming evidence. She could not think of anything. However, a common theme across the participants was a desire for the program to grow and to be a more solid volunteer opportunity. Although each of them saw the value in participating for the organization, they also believed that the program could be better. It is a detriment for students if they are unable to have piano lessons due to a lack of volunteers who are helping out at each program site.

## Summary

Through the conversations with these four piano teachers, I was able to begin to understand the important work they do with their students. The teachers emphasized the positive experiences they had with music growing up and their intention to provide a similar experience for at-risk students who may not otherwise be able to afford music lessons. They all felt that the *HCPP* was an important endeavour to volunteer for, and those who had left the program described it as a difficult opportunity to walk away from.

Their perceptions of change with their students were varied. Their stories illustrated that they perceived the students to benefit from the piano lessons, and that they began to take on a position as a role model for the students they were teaching. They noted that the music lessons appeared to make the students more confident musically as well as when interacting with their piano instructor and with their peers. They noted that students were able to be themselves and some received what appeared to be an emotional benefit from participating in the lessons. The teachers spoke passionately about their experiences and the students they had the opportunity to share them with. It seemed to me that the musicians, both teachers and students, were able to experience some of the best that music has to offer.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the current research study and compare it to recent literature on piano lessons, music and at-risk youth, and effects of music. The strengths and limitations to the research study are also considered as well as implications for further research and for practice.

### **Summary of Findings**

As discussed previously, music teachers may be well positioned to assist at-risk youth in building resiliency in order to graduate from high school and become a contributing member of society. The current study found that four volunteer piano teachers perceived positive results for students who engaged in weekly piano lessons with them. The participants each had at least a Royal Conservatory of Toronto Grade Six Piano credential and had volunteered teaching three-twenty minute lessons a week for at least one year in a Saskatchewan program, *Heart of the City Piano Program*.

The teachers used their own background in music and music study as a basis for how their lessons were taught. Three of the teachers started their music career in traditional one-on-one piano or cello lessons where they studied western classical music. One of the teachers began studying music in a group lesson which included learning a broader range of music. The teachers were responsive to the student they were teaching and the lessons were student focussed. The students were able to share information about their life if they chose to, and their music preferences also help to direct what type of music was learned. The teachers found other ways to teach the student if they had difficulty learning to read music. This allowed the student to gain as much as they could through the lessons.

The students were self-motivated to learn the piano and to take part in the lessons. Nick talked about the contrast between his private students and the students that he taught in *HCPP*. The student in the *HCPP* were the ones who wanted to be taking the lessons and were interested in the music study whereas those that were private students would often be there because of parental request.

The students gained confidence throughout their piano study. They gained confidence in their musical skills and performance as well as in social interactions with their peers. The students were believed to have increased trust within the relationship between the teacher and the student.

The teachers talked about how the students were able to explore music, which was something that was a passion for the teachers. The teachers wished to share that interest and excitement with their students. The students also were able to be themselves within the context of the piano lessons, and did not have to hide behind a mask. The students had access to a creative outlet for themselves.

The theme described passionately by all volunteer teachers was the development of a positive role model relationship between the students and the teachers. This kind of relationship is not always found in the homes and schools of these youth so it was unique and important. Each student had 20 minutes of one-on-one time with an adult every week. This included seeing their teacher being a good role model within the lessons, but also someone who the students could talk to if they chose to.

The last important aspect noticed was a sense of accomplishment that the student experienced through the lessons. This could be seen in a variety of ways. The teachers noticed

positive attributes in the students when they learned a piece of music or accomplished something within their lesson. This also occurred through student participation in recitals and festivals. The students felt an intrinsic satisfaction because they performed well and might have further satisfaction receiving the extrinsic feedback of audience applause or winning their category in the festival.

## **Integration of Findings with Existing Literature**

### **New Findings Not Reported in the Literature**

The students who participated in the *HCPP* were self-motivated to take the piano lessons. The volunteer music teachers talked about the students as being the ones who wanted to participate in the program, sometimes even when their parents were not supportive. If a student was not engaged or self-motivated, they did not continue with the piano lessons. One of the key aspects of the *HCPP* program is that the students must be self-motivated and want to be a part of the piano study. The reviewed research literature did not directly discuss self-motivation as important in the process of engaging at-risk youth with music. Selection criteria have not been explicitly described. Vacha-Haase and Thompson (2002) presented the idea that students with a particular learning style—sensing-feeling type—are more likely to leave school before graduation. Perhaps these students may be more motivated to participate in an activity where there is an emphasis on that type of learning style. This is an example of where music may be more fitting than other programs such as sports. The students may be more likely to be self-motivated when it is congruent with their learning style.

One of the themes identified in the findings was that the piano lessons allowed students to be themselves. The students had a place where they were free to express themselves as they



wished. They also had consistent opportunity to talk one-on-one with an adult. These aspects of the piano lesson were not found in the reviewed literature. However, the literature on music lessons as beneficial for certain personalities such as feeling type personalities (Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002) and the value of using culturally familiar music Ward-Stenman (2006) resonate with the idea of students being themselves.

### **Findings in the Literature but not in the Present Study**

The literature provided a broader idea of how music could be used with students, and in particular with at-risk students. Not all of these findings were seen within this study although given the limited scope of the present study; it is not surprising that the entire content of the literature was not covered. For example one of the main findings in the literature was that of McMahon (2007) who studied benefits for at-risk students through a program called Learning through the Arts. One of the outcomes was that students seemed to enjoy school more and were more engaged than those in the control school. Although the current study did not look at school engagement specifically, it nonetheless can be inferred that students regularly attended school on the days they had piano lessons as well as other days when they practised the piano. HCCP requires that students attend lessons and practice at the school or they are removed from the program..

The acquisition of academic skills through music instruction (e.g. Schellenberg, 2006, Schellenberg, 2004, Wetter, Koerner, & Schwaninger, 2008, Piro, & Ortiz, 2009, Costa-Giomi, 1999, and Dege et al., 2011) was also not noted by the volunteer piano teachers in the present study. However this is not surprising given that the volunteer teachers were visitors to the school

and not part of academic activities. Interviews with classroom teachers on the other hand may have led to a discussion about the academic ramifications of the program.

Finally, Ward-Stenman (2006) wrote about how at-risk children related best to music if that music was of their own cultural background. However, the *HCPP* does not deliberately consider cultural background. Any student who is deemed to need the program would have the opportunity regardless of if they were a new immigrant, aboriginal, caucasian, or of any other ethnic origin. The students generally start with traditional piano music in their lessons. The teachers do allow students to make request for particular music they may want to play, however most often this music comes from the popular and movie sector versus culturally specific music such as traditional aboriginal music, or Ukranian folk songs. The *HCCP* does not deliberately use culturally familiar music with its students but instead focuses on offering classical piano repertoire to all children.

### **Findings Confirmed in the Literature**

Many results of this study aligned with the current research literature. The first example is the idea of the teacher as a role model or mentor. Robinson (2004) found that music educators identified a number of strategies they use with at-risk youth including developing personal relationships, or a mentorship relationship. Shields (2001) also wrote about teachers acting as a mentor for students who are a part of the percussive and choral music programs. This included focussing on musical and non-musical needs, and also working with the students to address the areas of concern when it was appropriate. One of the main ideas presented by the piano teachers in the current study was the importance of the role model relationship in the lessons. The piano teachers emphasized that there was no obligation for students to disclose aspects of their personal

lives within the lessons, but lessons were structured such that if a student needed or wanted to talk, they could.

As well, Mackworth-Young (1990) wrote about the importance of pupil-centered learning within the piano lesson environment. Pupil-centered learning is indicated in the present study's themes about the lessons being (a) student focussed, and (b) a place and time where the students were able to be themselves. The participants spoke about the students being the central consideration for how the lesson was structured, what music was used and how the lessons were taught.

For example, Robinson (2004) found that music educators used different strategies when working with at-risk students. These strategies included making sure the curriculum is relevant and ensuring the students experience some success. Robinson reported that as much as they could, teachers were responsive to the students' desire to learn certain pieces of music. They also were willing to adapt the learning process in order for the students to have success in learning music. Similar strategies were reported in the present study. The teachers responded to the students' struggles in learning by ensuring that they were being taught in a way that would assure some success in learning. The literature indicates that being responsive to learning styles is important for building resiliency (Hanson, 1991). Davies (2000) reiterated Hanson, stating that music allows for engagement of all learning styles. She noted that those with learning styles that are not catered to in schools often feel alienated (e.g., feeling type personalities). In particular students with sensing-feeling type are more likely to be at-risk and are more likely to be reached by studying music which is a medium that values expression and exploration of feelings (Vacha-Haase & Thompson, 2002). Although it is not known whether any of the

students taught by the volunteer teachers in the present study were a sensing-feeling type of learner, many of them were perceived to have connected with the music.

Duerksen and Darrow (1991) focussed on several elements in their discussion of at-risk youth and music. One element shared with the present study was that students were able to use the music as a means of self-expression, which is associated with the theme of students being able to be themselves during their piano lesson. Duerksen and Darrow (1991) also suggested that music develops a sense of self-worth. Although self-worth was not identified in the results of the current study, it seems likely to be related to self-expression and self-confidence, which were identified in the findings of the current study.

Mackworth-Young (1990) used action research to compare teacher-focussed and pupil-centered piano lessons. Findings indicated that pupil-centered lessons were the most important style of piano lessons in terms of engaging the student in learning and for students to learn the most.. Pupil-centered lessons involve both the teacher and the pupil focussing on providing the best education and responsive education to the students.

Finally, Snow and D'Amico (2010) presented findings of a case study that showed increased self-esteem and increased interest and longer playing times for students participating in a drum circle. In the current study, the students were reported as demonstrating increased confidence. This was a key observation of the teachers. As the students participated in the program they developed confidence, which was evident both inside and outside of the music classroom.

## **Preparation to Teach At-Risk Youth**

The volunteer teachers were not provided with training to teach three piano lessons a week. Although one participant suggested it was not possible to prepare volunteers for the experience, I disagree. I think it is relevant and perhaps an ethical obligation to provide volunteers with a framework for working with at-risk youth and talking about some of the potential concerns that may come up. For example, the value of active listening skills, resources for referral if necessary, and training to ensure that volunteers are aware of child abuse reporting procedures are critical in ensuring that the volunteer teachers were prepared to teach these students. Such training would help the volunteers be prepared, increase potential benefits for youth, and minimize risk to both the students and the volunteers.

## **The Importance of Music**

One of the interesting remarks made by Gabrielle was that she did not think it mattered if the activity was music, or if it was reading. According to her, the important thing was that the youth are participating in something. This was difficult for me to listen to. Although there are benefits to participating in any type of activity, such as discipline, structure, and having something to do, it is important to note that there were certain stories told by the participants that illustrated the importance of music being the particular activity that the students were participating in. Gabrielle had a student who after interacting with music became a different student. Conversely, there was the student who did not continue with the piano lessons even though they acquired the technique. The medium matters because there are individuals who are powerfully drawn to music. Music is a unique medium. Music allows for us to engage in feeling, and reach those feeling-type personalities who might not be engaged in other ways. Others are not taken with music. So it does matter what the medium is. In the case of the *HCPP*, there are

not enough volunteers for the number of students, which illustrates the appeal of music for many youth.

One way to see the impact of music is in the engagement of students. There were some students who were a part of the program and they demonstrated that they learned a lot about music and were talented, yet they did not remain a part of the program. Simply having something to do and having success at music was not enough. The students needed to be personally engaged in the music in order to remain a part of the program. For some students, music was not what they needed.

### **Strengths of the Current Study**

The main strength of this study is that the research investigated a phenomenon not presently found in the research literature – volunteer piano teachers’ experiences of teaching classical piano lessons to at-risk youth. Previous research has reported on the use of popular or cultural music when working with at-risk youth (e.g., Snow & D’Amico, 2010 and Wang, 2010). Other research has indicated the positive impact of classical piano lessons for youth but not specifically with at-risk youth (e.g., Piro & Ortiz, 2009; Portowitz & Klein, 2007). In this study, the perspective of the volunteer piano teachers was sought and the sample of recruited participants had some diversity.

In addition, my background in music and as a musician helped establish rapport with participants and perhaps increase their comfort in discussing their experiences. I have previous experience as a student of classical music study, and have also taught at-risk youth within the classroom setting as well taught at-risk youth to play band instruments. This allowed me, as the

researcher, to approach the research from a common background with similar experiences, which aided in collecting and analyzing the data.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

There are several limitations of the current study. First, the volunteer teachers were Caucasian and they came from backgrounds where they had access to piano study. All of the participants had graduated high school and had completed post-secondary study or were currently engaging in post-secondary study. This information shows that their perspectives are from a place of privilege. Therefore, the teachers may understand the students and piano lessons related to their childhood experiences, which may actually reflect their hopes for students versus understanding what the students' motivations and experiences might be.

The study only considered the teachers' perceptions of change in the students they taught, whereas there are many other perspectives: e.g., the students', parents' or classroom teachers' perspective about the piano lessons. Although findings present a valid perception of the experience, the findings are partial and represent a narrow perception of the experience.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The current research is unique as it looks at the teachers perceptions of their volunteer experiences teaching at-risk youth in weekly piano lessons. This topic is located in the midst of a gap in the research between the benefits of classical music study and the benefits of music for at-risk youth. As most of the literature focusses on cultural based music as the basis for benefit for at-risk youth, it is unique to look at the use of classical music study. Further research is called for.

First of all, as this study was limited in the number of participants one of the first recommendations would be to do a study with a larger sample. This study could expand to include more perspectives, for example volunteer piano teachers' perceptions as well as student perspectives, parent perceptions and classroom teacher perceptions. The program may have ramifications within all aspects of the students' life and therefore it would be useful to gather information representing a broader spectrum of the students' lives

It would be beneficial to investigate different types of musical one-on-one programs. For example, it would be interesting to see the impact of using culturally familiar music. In addition, the literature (e.g. Saarikallo & Erkkila, 2007) suggests that there are benefits for at-risk students to engage in music in other ways too. A further study that focussed on composition, listening, and improvisation would be interesting to compare with performance-based music study.

Finally, as the *Heart of the City Piano Program* is a community based program which relies on volunteers, it would be interesting to do a study which compares the experiences with other community based programs serving at-risk youth. Currently in Saskatoon, there is another community based music program called El Sistema which is based on a long-term program in Venezuela. A comparison of experiences within the two programs would lend to discovering which program(s) may be of best benefit to at-risk youth, or identifying shared elements as well as differentiating characteristics.

### **Implications for Educators and *Heart of the City Piano Program***

#### **Music Educators**

One of the largest implications for music educators is to realise how powerful the subject of study is for students who may be at-risk. The current study's findings illustrate that students



may find that music class is a place where they are able to be themselves. Through success in music, they may gain confidence that can assist in other aspects of their life. The music classroom is also a place where students may be able to fully engaged in their studies. Last, and certainly not least, the mentorship model which may be present especially in one-on-one style music lessons is critical in the learning of the student.

### **Classroom Educators**

There are also implications for educators who work in the traditional classroom. The first is identifying those students who show a self-motivation towards music. Students who are self-motivated in music are the types of students who may benefit the most from music education. Also, it is important to be aware of the opportunities within the community where students may be able to study music with limited or no cost. This way, teachers can help to advocate this intervention to their students and parents where applicable.

### ***Heart of the City Piano Program***

The results of the study can have an impact of the *Heart of City Piano Program*. First of all, the results illustrate the importance of the one-on-one mentorship relationship that the volunteers have with their students. The teachers also illustrated that there was meaningful non-musical impact to the students within the program. The volunteers spoke of the personal importance of the program and volunteering, that there was a significant personal benefit derived from working with the at-risk students.

This information can be used in order to recruit participants and to rally within the schools to continue to provide a space and supervision for the piano program to run within the schools. Also, it may prompt more people to encourage students to participate in the program. It

would also be key to point on the potential limitations of the grade 6 RCM piano requirement for this program. It would be beneficial for recruiting volunteers to broaden that to include those who have a similar but different background such as Suzuki piano training.

### **Researcher Reflection**

At times throughout the research study it was hard to listen to what the participants had to say because of personal beliefs that conflicted with what I was hearing from the participants. In particular, when Gabrielle was speaking about how it wasn't important what the students were participating in and rather that they were just participating in an activity, it raised a lot of negative emotions. However, during the reflective process of analyzing and writing up the results, I related it to a different experience I was having in my life. I taught in a math program which was meant to help to eliminate gaps in students' math learning. In doing this teaching, I found that through math we were able to teach different skills that were applicable to life. For example, students learned perseverance, were able to have success, and increased their confidence. I saw that we could teach these skills through math, or through music; it was not only music. The one-on-one teacher role model relationship and the ability to instruct students in these areas were important and I was able to better appreciate Gabrielle's comments.

I related more with Nick than the female participants in terms of the context from which he approached the study of music. Nick talked about the emotional benefits and about the aspects of music which cannot be described using words. Nick also talked about the culture and depth of music study and the importance of studying music deeply. These beliefs reflected my experience in music, and some of the reasons that I believe music is something to share and promote with others. Writing about Nick's perspective moved me to think even more about the

positive and aesthetic qualities of music study. Nick demonstrated hope and a positive perspective of his students.

The experience of talking to volunteer piano teachers about their experiences gave me hope that although the arts are often seeing a decrease of funding and a lack of support, the arts nevertheless continue to have value in the people who are engaged in them. I strongly believe that the arts and aesthetic education are important for educating students and in particular when working with at-risk youth.

### **Conclusion**

The six themes identified in this study were student self-motivation, student confidence, student sense of accomplishment as well as student focussed lessons, allowing the students to be themselves, and the positive role model relationship. The teachers were passionate about their participation in this program and the involvement they had in this important volunteer opportunity. The volunteer teachers all spoke avidly about their experiences with volunteering to teach piano lessons to at-risk youth. Their experiences shed light on the importance of this volunteer based program and music lessons as an accessible and promising intervention for at-risk youth.

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## Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

### Letter of Invitation

#### Music Lessons and Youth At Risk of Leaving School

Research Team:

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Nicol, Graduate Student: Ivy Armstrong  
University of Saskatchewan  
College of Education, Educational Psychology and Special Education  
Email: [ivy.armstrong@usask.ca](mailto:ivy.armstrong@usask.ca)

Dear Heart of the City Piano Program Board of Directors,

We are writing to ask for your participation in a research study looking at the perceived changes that piano teachers have of at-risk youth who are taking piano lessons. We greatly appreciate you taking time to read this letter about this important research.

The purpose of this study is to look at what teachers perceive as changes in the youth who they are working with. These changes may be in behaviours, but also in the relationship they develop with the music and with the teacher. We ask that you pass on the participation flyer, as we are seeking a number of piano teachers who have taught with the program for at least one year within the past five years. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board.

The study will be conducted using individual interviews where the participant will be able to talk about their experiences teaching in this program. The commitment is two interviews of 1 – 1.5 hours each.

Participants should contact the graduate student via email at [ivy.armstrong@usask.ca](mailto:ivy.armstrong@usask.ca) in order to express interest in assisting with this study. Participants may pass on the study information to anyone whom might meet the criteria to participate in this study. All participants will be give a \$10 itunes gift certificate at the end of their participation as a thank you for their time.

Any questions can be directed to the graduate student via email at [ivy.armstrong@usask.ca](mailto:ivy.armstrong@usask.ca)

Thank you for your assistance.

Dr. Jennifer Nicol

Ivy Armstrong



## **Appendix B: Call to Participate**

### **Call to participate**

Have you volunteered with the Heart of the City Piano Program for at least one year?

Would you be willing to discuss your experiences in confidential research interviews?

Under the supervision of Dr. J A J Nicol, a Registered Psychologist, I am a graduate student researcher in Educational Psychology & Special Education at the University of Saskatchewan. I am interested in the experience of teachers who have taught in the Heart of the City Piano Program. I am seeking volunteers to participate in two individual 1 to 1.5 hour interviews.

In order to participate, volunteers must:

- A) have volunteered for at least one year with the Heart of the City Piano Program,
- B) within the last five years.

For more information, please email: [ivy.armstrong@usask.ca](mailto:ivy.armstrong@usask.ca)

## Appendix C: Consent Form

### Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Music Lessons for Youth at-risk of leaving School”. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

**Researchers:** Ivy Armstrong, M.Ed. Candidate & Dr. Jennifer Nicol (Thesis Supervisor), Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education, University of Saskatchewan (email: [ivy.armstrong@usask.ca](mailto:ivy.armstrong@usask.ca))

**Purpose and Procedure:** The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of piano teachers in the Heart of the City Piano Program. The study will look at the teachers perceptions of change within their students. The participation included two 45-90 min interviews. Following the recorded interviews, the transcript will be provided to the participant for review.

**Potential Risks:** Any risk associated with this study is minimal. Participation is strictly voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

**Potential Benefits:** Talking about the experiences you have as a volunteer may be a benefit. A benefit is learning more about experiences of teaching at-risk youth. In addition contributing to the research body of information on this topic.

**Confidentiality:** To protect your confidentiality and privacy, pseudonyms will be used in place of participants’ real names. The consent forms will be stored separately from transcription data so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given responses.. Although excerpts of the transcripts will be included in the final study, no direct identifying information will be used. As a participant, you have the right to request that portions of the transcripts not be included in the thesis.

**Storage of Data:** The digital recording, transcripts, and any hard copy materials produced as a result of these interviews will be safeguarded and securely stored in password [encrypted] protected files and stored in locked cabinets by Dr. Jennifer Nicol at the University of Saskatchewan. The data will be stored for at least five years after publication; if after that time the researcher chooses to destroy the data, it will be destroyed beyond recovery.

**Right to Withdraw:** You may withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any question for any reason, without penalty or loss of services. You can also request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed. Your right to withdraw data

from the study will apply until data has been pooled. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Questions:** If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any time; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided below if you have questions at a later time. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on Jul 26, 2012 (BEH 12-203). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (966-2084). Results of the study can be obtained by contacting myself at [ivy.armstrong@usask.ca](mailto:ivy.armstrong@usask.ca) or by calling my thesis supervisor Dr. Jennifer Nicol at 966-5261.

**Consent to Participate:** I have read and understood the description provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

**Ethical Approval:** This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca) (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free (866) 966-2975.

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(Signature of Participant)

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(Date)

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(Signature of Researcher)

**Appendix D: Data/Transcript Release Form**

**Data/Transcript Release Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the summaries of my personal interviews in this study, and have had the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the actual transcripts. I acknowledge that the summary accurately reflects what I said in my personal interviews with Ivy Armstrong. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Ivy Armstrong to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Date

## Appendix E: Interview Questions

### Background Questions

- What were your experiences participating in music growing up?
- Tell me about how you got involved with the *Heart of the City Piano Program (HCPP)* program.
- How long have you been/were you involved with the *Heart of the City Piano Program*?
- Approximately how many students have you taught in the *HCPP*?
- In your opinion, what is the purpose of the *HCPP*?
- What type of music do you teach within the program?
- Do you think it's important for children to study music? Why or why not?

### Key Question

What have you observed in the children you teach piano?

Can you give me a specific example that sticks out in your memory?

- Describe in detail, from beginning to end, like a story. Where the memory starts, how it developed, particular things you remember, what happened in the middle of this story, what happened at the end

A second example?

Were there any negative effects that you noticed when teaching students?

Were there any positive effects that you noticed when teaching students?