

HMONG YOUTH ARTS CULTURE:  
MUSIC TEACHING AND LEARNING  
IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Hmong youth artists who participated in my study. With your music, you have shown me how to teach and learn in new ways, ones that encourage me to raise my voice for those who cannot, for those who suffer, and for those who believe that there is a better future ahead. Most of all, I am emboldened to raise my own voice and tell my story. Thank you to Tou SaiKo Lee, Chilli, Laurine, Triple G, Money, Fres, Fong, Bao, Teng, and Patag for believing in me, as well as in the importance of this project to your community of artists and change agents. I am grateful.

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## ABSTRACT

Pre-service music educators are dedicated to learning the art of classroom and ensemble teaching, but they may be unaware of their ability to affect students' thinking and music making around critical issues outside school music settings. Although numerous studies have identified a need to enhance music educators' emphases in teacher education or music teaching in general to be inclusive of critical and democratic practices that forward students' voices, little attention has been paid to how teachers help youth express their ideas about societal issues outside the music classroom.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the musical art forms and activities in Hmong communities that will inform democratic education in teacher preparation programs. Focusing on rap, spoken word poetry, and lyrical songs of ten Hmong youth artists, three guiding questions will be explored: (a) In what kinds of musical activities do youths participate? (b) For what purposes do Hmong youths create their arts? and (c) How might what Hmong do in their community inform music teacher preparation?

Music educators who bring together various teaching and learning opportunities, critical pedagogy, and democratic action will forward students' voices and help them become change agents for themselves, their schools, and communities. In this ethnographic study, I found that given opportunities to create raps, spoken word poems, and songs, Hmong youth become proactive citizens who advance the tenets of a free and democratic society in their communities when they express their ideas centered on personal, group, social, and political issues that affect them. The results of this study demonstrate that music teacher preparers will serve their pre-service music educators by

forging a new, critical, and democratic practice that might be learned from community musicians.

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## PROLOGUE

Today

By Kinh T. Vu

Today we ask  
So tomorrow we can live.

This is not my life.  
This is not who I am.  
I am not of this place.  
This place does not care for strangers.  
I am an alien in new lands.  
If I tell you about my life  
If I tell you about my strife  
You will deny it ever happened this way.  
It is too sensational.  
I'm on the outside. I'm looking in.\*  
What am I seeing?  
You tell me, what am I supposed to see.  
You've taken everything I never knew  
Construed it as used, useless, senseless  
Reckless and hated.

Today we remember  
So tomorrow we can live.

People of color, dirty from transgressions  
Only their ancestors have witnessed.  
These hands are not their hands.  
They must be others', toiling, laboring on,  
Stained by their heritage.  
Dirty pasts wrapped up like wontons stuffed too full  
Too full of stories about war, the CIA, communists;  
Commies who annihilate mothers of unborn children.  
Who annihilate fathers of unborn nations.

If only we could be nourished by stories.  
Instead we grieve over the contradictions of this free land.  
A city ripping at the seams  
Groaning at the scenes of atrocities  
Committed by *our* Western and White oppressors.

Today we think  
So tomorrow we can live.

---

\* Lyrics from "Outside" on album *Breaking the Cycle* by Staind (2001: Flip Records and Elektra Entertainment Group Inc.)

Chai Vang was just like the rest of us,  
But trapped one day he snapped.  
Convicted by a White jury – enemies  
His pleas unheard, untried  
Tried not by a jury of his peers.  
The DA hated Vang not for his act  
She pursued him for being Hmong.  
Her vendetta was outrageous and overtly wrong.

Today we rebel  
So tomorrow we can live.

In the memory of injustice  
19 years old and barely legal,  
Fong Lee was taken from his family  
Gunned down by hatred  
Bang to Bang, Gang on Gang  
Sacred grounds consecrated by Hmong blood.  
This is not the hood, it must be understood.  
A bloodstained trust in a tired wasteland  
Tears strewn across an urban badland.

Today we die  
So tomorrow we can live.

Oh say can you see  
What is wrong in this land?  
Chai Vang and Fong Lee and other victims  
Wasted along the margins of unsent letters scrawled for some  
nameless crowd.  
It is our prayer, Shaman and Christian,  
To restore dignity and justice for all.

This is our country and this is our home.  
You cannot have the power to unwrap, unravel,  
Unmake and undermine our people.  
Under the steeple of love and pride  
We are one nation under one authority:  
Hispanic, Black, Caucasian, Asian ...

Human.

Today we hope  
So tomorrow we can live.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Hmong immigrants began arriving in America in mid-1975. An ethnic group from Southeast Asian, they first left their homelands to escape war-torn Laos. Hmong people come from parts of China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma) (T. P. Lee & Pfeifer, 2009-2010). Those who made it out alive left behind loved ones with the hopes of one day reuniting with family and making a new life in the West. I, too, escaped from Asia just as South Vietnam's capital city Saigon was falling to the Viet Cong in April 1975. At the time, no one seemed to know what would happen to orphaned babies like me as panic gripped the city's inhabitants. Just north of Saigon in Laos, Hmong people were discovering that they, too, needed to escape as soon as possible to avoid capture and possible death at the hands of Pathet Lao guerrilla fighters.

Arriving from Laos and Thailand beginning in 1975 through the last major immigration rush in 2003-2004, Hmong resettlement patterns developed in rural and urban regions of the United States (Vang, 2010, pp. 45-46). Sponsoring agencies, including Minnesota's International Institute and religious organizations such as U.S. Catholic Conference and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services offered both political and social assistance to help relocate Hmong refugees in Minnesota (Hillmer, 2010, p. 244; Vang, 2008, p. 11). The practice of secondary migration (moving from the initial location in which a refugee is resettled to another location) began almost immediately after the initial resettlement (Downing & Olney, 1982, p. 18). For instance,

the primary study participant in this study, Tou SaiKo Lee, was initially resettled in Syracuse, New York. Due to family ties in Minnesota, his father relocated the family to St. Paul.

Hmong youth artists ages between 18 and 24 and their young adult leaders from St. Paul tell their harrowing stories of narrow escapes, losses, life in the states, and self-discovery through music – rap, spoken word poetry, and lyrical songs – as well as stories about their experiences in Minnesota’s capital city. In this dissertation, I share how I learned from Hmong youth artists what it means to survive and thrive as storytellers and discuss how their lessons are applicable to the larger field of music education. We, my participants and I, share common threads and our lives are intertwined: We are refugees; we are immigrants; we are orphans; we are musicians; we are proud – we are Asians.

### **Hmong in Minnesota**

Minnesota is home to America’s second largest Hmong population, 28,591 of who call St. Paul, Minnesota, home. Participants in this study come from the largest population of Hmong ethnicity in an American metropolitan region. In his book *A People’s History of the Hmong*, one of Hillmer’s (2010) interviewees states that the Twin Cities had become “the epicenter of the Hmong community in the United States” (p. 286). Vang (2010) notes “[t]he large [Hmong] population concentration ... has resulted in the Twin Cities being referred to by some community members as the ‘Hmong capital of the world’” (p. 59).

According to Lee and Pfeifer (2009-2010), Hmong are a Southeast Asian ethnic group consisting of peoples from China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar

(Burma). Hmong people began arriving in the United States, including parts of the upper Midwest, in late spring 1975 and continue to come to the Twin Cities, Minnesota. In a 2004 report, Minnesota Public Radio's Mary Stucky focused on Hmong in Minnesota when nearly 15,000 Hmong refugees living in Thailand were about to immigrate to the United States; 5,000 refugees would presumably arrive in St. Paul. The most recent census figures posted by the Associated Press in 2011 indicate that the population of Hmong in Minnesota increased 46 percent from 45,443 in 2000 to 66,161 in 2010 ("Census," 2011, para. 2).

The high concentration of this ethnic group is a significant factor that affects St. Paul's commercial landscapes, as well as the Hmong arts scene. For instance, Hmong businesses such as "grocery stores, automotive repair shops, car dealerships, financial services, and insurance sales" (Yang, 2001, p. 168) began opening around 1975. Hmong have established themselves in the areas of professional services, health care, high-tech industries and farming during the past twenty years (p. 168). This kind of business growth was in response to a greater need for Hmong-specific products and services such as textiles, foods, medicine, Hmong language newspapers, insurance agencies, and legal assistance. The Hmong arts community, first driven by artist-actor-comedian Tou Ger Xiong (Yang, 2001, p. 174), has made important contributions to St. Paul. In 1998, the Hmong community established the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (CHAT) to serve performing artists through programs such as its youth leadership program (Fres, personal communication, October 9, 2012).

## **Hmong Youth Arts Culture**

The study of youth culture began as early as the 1920s and 30s, when University of Chicago sociologists, dubbed the “Chicago School,” began their investigation of juvenile delinquency (Bennett, 2000, p. 14). Bennett indicates that sub-cultural studies became vogue beginning in the 1940s, particularly after World War II; however, a shift occurred in the 1970s when youth cultural studies took on an ethnic flavor: “[R]eferences to the youth of ethnic minorities were, for the most part, incorporated into accounts of White appropriations of the [minorities’] stylistic innovations” (p. 28).

Weinstein (1999) notes that Rock [music] and youth “were born Siamese twins” (p. 101). “Youth culture [the term coined by Talcott Parsons] develops inverse values to the adult world of productive work and conformity to routine responsibility” (Brake, 1985, pp. 39-40). Rock ‘n’ roll, born in the 1950s, “[drove] a wedge between the generations and [marked] off youth from the parent culture ...” (Bennett, 2000, p. 35).

For the purpose of this dissertation, “Hmong youth arts culture” refers to three young adult leaders in their late twenties and early thirties and seven college-aged students but not necessarily college attendees. Youth are musicians, poets, dancers, and visual artists, and they represent a slice of the youth arts culture in St. Paul, particularly Hip-hop culture.

## **Hmong Youth Artists**

Music is one of the major modes of human symbolic communication (along with verbal language, mathematics, visual arts, and dance). For many, music is a powerful life force that enables self-expression, creativity, and communication. Hmong youth artists

use music to express their feelings about issues in their communities through the creation of music, because it helps them tell stories about their experiences in St. Paul. Some youth employ rap, spoken word poetry, and lyrical songs as ways to transform their lives.

Hmong in Minnesota have encountered challenges centered on political reform, police brutality, gang violence, and questions of Hmong-American identity. Today, grassroots arts leaders work together to create positive changes in their communities by empowering young people to use their voices to address these challenges. College-aged youth confront social injustice through the creation of rap, spoken word poetry, songs, and break-dance. Hmong youth artists have contributed to the artistic/musical fiber of the Twin Cities in the last decade, as evidenced by activities around the metropolitan area including open mic nights, music and poetry workshops, and arts festivals. Artists continue to make a positive, life-changing impact on social issues within and outside their neighborhoods and schools.

“The arts appear to have a high profile in the Hmong American community ...” (Hones et al., 2012, p. 191). In promotional materials for Eastside Rising, a group of rappers and poets from East St. Paul, Tou SaiKo Lee notes that Hip-hop musicians are encouraged to share their voices with one another in their neighborhoods to confront issues centering on stories of home and social justice (unpublished Eastside Rising application, August 2, 2012).

For the purpose of this dissertation, Hip-hop is defined as a culture that includes “graffiti, break dancing, dj-ing, [and] rap music” (Kitwana, 2003, p. 8). Additional elements of Hip-hop include “verbal language, body language, attitude, style, and fashion” (p. 8). With its origins in West Bronx, New York City, late August 1973, Hip-



hop was given its debut by Jamaican-born Clive Campbell (a.k.a., D. J. Kool Herc) who introduced a musical phenomenon to the youth in his neighborhood (Chang, 2005).

Though some “insist that African American Hip-hop is the only real variety and that other forms are inauthentic deviations, [other people] insist that to be authentic one needs to stick to one’s ‘own’ cultural and linguistic traditions” (Pennycook, 2007). St. Paul’s Hmong youth arts community primarily participates in Hip-hop culture as rappers, singers, poets, DJs, MCs, and break-dancers (b-boys and b-girls). They use music performed in English and Hmong languages to express their feelings by telling stories about their lived experiences in the Twin Cities.

Alongside adult arts leaders, youth build networks that give a powerful voice to Hmong residents, empowering them to work for equality among citizens, not just Hmong people, in St. Paul. The ways that youth make music lend itself to creating music that has a purpose that is centered on self or group identity, social justice or political commentary. This is not to speculate that all music is politically motivated, since traditional arts are also evident (e.g., Hmong New Year celebrations). Hmong people living in the United States enjoy various kinds of music practices in order to preserve, sustain, and develop their culture by performing rituals and telling stories. They use both vocal and instrumental genres in traditional and modern ways. Poss (2005) notes “Hmong immigrants, in the context of the United States, continue a number of musical practices that they learned in Laos and Thailand” (p. 17); however, the traditional practices are less present in the lives of participants with the exception of Tou SaiK.

## Traditional Music Practices

Hmong language and music are considered similar forms of communication in Hmong culture. In his master's thesis, Poss (2005) interviewed Ger Xiong who indicates that, "Hmong music is not like normal music. We play word by word into the flute." Poss probes further how one knows what is being communicated, and Xiong replies, "Mostly, if you are Hmong and know the language, then you understand" (p. 3). Hillmer (2010) describes the sophistication of Hmong communication: "Hmong people can hear sounds and know what they mean without having heard them before.... the Hmong have for centuries been 'eminently literate in terms of interpreting musical sounds'" (p. 35). This, however, is not the case for young people in today's American culture. Minnesota-based storyteller and professional grant writer Dyane, counters that infants are taught language in songful tones. Sound, she adds, is critical to language development, and Hmong children growing up in the United States do not have that any longer (personal communication, November 18, 2010).

Studying musical language may improve an understanding of the relationship between speech and music (Poss, 2005, p. 5). There is a close relationship between music performed on the *qeej* (pronounced "fang"), mouth organ or reed pipe (Vang, 2008; Hillmer, 2010), and language:

For the Hmong, the indisputable difference between their instrument and those of other ethnic groups is that the Hmong *qeej* "speaks." To the Hmong, the *qeej* is not an instrument designed to produce music; it is a bamboo voice that intones a highly stylized and ritualistic language. Thus "music" and "speech" are [generally] inseparable. (Morrison, 1998, p. 3)

In this thesis, I am not able to fully address the merits of Hmong music that include teaching, learning, and performing on traditional instruments such as the *qeej*. However, due to my primary participant's collaborations with his grandmother, I will refer to *kvv txhiaj* (pronounced "gut-tsia"), or "sung poetry" (Johns, 1986, p. 5), whereby performers improvise according to what Poss (2005) calls poetic and musical conventions (p. 18). The principal aim of this project is to consider contemporary music making and activism by youth who use Hip-hop arts of rap, lyrical song, and spoken word poetry rather than instrumental performance on the *qeej* or vocal performances of *kvv txhiaj*.

### **Music and Spoken Word Poetry**

*Music* is the general term I will use to describe the artistic forms employed by Hmong youth artists: rap and lyrical song. Rap, according to Rose (1994a) "is one cultural element within the larger social movement of hip hop" (p. 72). Spoken word poetry will be considered part of Hmong musical practices since "these cultural forms [music and spoken word poetry] overlap and blend into each other [and] include the composition of lyrics or verse or rap or prose, most often through writing" (Hull, 2003, p. 232). Robinson, Hall, and Spano (2010) state, "Music and poetry have an inextricable connection. They both incorporate rhythm, meter, and form" (p. 74). Galda and Cullinan (2006) note, "In poetry, rhythm refers to the repeated use of syllables and accents and to the rise and fall of words spoken or read" (p. 102). Additionally, poets use the element of pitch and sometimes include musical accompaniments played by acoustic instruments (e.g., guitar, piano) or electronic, pre-recorded music such as beats.

## **Hip-hop Music Practices**

Though traditional music is still important to Hmong people in St. Paul, a steady stream of contemporary music is created by Hmong youth ages 13 through 30 and includes American pop and rap. “In the mid-1990s, Tou Ger Xiong, a Hmong comedian, storyteller, and rapper, emerged as one of the first Hmong media personalities, sharing his message of cross-cultural and cross-generational understanding” (Hillmer, 2010, p. 300). Following a similar path as Xiong, Tou SaiKo Lee began his work as a youth arts leader of music and poetry in the 2000s. Chouchee Yang, a producer and MC, takes this view of Hip-hop music in the Hmong community:

You know the reason we do music is because, you know, it’s an art form. You know, it’s universal, and Hip-hop is music. You know, it’s beautiful. We do Hip-hop, because we want to bridge with the community – with the Americans.  
(Letson, 2010)

It is true that Hmong youth use music, particularly Hip-hop, to express their feelings about overcoming struggles (T. S. Lee, 2012). The youth tend to focus their attention on political activism. Fong Lee, a teen who was shot and killed while biking from Minneapolis Police; Chai Vang, a deer hunter convicted of six counts of first-degree intentional homicide and three counts of attempted homicide for defending himself against White landowners in Wisconsin (“Man Convicted,” 2009); and Twin Cities’ hit music station KDWB’s (FM 101.5) March 2011 radio broadcast of a racist parody about the Hmong lifestyle based on Eric Clapton’s “Tears in Heaven” are three local issues that rappers, singers, and poets have rallied against. Though my participants believe that the arts bring them closer to their Hmong communities and Hmong identities, not all Hmong

confess this same feeling. Ma Lee Xiong, a University of Wisconsin – Oshkosh student, says that “[t]he arts do not really make me feel Hmong. I feel more American” (Hones et al., 2012, p. 197).

## **Secret War**

Hmong youth artists tell stories about their past and are aware of their turbulent heritage because of the rich storytelling traditions carried on by their families: One important story is that of the Secret War and its aftermath. The Lao Civil War (1960-1975) is often referred to in the literature and colloquially as the Secret War, because it was overshadowed by the concurrent and widely known war in Vietnam (1955-1975). There were essentially two factions in the Secret War: Hmong soldiers who allied themselves with the Royal Lao Government (RLG) aided by the United States, and the Pathet Lao, Laotian communist guerrillas who were aided by the North Vietnamese (Hillmer, 2010; G. Y. Lee, 2009; Quincy, 1995). Like the Vietnam War, the Lao Civil War involved an American presence; however, the American military’s role in Laos was clandestine:

[B]etween 1961 and 1973, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and USAID [United States Agency for International Development], in partnership with the governments of Laos and Thailand, worked closely with ... ethnic minorities in Laos to develop conventional and guerrilla forces capable of defending the Royal Lao Government. (Hillmer, 2010, p. 91)

The CIA, fearing a communist victory in Northern Indochina (the Southeast Asian peninsula), provided covert support to the RLG (Quincy, 1995, p. ix), as well as its

Hmong fighters, numbering nearly 23,000 troops by 1964, who were “recruited into the so-called ‘secret or mercenary army’ by the Hmong leader, General Vang Pao” (G. Y. Lee, 2009, p. 122).

The RLG and CIA did not achieve the desired outcome of the Secret War. From 1973 to 1975, the Hmong troops under Vang Pao’s leadership were weakened. Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma ordered Vang Pao to “cease all attacks against the communists” (Quincy, 1995, p. 206). Phouma lamented, “The Hmong have served me well, Vang Pao has fought well for me. The Hmong are good soldiers. It’s a pity that peace may come only at the cost of their liquidation” (p. 206).

### **Purpose and Guiding Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the musical art forms and activities in Hmong communities that will inform democratic education in teacher preparation programs. St. Paul’s Hmong youth artists teach, learn, and perform musics that tell their stories about struggle and achievement in the Twin Cities metropolitan region. From this Hmong community-based model of music education, teacher preparers of future K-12 music educators can learn how to empower their own students by creating lessons that forward democratic thinking and action in their music classrooms.

Teaching and learning situations, formal or informal, are propelled by organic, critical needs that arise within the community such as developing leadership among youth, raising collective voices about social or political issues, or exploring personal matters. By focusing on rap, spoken word poetry, and lyrical songs of ten Hmong artists,

three guiding questions will be explored: (a) In what kinds of musical activities do youth participate and how do they teach and learn their arts? (b) For what purpose do Hmong youth create their arts? and (c) How might what Hmong do in their community inform music teacher preparation?

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Music Learning Practices**

Hmong musicians employ two kinds of learning practices: formal and informal. Where and how these practices occur are two different matters. Regarding *where*, both formal and informal music learning practices occur in places such as schools, centers, homes, and parks. Instruction methods are also characterized by *how*, or more aptly, by whom the music is taught and learned.

In formal learning practices, adults such as music teachers or youth leaders design and implement instruction intended to guide composition, improvisation, and performance activities undertaken by youth. This kind of instruction when carried out in a community setting, as in this study, bears a resemblance to classroom music instruction associated with schools.

Informal learning practices are generally considered to be student-centered. This means that a teacher's instruction techniques might allow students the opportunity to be independent in the ways they choose to create their music. Another meaning is that students cultivate their own music making free of guidance from teachers; they often rely on their own volition or on assistance from peers of the same or similar age. In this

dissertation, I rely on Green's (2002) work about informal music learning practices to frame my use of the term *informal*:

within [informal] traditions, young musicians largely teach themselves or 'pick up' skills and knowledge, usually with the help or encouragement of their family and peers, by watching and imitating musicians around them and by making reference to recordings or performances and other live events involving their chosen music. (p. 5)

Another kind of music learning practices is intergenerational. Green alludes to family as one source of motivation for young people's acquisition of musical skills. In this study, family means parents, grandparents, and siblings of the participants. Tou SaiKo Lee references his grandmother frequently, which adds the element of intergenerational mentoring as one way that Hmong participate in music teaching and learning.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy, in Wink's (2011) concise definition, is to name, reflect, and act (p. 9) in and on the world. Paulo Freire (1970/2000), Brazilian change agent provided an example for educators to change their own worlds and those of their students by empowering people to read the world, not just the word. Because he insisted on teaching the poor to read, he enabled them to name issues and question the world and the authorities that govern it. In education, critical pedagogy encourages students to acknowledge and connect their experiences to learning. Self-expression, coupled with political and social awareness, provides students with opportunities to critique and



change practices and issues in their learning communities. Critical pedagogy in this dissertation is the bridge connecting people's musical experiences between informal and formal learning situations; home and school culture; Hmong culture and hegemonic culture; popular and classical music; and self and group expression.

### **Democratic Education**

Democracy refers not to ideals such as majority rule or political parties. It is the freedom exercised by youth and their adult youth leaders to use their music as a form of self or group expression. Sometimes their expressions are about personal experiences as Hmong Americans living in St. Paul while at other times they are explicitly about socio-political issues that affect them in the Twin Cities.

American philosopher and educator John Dewey proposed a way of thinking that linked the responsibility of the educational system to uphold the tenets of a free society. He expressed that there is a connection between the two – democracy and education – that is worth making so that people learn to think for themselves, as well as build a collective society that is not complacent. In this study, democratic education includes democratizing the classroom so that power differentials among individuals and between groups (e.g., teachers and students) are reduced or eliminated. By endeavoring to equalize stakeholders' contributions, everyone in the educational enterprise becomes both a teacher and a student.

## Theoretical Framework

Based on my own experiences as a music teacher and my understanding of the structures associated with teaching and learning in public school, when I entered the Hmong community, artists highlighted for me gaps between how we teachers make music in school and how students experience music in their everyday lives. The gaps that my study's participants indicated exist in their lives included disconnections between their own musical experiences and those experiences cultivated at school, and these gaps appear to function like barriers that keep Hmong youth from enrolling in and enjoying school-based music. How, then, might I build a bridge to span the gaps? Three elements constitute a theoretical framework upon which a new pedagogical narrative for music education, especially as it pertains to teacher preparation, might be born: *music learning practices*, *critical pedagogy*, and *democratic education*.

In this dissertation, I explore ways in which Hmong youth use music to make sense of their lived experiences and to discuss the importance of learning from them how music learning practices in community settings might help to reframe or enhance school- or college-based models of music education. The framework employs critical pedagogy to bridge gaps by enabling youth and teachers to name issues, critically reflect on their lives, and act (Wink, 2011, p. 9) in ways that demonstrate the power of Hmong arts.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) write:

If students are to be prepared for democratic engagement on an equal footing, teachers in many schools will need to create new conditions for learning that

provide more equal access to challenging curriculum and more engagement in decision making. (p. 170)

Music making is the conduit through which words are written, spoken, and sung. Democratic education grounds the ways students learn both in community and at school, as well as equalizes teaching and learning responsibilities, so that people, places, and situations are changed in a manner consistent with the voices that speak of positive, community-based change.

The power of group dynamics allows Hmong musicians who participated in this study to raise their voices for the common good as both individual and group performers. When I observed Hmong youth artists making music, either in its creation phases or in live performances, I noticed that (a) music making appeared effortless for the youth during many activities; and (b) the words they spoke and sang were about the worlds they know or the ones that they envision. This led me to believe that something important happens when Hmong youth “spit” their raps or composed their beats. Beyond notes and rhythms, music making for the sake of music alone (aesthetics) was coupled with voices that called for freedom, voices that called for justice, voices that called for family, and voices that called for remembering. Their words and their worlds (Freire, 1970/2000) collided powerfully; the words I heard disrupted what might have otherwise been silences.

These actions harken to Freire (1970/2011) and his work on critical pedagogy. He notes:

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist,

humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (p. 88)

Leaders and youth alike may advance democracy for themselves and their communities using a critical pedagogy of the arts that names, critically reflects, and acts on issues that matter. This is because critical pedagogy “challenges our long-held assumptions and leads us to ask new questions, and the questions we ask will determine the answers we get. Critical pedagogy gives voice to the voiceless, gives power to the powerless” (Wink, 2011, p. 6). Music making constitutes a significant part of the Hmong youth arts movement that simultaneously questions cultural hegemony and promulgates a peaceful expression of ideals that amplify the status of the Hmong minority.

Participants feel that their collective voice around ethnic issues (e.g., unfair treatment by local police) is unheard. Macedo (2000/2011) writes about colonialism and “culturally schizophrenic” experiences: he notes that people living in colonized cultural spaces face “tensions, contradictions, fears, doubts, hopes, and ‘deferred’ dreams.” He further summarizes cultural bi-polarity by writing that people can “be present and yet invisible, be visible and yet not present” (p. 11).

Critical *musical* pedagogy in the Hmong youth arts culture offers ways to bridge gaps and transform our understanding of what music education is and can be both in communities and schools. Abrahams (2005a) notes that critical pedagogy in music must move beyond constructivism, that is to say, meaning building. “For music learning that empowers, the pedagogy must also address feeling and action that are significant, sophisticated, and meaningful to the students and teacher” (p. 14).

Music learning that empowers people to think, feel, and act entails active participation in democratic education. Wink (2011) writes, “Democracy is at the heart of the transformative lesson” (p. 144). Though the lesson (e.g., music learning) is important, people act in ways that may or may not resemble democracy. It might also be at the heart of the societal lesson in which students and teachers alike can make real choices that affect the direction of education.

Democratic education is communal. Dewey (1916/2011) writes, “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 50). Yet somehow, school personnel tend to divide conjoint communication, teachers shy away from fighting for children’s rights to fair and equal opportunities, and communities rebel against schools for their perceived lack of interest in child-centered education that now favors standardized test training, rote learning, and rule adherence. Noddings (1984) calls this kind of situation a “crisis of care” (p. 181).

Applied to music education, democratic education is equally important. It means that *access* to arts and music education is granted to all people. However, for example, the advent of “elective” music in the 1960s (Mark & Gary, 1999, p. 258) and the introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001 narrows rather than broadens school curriculum (Bryant, 2009, p. 44), leaving little room for music and other arts in students’ schedules for music classes. *Quality* educational experiences in music are sometimes replaced with skill and drill, performance-centered music experiences (Regelski, 2006). *Equity*, the value of music education, is reduced through a series of actions that “shift funding away from subjects such as music ...” (Kratus, 2007, p.43).

McCarthy (2003) reports that music educators around the world are concerned about democratic principles such as access, quality, and equity. She notes, “common interest of all music educators in children and music, or the common bond to see people’s lives enriched by music, [should rise] above political loyalties of members” (p. 206).

Community music making by Hmong youth artists seems to embrace democracy and democratic education in or through music by adhering to the three tenets: access, quality, and equity. The common interest, as McCarthy states it, is that music tells stories of high value to and for the community and does, indeed, enrich people’s lives.

Participants in this study advance democratic education through music making conducted in and around homes, streets, cafés, community centers, college student centers, and neighborhoods. The work of youth and their leaders has the power to transform people in positive, uplifting ways, making them change agents through informal, artistic, and educative endeavors. Critical pedagogy and a dynamic transformation that is democratic education merge when dialogue takes place. Freire (1970/2000) identifies dialogical encounters, such as critical reflection (i.e., words) as those that occur between those who can speak with one another, not antagonists (pp. 128-129). “There is nothing, however, more real or concrete than people in the world and with the world, than humans with other humans – and some people against others, as oppressing and oppressed classes” (p. 129). He continues by noting that people must think together, not the same thoughts, but think about and around issues critically: “Revolutionary leaders cannot think *without* the people, nor *for* the people, but only *with* the people” (p. 131).

The triadic, theoretical framework (see Figure 1) includes music learning practices, critical pedagogy, and democratic education. It is meant to underscore the importance of music making in the Hmong youth arts community as musicians create musics with critical purposes in mind such as self and group expression, social justice, and political awareness.

Bridging the gaps between people's lived experiences is a critical pedagogy. It is an act of democratizing education, because through music teaching and learning, educators empower students like the Hmong youth in this study to create music for positive change. Music making in one's own life in community or at school helps students learn how to make artistic choices that will translate into life choices that benefit society and further strengthen the foundations of democratic education in community and at school. If practically applied to traditional school-based music education, educators might use this framework as a way to re-imagine music education for the twenty-first century both in teacher preparation and K-12 settings whereby the students' lived experiences in community and school travel fluidly across the bridge, one informing the other on a bi-directional roadway. Additional lived experiences will be discussed in Chapter V.

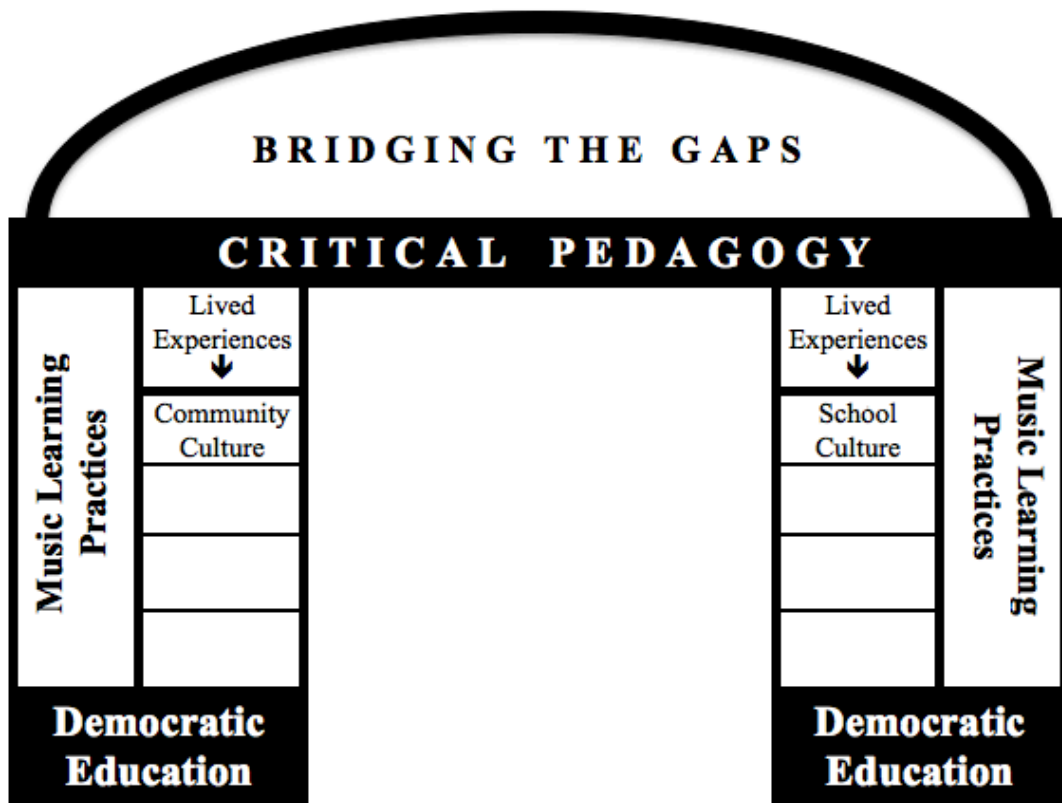


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

### Overview of Procedures

#### Research Design: Ethnography

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) describe ethnography as “[an] *analytical description* (emphasis added) of social scenes and groups that recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of those people” (pp. 2-3). “Rooted in anthropology, ethnography involves the study of an intact group, logically defined, in its natural context for a sustained time interval” (Creswell, 1994, p. 11). The Hmong community in St. Paul provides a rich context in which to study youth culture and



their music making. The Hmong youth arts culture is a semiotic domain, that is “[an] area or set of activities where people think, act, and value in certain ways” (Gee, 2007, p 19) in which youth participate in informal musical learning practices (Green, 2002, p. 5) that ultimately forward democracy for both individuals and groups.

The complexity arises in that youth artists do not simply identify themselves as “just a rapper” or “just a lyrical singer.” They oftentimes participate in more than one activity type (e.g., rap, lyrical song, and poetry) within the larger Hmong youth arts culture, specifically the Hmong youth Hip-hop domain. Youth leaders, as well as those they mentor, encourage artists to participate in rap, lyrical song, spoken word poetry, and break-dance activities. They learn master of ceremony (MC) and disc jockey (DJ) skills where the combined artistry performed by individuals is greater than any one kind of artistic medium performed alone.

## **Method**

This ethnographic study was conducted using the following methods for collecting data: interviews, focus groups, participant-observations, and artifact acquisitions. I employed interviews as the primary strategy for data collection, because they gave my participants and me an opportunity to discuss their lives and work on an individual basis. Fontana and Frey (2008) indicate that “interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (p. 119). Regardless, structured, semi-structured, and open interviews were useful for the purpose of answering questions about how and why artists make music in their communities.

Glesne (2011) indicates that focus groups, sometimes known as group interviews, are useful “to better understand how a group would discuss some issue and elicit multiple perspectives in the process” (p. 131). In this research study, focus groups were important for two reasons. First, they allowed youth artists to do what they know how to do best; participants are used to sharing with each other in social ways in their daily lives (outside this study). Second, focus groups provided safe spaces for Hmong youth to generate conversations that might not otherwise have arisen during one-on-one interviews. These generative dialogues have the power to elicit important issues about personhood, communion with others, and relationships with temporal and situated circumstances.

Observations, both as a bystander and participant, between November 2010 and November 2012 provided the bulk of information for this study, since, as mentioned above, ethnography involves “the study of an intact group, logically defined, in its natural context for a sustained time interval” (Creswell, 1994, p. 11). I attended a variety of activities in the Hmong community including but not limited to arts festivals, Hmong New Year in St. Paul, open mic nights, organizational meetings, and youth leader planning sessions. The numerous events provided me with many experiences that formed the basis upon which to build a thick description (Ryle, 1968; Geertz, 1973) of the lives and activities of the Hmong youth arts culture.

“Artifacts are the material objects that ... represent the culture of the people and setting.” To the outsider, they may seem inconsequential or “just ‘stuff’”(Glesne, 2011, p. 88). Artifacts produced by my participants such as flyers, posters, brochures, and recordings added to this research in that they provided a printed or recorded (i.e.,

physical) description of settings – time, place, and context – and helped to explicate the thought processes and attitudes of Hmong youth artists.

### **Significance of Study**

I studied the musical lives of Hmong youth artists and the ways they gather together to compose, teach, learn, and perform their music, because I wanted to discover how and why they use music as a means to critique themselves, as well as the social and political issues that affect Hmong youth in their St. Paul communities. By uncovering aspects of their musical work that distinctly addresses self-expression, group identity, social justice, and political issues through music making, music educators will bridge gaps between their own important music-specific work (e.g., curriculum) and that of the music makers outside their schools. This kind of community-centered, community-inclusive practice will provide a way for teachers to broaden the kinds of musics they choose to teach, as well as diversify the purposes of music in their classes. The crux of this research, however, is the intersection of musical practices, critical pedagogy, and democratic education. I am interested in music's power to not only affect students' artistic or emotional senses, but also to have a purposeful effect on the way students and teachers learn and make music together in schools.

Until recently, I have not questioned music education's role in the lives of people outside elementary, secondary, and collegiate settings. The Housewright Declaration, written in 1999, is a summary of the agreements made at the Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education. Writers indicate, "Professional music educators must

provide a leadership role in coordinating music activities beyond the school setting to insure *formal* and *informal* [emphasis added] curricular integration” (“Vision 2020,” 1999). Teaching of bands, orchestras, choirs, and general music classes is still important to the holistic development of every child-learner in schools, but my research provides readers with an opportunity to discover the potential benefits of music learning practices and critical purposes of music making within Hmong youth arts communities, as one example, to the larger field of music education. Therefore, the research is meant to show that this confluent aspect of music learning, critical pedagogy, and democratic education in music education is essential to school musicians of the twenty-first century.

Hence, I postulate that teachers who engage in music outside their school buildings – in their students’ neighborhoods – will encounter opportunities, some of which might be new, to teach and learn symbiotically with students and residents alike. Banks (2009) states that, “The schools should affirm and recognize the home and community cultures of students. However, it also should help them to develop a critical consciousness of their home and community cultures” (pp. 106-107). For example, teachers might discover musics that have been part of the community long before the school existed (e.g., ethnic folksongs), become acquainted with local community settings where music is deemed an important facet of such spaces as church halls or coffee shops, and build new relationships with residents that will strengthen the credibility of music teachers and music education as a whole among students and their families.

Nzewi (2007) writes, “The discipline of the musical arts [has] a divine responsibility to re-search strategies for re-humanizing the leaders” (p. 317).

Furthermore, teachers who come in contact with and, in fact, join the public vitalize a

conversation that centers attention on “show[ing] empathy with the people” (p. 317). However, “showing empathy” is not necessarily easy; “non-reflective and unexamined cultural attachments will perpetuate cultural and ethnic ethnocentrism (Banks, 2009, p. 107). Non-traditional teaching and learning environments, such as in the Hmong community, may present challenges for music educators who are accustomed to traditional school-based classroom settings.

Community spaces can be unfamiliar to and uncomfortable for music teachers for reasons including cultural and intercultural issues such as lack of formal structures (i.e., rules), language barriers, mannerisms, commerce, health and medical practices, religious traditions, and even foods. Hence, some music teachers may be tempted to emphasize “cultural assimilation into the dominant culture of the nation state,” and may inadvertently ignore local communities and cultures (Banks, 2009, p. 105). Teachers could inadvertently forget to “develop a *critical consciousness* of their home and community cultures” in their curricula (p. 106). Intentional planning will be necessary to address, as well as forward a dynamic re-framing of music’s role in schools and colleges whereby various learning processes are valued and even necessary to whole music learning.

Training programs for pre-service teachers and professional development for working, in-service music teachers may include the development of partner programs that invite community musicians, like my Hmong participants, to plan chapter units, school-wide projects, or year-long themes that focus students and teachers on various music learning practices that are similar to one’s own surroundings. These practices, rooted in community settings, become the heart of a curriculum that puts students’ lived

experiences in the middle of insightful and powerful music making that ultimately raises issues important to the performers. Educators must connect music content to the people they teach by broadening the scope of music curricula beyond series texts and ensemble repertoire. By way of moving outward from schools into neighborhoods, we may find, as did Hoffman (2012) in her “Performing Our World Project,” an in-house, school-wide program, that we might “positively affect the way in which students and teachers in the school construct meanings of themselves as individuals and redefine the world around them” (p. 65).

Significance for this study can be found in what happens in Hmong youth arts communities and then applied to collegiate music education communities. I interrogate how Hmong youth artists forward their voices through raps, spoken word poems, and lyrical songs in their music making environments. The findings of this study will contribute to the field of music education in three important ways: (a) to broaden the scope and definition of music education beyond K-12 or K-16; (b) to reframe music education’s role in the lives of people in schools and communities; and (c) to bring critical pedagogy and democratic education to the fore in music education practice and research. By actively engaging in a reciprocal relationship between schools and communities, music teachers and their preparers might begin to re-imagine the potential of their musical teaching and learning lives as ways to advance democracy.

## **Limitations and Boundaries in the Data Collection Process**

### **Limitations**

Participants come from the largest population of Hmong ethnicity in an American metropolitan area, a factor not considered at the outset of this research project. The importance of citing population is that with large numbers of Hmong in such a concentrated geographic region, issues of place, identity, and voice arise quickly throughout the ethnic community. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, Minnesota is home to 63,619 Hmong people who filed “one category alone” (e.g., Hmong), the second largest population of any state behind California’s 86,989 who also filed “one category alone” (factfinder2.gov, accessed August 6, 12). The Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington-MN/WI Metropolitan Area, however, boasts the largest population of Hmong people in any one metro area numbering 64,422, which places the next largest concentration of 31,771 Hmong people in metropolitan Fresno, California (website, accessed August 6, 2012).

The music that my participants teach, learn, create, and perform is situated in Hip-hop culture. It includes raps, lyrical songs, and spoken word poetry. Accompaniments for all three types of performance media include acoustic instruments such as guitar (the most frequent), piano, and pre-recorded beats. Oftentimes, youth mention their participation in other Hip-hop art forms aside from music including MCing, b-boying/girling (breakdancing) and painting. Though these art forms most likely contribute to the “whole artist,” they do not fall within the purview of this research project.

## **Boundaries**

Tou SaiKo Lee became my key gatekeeper and primary participant; he introduced me to youth with whom he has personally mentored, performed, or community organized in the Hmong arts scene of St. Paul. The snowball effect, in some ways, is like a convenience sample (Utts & Heckard, 2006, p. 110) since participants' names were both suggested to me and of those who were suggested, all volunteered. In all cases, participants were enthusiastic and curious about the study. Participants also lived within ten miles of the University of Minnesota making interviews, focus groups, and observations quite easy to accomplish. Hence, I delimited the study by selecting college-age youth (18-24), but not necessarily college attendees. I intentionally restricted my focus to high school graduates who are 18 years of age or older. Their music making and organizing efforts in the Hmong Hip-hop scene were sufficient and also rich, because this age group had already experienced middle and high school in the United States and were able to share broad perspectives on the state of music in the Hmong community.

High school students may have provided a fruitful body of data, because they, like my college-aged participants, are highly involved in the artistic movement in St. Paul. By participating in open mic nights and organizational meetings of groups like In Progress or Speakers of the Sun (S.O.S.), a spoken word poetry group, they compose and perform music that is both entertaining and meaningful in socio-political ways. Their stances on local issues appear to be enculturated by their mentors and teachers. One series of events that would have provided rich detail about semi-informal teaching and learning of Hip-hop music among 13 through 17-year old youth came to my attention in August 2012.



The following footnote was printed on a handout that was distributed during the organizational meeting of Eastside Rising:

Eastside Rising is a project to create a positive creative space for youth on St. Paul's Eastside District 5 area. There will be Artistic Spoken word and songwriting sessions with youth where students will be engaged in creative writing, expressive poetry and movement based performance techniques. Students will write songs and poetry inspired by their stories and experiences that will reflect the diversity representing on the communities in District 5. The youth students will pair up with elders to capture their stories of "HOME." How neighborhoods represent economics, class, survival, overcoming struggles. (T. S. Lee, 2012)

Participants were not selected based on sex (male or female), gender identity, social class of the youth or their families, college enrollment, or occupation. Any one of these classifications could provide enough data for a separate study. For example, Shades of Yellow, also known as SOY, is a Hmong lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) nonprofit organization that works to provide support, education, advocacy, and leadership development to Hmong LGBTQ and allies (website, accessed August 6, 2012). This St. Paul-based non-profit organization is staffed by two female artists Oskar and Linda; both women are MCs, rappers, singers, and spoken word artists. Their work with LGBTQ peoples includes musical activities hosted by SOY's youth-lead INSPIRE which hosts open mic nights as a form of support.

## Chapter Overview

**Chapter I.** I outline the research community of Hmong musicians, purpose for this study, key terms related to the theoretical framework, procedures, limitations, and boundaries.

**Chapter II.** This chapter is a review of literature pertaining to democratic education, democratic education in music education, critical pedagogy, music learning practices, Hmong music culture, and music teacher preparation.

**Chapter III.** The research design, method, and analysis are discussed in this chapter. Information is also presented about the Hmong youth arts community and ethical considerations of conducting research among participant musicians. An autoethnographic account of my musical upbringing and 10 years of public school teaching is presented so that readers might know my biases that are relevant to this research study and its theoretical framework.

**Chapter IV.** Participants are given extensive attention in this chapter in order to make certain that their voices are presented. Based on the collected data, I share their stories about activities and purposes for their music making, as well as artists' own experiences with music education.

**Chapter V.** In this chapter, a discussion of the findings from Chapter IV is presented. Future research about teacher preparation, music learning practices, democratic education in music education, and critical pedagogy are addressed.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LITERATURE

This dissertation is about the musical art forms and activities in Hmong communities that will inform democratic education in teacher preparation programs. It concerns the ways musicians compose, teach, learn, and perform their music as a means toward addressing critically social and political issues for and with youth in community settings. Hmong people's activities-based endeavors to create musical compositions help them express how they feel about their individual and collective experiences in St. Paul, as well as their efforts to give youth opportunities to become active in community organizing work in their neighborhoods.

Like the Hmong youth leaders in this study, music educators have an opportunity and an obligation to guide students in and through musical experiences that oftentimes constitute important, life-changing moments for learners. Francis Elliott Clark (1982), first president of the Music Supervisors National Conference (MSNC; now the National Association for Music Education) proclaimed in her 1919 speech to St. Louis MSNC conventioners that, "The hour of *music as education* has struck ... [it is] *one of the great vital forces of education*" (p. 196). Though Clark's call for the revitalization of music teaching followed World War I and a utilitarian vocational era of education, it is one that challenged teachers to consider:

cultural subjects that make for right understanding and right living, and sensible serving in the up-building of community, the state, and the nation, to those things that bring a realization of the spirit of “All for Each and for All.” (p. 196)

In order for music education to be vital today – to answer personal, group, societal, or political questions – a critical pedagogical approach to teacher education must be cultivated. Through music learning practices that foster performance, composition, improvisation, and thoughtful discussions, teacher educators can model a style of teaching and learning that forwards students’ voices and ultimately, democratic education in the music classroom. When teacher educators demonstrate democratic ideals to their pre- and in-service music educators, these students, in theory, will do the same for their own K-12 students in the near future. Teacher preparers will also spotlight the vitality of music education today, because the democratic model has the potential to develop self-confidence, yet open mindedness among future teachers who will soon affect their own students.

Though it is true that pre-service music education majors must learn the craft of teaching through numerous ensembles, methods, and techniques classes, they are sometimes unaware of the large picture that places them in schools not just as teachers of music, but as mentors to children and youth. Therefore, I argue that an active democratic education, one that advances the common good or right result, will be achieved in music education when teachers employ a critical pedagogy model that accounts for individual and group agency (e.g., rights, wants, desires, needs) – past, present, and future – of the music profession at large.

Limited research has been conducted that specifically addresses a link among music learning practices, especially informal ones (Green, 2002), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Wink, 2011) and democracy as it relates to education (Dewey, 1916/2011; Palmer, 1993). The intersection of these three areas forms the theoretical framework I use to investigate the importance of Hmong musicians' ways of teaching and learning to music education, music teacher educators, and their pre-service teachers.

In this study, I examine three main ideas: music learning practices, critical pedagogy, and democratic education. Music learning practices and critical pedagogy may be viewed as mutually exclusive from democratic education or as contributors to it. For the purposes of this study, all three elements are included as integral parts within the theoretical framework where I build a case for providing emancipatory spaces within teacher education programs for pre-service teachers to express themselves as individuals and groups that have agency, as social justice advocates, and as political activists (or at least politically interested beings). In so doing, pre-service teachers might themselves be the change agents in their own K-12 classrooms in the near future. How do we begin to build critical consciousness in music education that supports liberatory education (hooks, 1994) if pre-service teachers, or any teachers for that matter, are "products of their own environments and educational experiences" (Hicks & Jones, 1983, p. 24)? I propose that we give teachers a new way of thinking, doing, music making, and teaching within a framework that forwards democracy for their students *and* themselves.

## Democracy and Education

*The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of order and liberty* (edifice of the Boston Public Library).

Democracy and education are two words that I thought I understood prior to reviewing related literature. The first word, democracy, was personal, because I was delivered from a communist nation-state. I was considered by my own middle and high school teachers to be one of the “lucky” ones to escape to a free country. Democracy implied freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom to think – all of these freedoms were supposed to come without fear of oppression or ridicule.

Education, the second word with which I also felt fairly comfortable, represented a safe haven where I envisioned myself both physically and intellectually for a long time, maybe forever. Yet, as I spent the last five years of my public school career teaching in an economically diverse region of Connecticut, I realized that the issues my students had with school were very different than the ones I had as a teacher. While I spent my day worrying about quarter notes, musical phrases, and paperwork, some children in my band worried about food, shelter, and love. Their place at school was one laden with fear; fear of acceptance, as well as academic and musical achievement were among their chief concerns. Looking back on that part of my professional life, I now realize that I had no idea how complex democracy and education might be for my students and me.

The first time I thought seriously about democracy and education as a singular ideal was two years ago. Wink (2011) writes, “Democracy is at the heart of the

transformative lesson. Schooling in the United States has historically prided itself on teaching democratic principles, but how many schools are truly democratic” (p. 144)? Ayers, Hunt, and Quinn (1998) delineate school from education: “Education, of course, lives an excruciating paradox precisely because of its association with and location in schools” (p. xxiii). On the one hand, education opens doors, is unconditional, surprising, unruly, disorderly, and it frees the mind. On the other, schooling sorts, punishes, grades, ranks, certifies, demands obedience, and conformity (p. xxiii). These distinctions between two important constructs – education and schooling – became touchstones for me as I spent time listening to Hmong youth artists rap, sing, and speak their own lives through music outside schools where I think education, not schooling, was alive and well.

Dewey (1916/2011) indicates that democracy is devoted to education (p. 50); however, does education have a devotion to democracy? The intersection of theory and practice is where democracy and education reside in one space. “Not only must democracy be taught; it must be lived within the classroom, the school, and the community” (Wink, 2011, p. 144). Therefore, I argue that music teachers and professors, given both tools and agency, can fruitfully participate in democracy by teaching not only democratic values, but also the democratic voice in their classes.

In a recent talk by former Vice President Walter F. Mondale (2012), he indicated that government officials, namely Congress, are unwilling to debate important issues such as taxes, healthcare, or gun control. Specifically addressing the deterioration of the senate filibuster process on Capitol Hill, Mondale noted that congressional leaders from both the house and senate stall bills that could, and oftentimes do, immediately impact constituents. This unwillingness to openly debate issues of national importance among

congressional leaders characterizes the unhappy state of civic participation among not only government officials, but also the participatory, democratic action of ordinary citizens. In this section, I show that democracy and education are closely linked and that “we the people” should not wait for democracy to arrive as if on a silver platter.

McCowan (2006) believes that those who believe they are free to act will do so whether it is a right or a duty for the betterment of the world either locally or globally (p. 3).

John Dewey, American philosopher and educational reformer, established the “intellectually significant relationship between democracy and education” in his 1916 book *Democracy and Education* (Englund, 2000, p. 305). Dewey (1916/2011) notes that “[t]he peculiarity of truly human life is that man has to create himself by his own voluntary efforts; he has to make himself a truly moral, rational, and free being” (p. 54). The voluntary or free will nature of man and womankind is imperative to the civic and moral upbringing of the citizenry. It means that not only will humans philosophize about the rights or duties of a free people, but they will also act in concord to the benefit of society:

A society which makes provisions for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic.

(Dewey, 1916/2011, p. 56)

An ideal society, one that values the individual and collective rights and duties of its citizens, in Dewey’s (1916/2011) words, will “unite men in common ends, irrespective of national political boundaries” (p. 55). An interest in and action toward a national discussion centered on democratic consciousness might be considered the common end.



How, then, might the nation's ordinary citizens cultivate democratic consciousness, one that forwards a government of, by, and for the people? Can, as McCowan (2006) notes, people exercise "effective citizenship" (p. 1) whereby they are welcome to debate the important issues in their communities as a means to an end that shows civic responsibility among the electorate? The answer to democracy as a way of being, a common end, may lie in the education of its people.

"Education in the service of democracy has been lost as an important purpose, if it was ever established as such" (Comer, 2004, p. 149). As noted earlier, Wink (2011) queries, "Schooling in the United States has historically prided itself on teaching democratic principals, but how many schools are truly democratic" (p. 144)? When teachers were asked, "whether they work in democratic schools," Wink offers her amazement at teachers' cynicism about democracy in the schools noting that social studies teachers who teach about democracy, for example, "admit that they do not live and work in a democratic environment" (p. 144).

It is ironic, then, that Thomas Jefferson's vision, according to Comer (2004), for a "public education system [should] enable the average person to understand political, economic, and social issues, their relevance to their own lives, and what was needed to improve and to sustain democracy" (p.149). If American educators are going to foster democracy, they must live democracy "within the classroom, the school, and the community" (Wink, 2011, p. 144).

Democracy and education, according to the literature, go hand in hand. Torney-Purta (2001/2002) believes that all teachers, regardless of their disciplines, "have many opportunities to foster students' civic participation, knowledge of political institutions,

and positive attitudes about the law” (p. 45). A review of research conducted on the relationship between democracy and education in the United States and abroad indicates that positive attitudes translate to democratic action (Harber, 2006; McCowan, 2006); early education fosters acceptance of the democratic process (Evans & Rose, 2007; Stasavage, 2005); personal responsibility and curiosity for democracy in education is important (McLaughlin, 2011); and better evaluation of teaching promote democratic ideals (Milligan, Moretti, & Oreopoulos, 2003).

Though much of the research is about democracy as a way of acting *on* education, particularly regarding civics or citizenship and not about specific enactments of democracy *in* classroom environments, the studies provide evidence of a keen interest in democracy and education worldwide that link peoples’ education to their attitudes about democracy. In some cases, positive attitudes translate to democratic action (Harber, 2006; McCowan, 2006). That action, as reviewed in the last part of this section, transpires in classroom pedagogies of teachers who both value democratic ideals as a way of being and as a way to teach about democracy and citizenship throughout the curriculum.

With a focus on primary education in Africa, Stasavage (2005) and Evans and Rose (2007) show that education at an early age is key to ones’ acceptance of democracy. David Stasavage’s 2005 study details attitudes around government provisions of primary education and, in turn, the likelihood that “democratic attitudes” exist among past school attendees in Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, and Kenya. He notes that though participants seem to prefer democracy to authoritarianism, “there is less indication that primary education causes democracy by generating sizable shifts in ‘democratic values’” (p. 1). Evans and Rose (2007) indicate that their research participants in Malawi are more likely

to endorse democratic values if they have attended primary school, regardless of whether or not they finished school. “In Malawi, education strongly predicts mass endorsement of democratic procedures and rejection of commonplace non-democratic alternatives” (p. 916). Harber (2006) finds that teacher supervisors in The Gambia on Africa’s west coast are receptive to learning democratic supervisory practices that ultimately foster democratic ideals among teachers they observe.

In a similar study conducted by United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) consultant Bob McLaughlin (2011), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic Ministry of Education (MOE) actively pursues the development of Schools of Quality (formerly Child Friendly Schools) across the country in order to improve the lives of children. The process of change that emphasizes access and quality clarifies that “the concept of quality [is] a process of change” (p. 26), one that, among many MOE goals, encourages students of all socio-economic backgrounds to take responsibility for themselves by living healthy and inquisitive lives in and outside school.

In their study comparing civic participation between the United Kingdom and the United States, Milligan, Moretti, and Oreopoulos (2003) found that “[b]etter educated adults are more likely to follow election campaigns in the media, discuss politics with others, associate with a political group, and work on community issues” (p. 1669). As an example from elsewhere in the world, McCowan’s (2006) research reveals how “active political participation as a citizen’s right and a means for social justice for all” (p. 1) is slowly countering the dominant culture in Pelotas, Brazil. He establishes the fact that “Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world” (p. 4) and that “[e]ducation is both a cause and a reflection of this inequality” (p. 4). With a difference of opinion

among residents, citizenship is either viewed as a right or a duty, but the matter of who can participate in governance is still a classist issue (i.e., upper-middle class controls power). To encourage participation in local school policy development, the Minister Secretariat of Education set in motion a process by which “teachers, non-teaching staff, pupils and parents” (p. 8) assessed the school system’s needs, debated findings in public, and formalized policies.

Democracy and education are not limited to researcher think tanks and policy makers; they have a close association inside classrooms, too, where teachers employ critical thinking centered on democratic action in civics and citizenship education. Literature was sampled from a special activity focused on democracy in an English day school (Davies, Gray, & Stephens, 1998); civics and active participation across the curriculum (Torney-Purta, 2001/2002); deliberative democracy enacted through multicultural perspectives (DiCamillo & Pace, 2010; Englund, 2003; Hutchins, 2012); and Hip-hop as a tool for literacy education (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). In each case, researchers point to efforts around the world to raise the democratic consciousness among students in order that they may one day become responsible citizens who are unafraid to voice their concerns as individuals.

Davies, Gray, and Stephens (1998) studied the planning, implementation, and effects of Democracy Day held at a school in Northern England. They found through survey and interview data that students, after having participated in a day devoted to democracy awareness, were likely to think about critical issues (e.g., human rights, justice, elections) in the nation; however, they were unlikely to do something about those same issues either in the present or in the future. One key observation by researchers was

that teachers, the planners of Democracy Day, were excited about what they and their students had accomplished: “The positive perception is significant, for obviously no work will take place if teachers believe that the central issues are too complex or that worthwhile activities cannot be developed” (para. 13).

Torney-Purta (2001/2002) highlights her results pertaining to civic awareness and civic action from a survey conducted among 14-year olds from 24 separate countries including the U.S., noting that the level of education or educational aspirations among teenage participants is directly proportional to future civic engagement such as doing good deeds or voting (Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999). She suggests that schools need to include civic education as part of their core missions alongside the staple coursework such as science, English, and mathematics.

Deliberative democracy in education through a neo-pragmatic lens, according to Englund (2003), is “where individuals bring different perspectives to an on-going communication” (p. 306). He concludes that deliberative democracy is not solely reliant on education for its enactment, but that schools are places where democracy can be “promoted” (p. 308). In a case study of deliberative democratic pedagogies employed by a high school U.S. history teacher in California, DiCamillo and Pace (2010) found that explicit attention to multicultural perspectives in addition to the teacher’s bent toward social justice as both an activist and educator contributed positively to students’ engagement and excitement about the course. Hutchins (2012), a Seattle, Washington high school teacher, agrees with Torney-Purta’s (2001/2002) call to engage students in civics education. Through a civics-rich curriculum, Hutchins establishes real-world

political activism among students who, in turn, have introduced or changed laws from the local school board all the way to the Washington State Senate.

In Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's (2002) high school literacy project, for example, they strive to balance the needs of the students with larger, school-mandated academic outcomes:

... we could utilize Hip-hop music and culture to forge a common and critical discourse that was centered upon the lives of the students, yet transcended the racial divide and allowed us to tap into students' lives in ways that promoted academic literacy and critical consciousness. (p. 88)

There is a need for educators of all kinds, not just social studies teachers, to model and teach civic responsibility to their students. Torney-Purta (2001-2002) expresses the challenge to "prepar[e] teachers to conduct such discussions while maintaining a strong content focus in classrooms with students of diverse backgrounds and opinions" (p. 49). Additionally, "[t]eachers who assume the role of transformative intellectuals treat students as critical agents, question how knowledge is produced and distributed, utilize dialogue, and make knowledge meaningful, critical, and ultimately emancipatory" (Giroux & McLaren, 1986, p. 215).

It is clear that democracy and education are important, conjoined topics among researchers and teachers alike. Whether democracy or civics are explicit subjects taught by teachers or they imply a way of acting, of teaching, of doing, these studies point to the need for ongoing research, particularly into the ways that American educators, and in this case, music educators infuse democratic ideals and democracy as a subject into their practice of teaching.

## **Democratic Education in Music Education**

Democracy as a topic within music education is not new to the professional discourse. From the beginnings of music in U.S. schools, the goal has been to institute some form of change toward the betterment of society at large. Mark (2009) relates that, in late 1830s Boston, the purpose of music in schools was to develop moral, physical, and intellectual beings (p. 13). The focus of music education has developed ever since to adapt to modern times, whether to integrate new immigrants into American society from 1880 to 1920 or to build a culturally sensitive, welcoming environment for all students during the multicultural movement in the mid- to late-twentieth century (p. 18). In his conclusion, Mark (2009) states: “I hope that music educators will come to see how important their work is to the nation, and will recognize that their profession has played a critical role in the evolution of our democracy through the centuries” (p. 18).

In her speech to the 2007 Centennial Congress convened by MENC: The National Association for Music Education, Anne Bryant (2009), then executive director of the National School Boards Association, argues that school boards, parents, and teachers are responsible for “pressur[ing] local decision makers to have the right vision and goals, to have twenty-first-century skills very much on their minds” (p. 45). The call for school officials is reflected in the call for music teachers to consider their roles as leaders in a democratic American education system. Stein (2001) conveys her concern for music teachers who “need to reconceive themselves as opinion leaders and champions of the public good and not as just another special interest group (pp. 122, 185), while Reimer (2009b) calls for music teachers to address equity and justice around world issues while

simultaneously possessing “an obligation to music and to the teaching and learning of music” (p. 164).

Democracy and *music* education can also be linked to answer what Allsup and Shieh (2012) call the “big questions.” By claiming that the public questions “do not belong to us” (p. 48), they show that issues involving a “decade of war, a pervasive mistrust of immigrants and non-White communities, tremendous gaps in wealth and opportunity, increasing rates of poverty and dislocation, [and] an unemployment crisis that appears never-ending” do, indeed, belong to music educators (pp. 47-48).

Music educators can and should move toward a more critical approach to teaching and learning. As Nayler and Keddie (2007) suggest, a pedagogical analysis is necessary “because it requires teachers to think deeply about how their own identities, beliefs and practices might be implicated in perpetuating but also potentially transforming the inequitable social relations of schooling” (p. 200). Hence, Allsup (2007) asks two questions meant to engage music teachers in how they think about their work in schools: “‘Why this tradition?’ or ‘Why this tradition for these students?’” (p. 54).

Along with various opinions regarding music education’s purpose in society is also a question surrounding democracy’s definition within the music education discipline, and this may be partly to blame for its tenuous foothold in the field. Karlsen and Westerlund (2010) note that antagonism and conflict, that is to say, varying viewpoints or definitions, are necessary to the democratic cause in music education, while Woodford (2005) concurs: “Democracy depends on the desirability and possibility of difference and dissent leading, we hope, to positive change” (p. 21).



Yet, music educators “remain ambivalent about the coupling of democracy with music education” (Woodford, 2005, p. xi). Jorgensen (2003) notes that, in order to transform music education, the profession must address “systematic problems of gender, worldview, music, education, tradition, and mind-set in music education” (p. 139). Music curricula must be inspired and long-reaching as well as age appropriate; hence, those who value democracy will

bring new dimensions to the work of music teachers who are able to provide and facilitate for pedagogical practices ... such as celebrating and nurturing a multiplicity of identities, different ways of being and acting in the world, experiences of transcending individualism as well as intense negotiations in and through music. (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010, p. 236)

The “common ends” of education as Dewey called them were a balance borne from the benefits of personal agency and collective creativity. Viewed as a sort of freedom or even liberalism, diffuse personal agency is sometimes subordinated to centralization in the form of statehood, mandates, and top-down rule in order to control and integrate many parts into one. The latter point, addressed by Volk (1998), tells of post-World War I nation-building efforts in America’s schools that focused primarily on assimilation education (p. 33). Elliott (1989) writes that the goal of assimilation is the “elimination of cultural diversity toward the unification of a culture” (p. 15). In light of modern globalization of world populations, Elliott counters that rather than employ assimilation education, “multicultural education share[s] a common concern for the preservation of cultural diversity” (p. 16). Bradley (2006) notes that in the study of multicultural human subjectivity, an “emergent category of practice characterized by

acknowledged feelings of connectedness to people in other places and cultures, in open-mindedness toward previously unfamiliar cultures, and through concern for social justice” (p. 17), that student “recognize themselves in others and recognize others within themselves” (p. 17).

Connectedness, as suggested by Bradley is further supported by Allsup’s (2003) idea that “[d]emocracy requires collaboration, and it must involve more than just adults – its practice should incorporate the rights and opinions of both teachers and students” (p. 27). Karlsen and Westerlund (2010) suggest an approach to music education that expands the multicultural framework (Elliott, 1989; Bradley, 2006) and incorporates individuals’ rights and opinions (Allsup, 2003) by employing a four-stratagem component, one that honors the plurality of students’ lived experiences:

1. Teachers encourage students’ musical agency by helping them or allowing them to explore their own music, the music of their friends, and the music of the society in which they live;
2. “Then, with musical agency as a hub, it would be possible for the students to re-narrate their selves and also re-negotiate their positioning in the world;”
3. Through group performances, students may develop a sense of collective agency; and
4. Students and teachers together forward democracy through “sharing, negotiating, discussing, creating and performing music together.” (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010, pp. 233-235)

Through this four-point strategy that engages students in learner-centered activities, Karlsen and Westerlund (2010) show that music teachers give particular thought to how

and what students bring to school music, and this, I argue, requires teachers to employ or rather, live democracy by embracing an ethic of care throughout their musical careers. Teachers who employ this ethic will transcend “technicist” methods (Regelski, 2002) and help move students toward a critical, democratic consciousness in their own music education.

In her seminal work, Noddings (1984) discusses the one-caring, cared-for, and an ethic on care in education. She defines the *one-caring* as the person who gives care, the *cared-for* as the one who receives the caring, and *ethical caring* as the relation in which we do meet the other morally ... [which] arises out of natural caring – that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination” (pp. 4-5). In schools, teachers demonstrate the care ethic to students, and students, in turn, reciprocate the care. Teachers, the ones-caring, are charged with producing “dialogue, practice, and confirmation” (p. 180) of care for students, giving them the opportunity to learn the dynamics of considerate relationships. Students, the cared-for, are equally responsible for caring for teachers by responding to the efforts that adults make on behalf of children (p. 181).

However, Noddings (1984) writes that schools are in a “crisis of caring” where students and teachers are attacked either verbally or physically (p. 181). The crisis continues today when teachers are berated for working, for instance, “only” six- to seven-hour days, taking off summers, or even failing to help students meet academic standards outlined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB; public law 107-110). Though “public opinion remains so mixed in regard to NCLB” (Hess, 2005, p. 56), teachers, students, and administrators feel public pressure related to adequate yearly progress, “the metric by

which all schools and school districts are evaluated under NCLB ...” (p. 54). Noddings (1999) laments that

the movement for uniform standards may actually handicap efforts to renew democracy in the schools 1) by eliminating many of the legitimate choices that students should be guided in making and 2) by failing to encourage the sort of rational political discussion that provides the very foundation of liberal democracy. (p. 580)

The stress associated with “keeping up” with standards-based assessment, rather than encouraging open discussions, is a factor that erodes the sense of care that teachers can show students; students, in turn, recognize the strain and respond in kind.

Regelski (2002) calls the ethic for care a “right result” or *phronesis* (p. 104). He differentiates between *phronesis* and *techne* – the “doing” of methods – warning that curricula can become a technicist method (p. 106). As a sample comparison between *techne* and music making, Allsup (2003) shares his concern that traditional strategies, such as those employed in instrumental band method books, encourage students to master graduated skills; those who succeed are “considered ‘gifted’ and ‘talented,’ reinforcing the stereotype that instrumental music is an elitist endeavor” (p. 26). Care and “right result” are two vertebrae in the backbone of social endeavors like music learning and teaching. Devoid of care, music becomes just another thing (a *techne*). The “right result” in music promotes student-centered learning through caring reciprocity between teachers and their students.

Critically-minded music teachers, hence, must be willing to imagine music education differently than, say, music as just object or music in context alone. How is

music education “in the process of being transformed ... whereby music education has a transformative effect on those involved in it, on music, on education, and on society at large” (Jorgensen, 2003, p. 118)? In the examination of transformation, Jorgensen implores educators to unpack what it means to transform education by “narrow[ing] rigid concepts, classifications, theories, and paradigms to embrace a broad and inclusive view of diverse music educational perspectives and practices” (p. 119). Allsup and Shieh (2012) agree with Regelski’s anti-technicist attitude and call for a public music pedagogy that makes “music teaching more than the teaching of sound and sound patterns alone – that there is something non-neutral about music that requires our moral engagement” (p. 51).

Perhaps an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984), particularly in our schools – our music classrooms – is necessary if we will continue to justify music as a viable and relevant subject in American education. Accordingly, “[m]usic educators that want to apply democratic procedures need to constantly invent new ways of co-operation and continue to search for meaning in relation to the experience of the students and to the educational situations and contexts” (Väkevä & Westerlund, 2007, p. 103).

There is no doubt that university professors intend good things for their students, but concerns about the relevancy of democracy in music education are not in the forefront of their minds when things such as credentialing and teacher licensure for students are prevalent. “Research is central to higher learning ...” (Boyer, 1990, p. 17) as is service, though, to a lesser degree, and therefore demands professors’ time and energy. In the realm of classroom teaching, much of it “remains focused on teaching ‘concepts’ and facts ‘about’ music that are supposed to facilitate ‘music appreciation,’ and on ‘basic

skills,' such as keeping a steady beat, matching pitch, and reading music" (Regelski, 2006, p. 4). How might professors achieve a "right result" or "common good" for pre-service teachers by utilizing the national standards for music education and even the basic concepts that Regelski discusses as a way to activate critical thinking and development among students in music?

### **The Commitment Debate**

In late summer 1967, leading music researchers, teachers, and musicians met at the Berkshire Music Center in Western Massachusetts to discuss the foundations of what is considered an excellent music education. The conference resulted in the Tanglewood Declaration, a creed that outlines the tenets of a core music education. The preamble to the declaration states:

Educators must accept the responsibility for developing opportunities which meet man's individual needs and the needs of a society plagued by the consequences of changing values, alienation, hostility between generations, racial and international tensions, and the challenges of a new leisure. (Britton, Broido, & Gary, 1968, p. 139)

Jorgenson (2003) captures the essence of a movement toward democratic thinking in music educator preparation. She writes that music education must reach a modern audience in critical, transformative ways lest it becomes passé to humankind (p. xiii). Additionally, she calls educators to invest time and energy to build creative lessons that invigorate students to create and to discover their inner muse. She challenges teachers to find "holistic approaches to music education that foster openings for personal and

collective development” (Jorgensen, 2007, p. 409). Palmer (2007) goes one step further, expanding the role of teachers to not just know their students, but to know themselves so that they can make powerful contributions in education: “the call to teach does not come from external encounters alone.... Any authentic call ultimately comes from the voice of the *teacher within*, the voice that invites me to honor the nature of my true self” (p. 30).

**Creativity.** Much attention has been given to the relationship between children’s academic performance as it relates to their exposure to music. Lapidaki (2007), after researching the creative processes of many twentieth century composers, asserts that music teachers need to understand the creative process in order to forward students’ compositional tuition (p. 94). Composition is a “slow activity that starts either ‘out of nothing’ or with a process of silent hearing, seeing, touching, feeling, transforming, or improvisation” (p. 98). She argues that while teachers may encourage creativity through ample opportunities to succeed and time to write, educators must also seek professional development and resources to further aid students’ compositional explorations.

According to Susan Hallam (2010), “researchers have paid less attention to the impact of music on creativity” (p. 278). Studies show increased creativity among various age groups (Kalmar, 1982; Lapidaki, 2007; Simpson, 1969; Wolff, 1978) including university music majors (Hamann, Bourassa, and Aderman, 1990). Miell and MacDonald (2000) investigated creativity in musical compositions written by friend and non-friend pairs. Findings released by the authors indicate that final compositions of friend pairs received higher scores by teachers than those of non-friend pairs. Miell and MacDonald state that non-friend pairs’ progress was impeded by the added step of building relationships. Though this research precedes Lucy Green’s (2011) works, Miell and

MacDonald's findings align with the premise that informal music making often occurs in what Green (2011) calls friend groups (p. 139).

In an early study on creativity in a choral setting, May (1976) recounts the case of a high school festival chorus project that included Gordon Lamb's 1973 avant-garde composition *Aleatory Psalm*; the composer provides singers with opportunities to contribute their own improvisatory sounds within the work. John Paulson's (1975) *Epinicion* for band is an example of aleatoric music in which student musicians create their own sounds by employing extended techniques. These forms of creativity are composer-driven. "Can graduates of an instrumental program [however] make music alone, or with a few friends" (Beitler & Thornton, p. 162, 2010)? This query stems from school music teacher Beitler's interest in creativity in band and orchestra. Beitler notes that, "Adding creative tasks to each day has had a profound effect on my students and their musical performances" (p. 170).

**Identity.** The responsibility and challenge for teachers is to develop, implement, assess, and reflect on specific practices that will be useful to students. Music and lyric composition may be a valuable tool that music teachers can employ in their classrooms to allow students to express themselves. Some students will need more assistance than others to complete compositional tasks, but the idea is to provide regular music education class instruction that centers on student learning processes and outcomes that ultimately forward democracy and students' powers of voice. Gold, Vorecek, and Wigram (2004) note that music therapists have argued that music has a very specific potential for expression and communication. Music teachers who employ song and lyric writing as



ongoing objectives may provide a necessary tool for students to express themselves (see below).

A commitment by teachers to musical performance, listening, composition, and evaluation as part of a fully participatory music education may give students an opportunity to establish their individual and collective identities. As noted in the studies cited below, research has been conducted both inside and outside schools and is representative of various age groups from children to adults (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2007; Clay, 2003; Higgins, 2007; North & Hargreaves, 1999).

Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2007) investigated individual difference and its relationship to music use and found that personality and cognitive ability may determine the way in which we experience music (p. 175), while North and Hargreaves (1999), indicate that youth actively “employ pop music as a guide to the likely characteristics of the fans of particular styles, and as a means of defining their own identities” (p. 76). Peterborough, England, samba band members developed a sense of collective and individual identity through regular participation in their community music group (Higgins, 2007).

The growing body of literature from music therapy provides evidence that self-expression is manifested through lyric and song writing. Song lyrics taken from patients’ favorite albums, for instance, reflect individuals’ feelings (Lehtonen, 2002); song sharing encourages openness among patients (McFerran-Skewes, 2005); and lyric or song composition helps patients express their feelings (McFerran, Baker, Patton, & Sawyer, 2006).

One way to help patients diagnosed with anorexia nervosa to cope with their disease is through music therapy. Shaughnessy (2002) in his interview with Kimmo Lehtonen found that song lyrics reflect important developmental milestones, especially for adolescents. The songs Lehtonen's psychiatric patients identified as most important were ones about failure and losing love. Other songs used symbolism and the Jungian concept of "anima" (p. 15). McFerran-Skewes (2005) related her work with girls who were encouraged to share their music with each other in-group social work settings. The plan for girls to share their music, according to McFerran-Skewes, included music of any type and open discussions about their choices. The most important part of the process was that the facilitator could not interfere with the selection or sharing of the song lest it would interfere with the authenticity of expression (p. 151). The results of her study point to the potential in promoting authentic self-expression and achievement of group cohesion (p. 155).

McFerran, Baker, Patton, and Sawyer (2006) researched song writing as a form of treatment among 15 girls admitted for a 21-day in-patient residency at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, Australia. Their study confirmed that music therapy could have a role in medium- to long-term therapeutic treatment of adolescents with anorexia nervosa, and that of six categories of lyric analysis, identity formation was the most frequent theme addressed in girls' lyrics (p. 402). In one particular case where traditional therapy sessions failed to access the root of a patient's current issues, a girl revealed through her lyrics, "It all started when Dad went away. I missed him and I begged him to stay. He said he couldn't, had money to earn, [a]nd I began to feel depressed" (p. 401). McFerran, in both her 2005 and 2006 studies, emphasized the

*process* for lyric and song writing above all else. She outlined well-defined lesson plans for achieving desired results: helping girls express themselves to better understand the complexities behind anorexia nervosa. If these kinds of therapeutic exercises, lyric selection and lyric writing, are helpful for patients with anorexia nervosa, the same or similar processes might be useful in music class settings. Here, teachers could guide students toward self-actualization as they express themselves through musical compositions.

Democratic education, in music education, one that reduces the division between students and teachers and grants each a sense of autonomy or choice in his/her music making, is essential. Its movement in modern American educational systems (i.e., schools and universities) will only come to fruition if and when music teachers, as well as teacher preparers, begin to raise the consciousness of students and themselves to the potential for democracy and democratic education to inspire music teaching and learning. Changing the landscape of music education, then, is like gardening: Careful tending of existing perennials, cultivating the soil, weeding away dead material, planting new flora, and watering are all necessary for a garden to flourish, grow, and change with the seasons. Music education's season has changed and teachers can respond or better yet, innovate, to build a music garden rich with possibilities. Woodford (2005) claims that music educators need to "begin reclaiming a democratic purpose for music education by contributing to wider intellectual and political conversations about the nature and significance of music in our lives and those of our children" (p. xi).

## Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy, a way to name, to reflect critically, and to act (Wink, 2011, p. 9), is credited with having its provenance in the socio-political theories of Karl Marx (Abrahams, 2005a, 2005b; Anyon, 2011). Marx never wrote a treatise about education, but couched his remarks in broader socio-political discussions. “One well-known principle of Marxian thought is the ‘unity of theory and practice’ ... and [a relationship that] depends on circumstance” (Small, 2005, pp. viii-ix). Circumstances for Marx would have included his bent toward social change, “including programmes for the transformation of education” (p. ix). Further developed as a Neo-Marxist practice (Anyon, 2011, p. 5), critical pedagogy along with other sociocultural educational approaches (e.g., feminism and critical race theory) (Stetsenko, 2011, p. 166) have influenced the likes of Brazilian educator, philosopher, and theorist, Paulo Freire.

Freire (1970/2011) distinguishes between two kinds of teaching and learning, the banking model and transformative model. The banking model is one in which “the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” (p. 72). Likewise, for Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky, the mind

is not a container that stores knowledge, nor a mirror reflection of reality; rather, the mind is a dynamic system formed and carried out in and *as* actions by individuals who, through these actions, realize their relations in and to the world.

(Stetsenko, 2011, p. 175)

To the detriment of students who do not participate in an active exchange of ideas, *deposits* consist of the knowing of teachers exclusively, thereby creating a Cartesian split

between what the mind comes to know and what the body actually does with its new stores.

Banking models are not inherently negative, however. Schippers (2010) shares information pertaining to music learning through transmission models in educative settings outside schools. “Transmission,” he writes, “not only relates to learning musical material but also to the enculturation of approaches to a musical style or genre at large” (p. 62). Yet, the perception of banking is still one that silences and subordinates pupils. Melding the two models of education, banking (or transmission) and transformation, is key to tapping into and developing students’ music making abilities.

“The philosophy that supports transformative teaching and learning is founded on the principle that theory and practice are joined to form praxis” (Wink, 2011, p. 144). The idea that people are agents in important work should give educators, administrators, and students the chance to not just survive, but thrive. Unfortunately, the teachers that Wink discusses and the ones I know personally often feel powerless to the educational system.

The transformative model encourages “the learner to get out into the real world and participate in real activities” (Wink, 2011, p. 8), and it counters banking in one important aspect: It engages students “in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization” (Freire, 1970, p. 75). Humanization is the process by which teachers and students interact in non-dichotomous roles, teachers learning from students and students learning from teachers.

Wink (2011) summarizes Freire’s idea about critical pedagogy into a useful phrase: “to name, to critically reflect, to act” (p. 143). This mantra, if it might be called one, reminds teachers, the daily practitioners in particular, to contribute a strong voice (p.

143). She makes it clear that, though theorists may postulate the ideals to name, critically reflect, and act, it is the practitioners who have immediate impact. Critical pedagogy can do amazing things for students and teachers: “Critical pedagogy challenges our long-held assumptions and leads us to ask new questions, and the questions we ask will determine the answers we get. Critical pedagogy gives voice to the voiceless, gives power to the powerless” (p. 6).

To McLaren (2011), critical pedagogy “is both a reading practice where we read the word in the context of the world and a practical activity where we write ourselves as subjective forces into the text of history” (p. 215). Practical activity, then, is the act of doing something dynamic in the form of actions that are together social and political (Small, 2005, p. 40). This social-political praxis, or human action that is contextually mounted, invigorates music teaching and learning. Stetsenko (2011) describes very clearly what happens:

Through [a sociocultural] collaborative process (involving development and passing on, from generation to generation, the collective experiences reified in cultural tools, including language), people not only constantly transform and create their environment, they also create and constantly transform their very life, consequently changing themselves in fundamental ways while, in and through this process, becoming human and gaining self-knowledge and knowledge about the world. (p. 180)

Music education, like general classroom education, has its own proponents of sociocultural approaches (Stetsenko, 2011) such as gender and sexuality studies, constructivist education, and critical pedagogy. Abrahams (2005a, 2005b) and Regelski

(1998, 2002, 2006) each tackle some of the issues associated with critical pedagogy in music settings. Abrahams uses a transformative approach that includes students as learners of more than notes and rhythms, and he espouses that teachers learn from the process of teaching in a critical, holistic manner. For example, Abrahams discusses how teachers might contextualize their curricula (i.e., general music lessons or ensemble repertoire) to meet the musical interests of their students; hence, the schema upon which teachers build knowledge about and around music is the key to a successful critical pedagogy. Abrahams (2005a) summarizes an important factor for music education to be considered critical: “For music learning that empowers, the pedagogy must also address feeling and action that are significant, sophisticated, and meaningful to the students and teacher” (p. 14). Where Abrahams’s interpretation addresses music teaching and learning from a critical context within music classrooms, I would like to add that those critical approaches must transcend the walls of the classroom and emanate into the world as learners leave the music room.

A reading of the sample lesson plans by Abrahams (2005a, 2005b), as well as attending a seminar he presented at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota (2012), raises some questions in my mind regarding the presence of voices and expressions to the music classroom. Lesson plans pertaining to Brahms (Abrahams, 2005a), Madonna (Abrahams, 2005b), and Lady Gaga (Abrahams, 2012) are designed in such a way that students and teachers think comprehensively about music (i.e., music in time and context, meeting students where they are and working backward in time). This study extends Abrahams’s approach and focuses on the outward reach of critical

pedagogy beyond music classrooms. It threads the critical pedagogy approach in music throughout the life work of the educators and students.

Regelski's vision for a critical musical pedagogy takes a more poignant stance and brings music teachers a step closer to the life enhancing, even life changing educational approach imagined by neo-Marxists like Freire or Giroux. Giroux, for instance, thinks of critical pedagogy as a way to "raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centers power in schools and concerns itself with ... reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity" (Duda et al., 1999). Regelski (2006) laments that "[t]here is little if any concern, then, with whether or the degree to which the ideas and information conveyed to students actually contributes to the *life well-lived* that a general education supposedly promises" (p. 2). Musically, he challenges music educators to consider where music education will go next:

Change, and the eventual transformation of music education itself, requires a complete rethinking from the ground up of the why, what, how of music teaching – not to forget "whether" music education has actually added musical value to, and thus transformed students in musical ways that enrich and enliven their lives forever. (Regelski, 2006, p. 10)

Opponents of critical pedagogy, music or otherwise, voice that there is little that it adds to conventional education (Bowers, 1982, 1987; Knight & Pearl, 2000). "Whatever its other merits, critical pedagogy has been unable to slow the advance of an ever more alienating and mind-numbing curriculum ... [because] it proposes virtually nothing new as an alternative" (Knight & Pearl, 2000, pp. 200-201). Ellsworth (1989) believes that the



critical pedagogues have failed to address power imbalances among key stakeholders like parents, teachers, and students, when the point of the pedagogy is to focus on the margins, reclaim power, and work against “Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and ‘banking education’” (p. 298). Though the claims against critical pedagogy are compelling, important work is still necessary in order to instill a sense of democracy in education, specifically music education.

Critical pedagogy is dynamic and is evident when bi-directional teaching and learning occur between students and their teachers. In a recent study by Abril (2010), he reports the cultural impact of a school mariachi band on one student of Mexican heritage in the Midwestern region of the United States. Abril notes that the teacher had essentialized the band by inadvertently making mariachi something like an “other” form of music (i.e., a trope for anything Mexican). The student voiced her concerns to the teacher, who saw “an opportunity” to learn from the students.

Abrahams (2010) broadens the scope of critical pedagogy in classroom music by investigating *O Passo* (The Step), a Brazilian form of music education developed by native Lucas Ciavatta. In Ciavatta’s method, students come to know and make music by experiencing it, especially through composition and improvisation. *O Passo* involves constructivist teachers who advance students’ self-efficacy in various activities designed to help students be masters of their art. Abrahams notes that there is a bridge between critical pedagogical theory and on-the-ground practice; he believes that *O Passo* “provides the tools that enable students and their teachers to walk across that bridge one step at a time” (p. 186).

Critical pedagogy bridges the gaps between students' music making experiences in community and at school by requiring them to name, reflect, and act artistically. Threaded throughout the music curriculum as a way to engage students, teachers who use critical pedagogy will make music teaching and learning personal to those who claim its legitimacy. This sort of thinking will become part of a philosophical and practical shift in the way music teachers are prepared for the dynamic changes in education in the first half of the twenty-first century. The democratic ideals evidenced through purposive music making in the Hmong community, along with a variety of music learning practices and critical pedagogy, might serve as a model for schoolteachers as they prepare to make a positive difference in their classes and communities.

### **Music Learning Practices**

Music learning among Hmong musicians who participated in this study is accomplished both formally and informally, with and without curriculum-like structures (e.g., lesson plans), alone and together, and in school and in community. Oftentimes, youth artists create their music together while gathered in small groups. Green (2011) refers to a process of "cooperative learning within a learning community" (p. 138), as well as peer-learning groups as friendship groups consisting of four to five students (p. 139). These practices "share few or none of the defining features of formal music education" (Green, 2002, p. 5). "Young musicians," she states,

teach themselves or 'pick up' skills and knowledge, usually with the help of encouragement of their family and peers, by watching and imitating musicians

around them and by making reference to recordings or performances and other live events involving their chosen music. (p. 5)

Finnegan's (1989) research precedes Lucy Green's research by more than a decade and provides a seminal reading of community music making. Her "interest is in the practice of music-making, in notions of performance, and in the arrangements which are necessary to allow music to happen" (Cloonan, 2012, p. 298). Finnegan unpacks music's power in community settings and "suggests that human beings are inherently musical" (p. 298) and thereby documents learning outside schools, a process I adopt in this thesis.

In her research, Finnegan (1989) describes the way a school-aged study participant came to play drums in his school band through unconventional means. After hearing the school's big band, the student became interested noting that the band was "intensely exciting compared to the conventional school orchestra with its 'scratchy violins and squeaky clarinets'" (p. 138). He obtained a drum kit and practiced in the shed and even with knitting needles "at every opportunity" (p. 138). Finnegan shares that this student drummer was in high demand in local jazz and rock bands. This anecdote is helpful, because it points to possibilities for music making in multiple settings, both in and outside schools.

Music education, formal or informal, is not the "exclusive preserve of academics" (Walker, 2007, p. 3). Music education occurs in community settings, too. Its existence in non-school environments has an organic feel, one that in the Hmong community is responsive to the needs of residents. "Musicians in the 'community music' realm are much more accustomed to informal ways of working with groups of teenagers than

school teachers” (Green, 2008, p. 27). Higgins (2012) notes that there is “an active intervention between a music leader or facilitator and participants” (p. 3) and further suggests that, “community music may be understood as an approach to active music making and musical knowing *outside* of formal teaching and learning situations” (p. 4).

Pitts (2005), however, warns that educators in who teach in schools should avoid appropriating community-based techniques noting that:

Music teaching in schools needs to be compatible with, but distinctive from, the musical learning in which students are engaged beyond the classroom, so that students are encouraged in their independent learning by teachers who retain a credible and supportive role. (p. 128)

In this study, learning from the Hmong community is not intended to be an appropriation of their teaching and learning procedures, but rather a way to glean important pedagogical examples that might be applied to music teacher education concerning democratic action.

It appears, however, that there is an implicit connotation established between the words informal and individual, as well as informal and amateur that might prevent some teachers from delving into the realm of musics enjoyed and performed by students and families in community or home environments. The former relationship is that individuals prefer to work away from the “dictates of convention” (Green, 2002, p. 106), while the latter pairing would indicate that amateur arts are “self-motivated and unpaid” (Brinson, 1992, p. 88). Music that is learned outside school or formal settings lacks professionalism, a set structure commonly valued among schoolteachers.

Informal music and popular music are associated. Finnegan (1989) writes:

The most evident contrast is between the classical mode of professional and formalised teaching by recognized specialists on the one hand, and the self-taught or apprentice-type process of the more ‘popular’ music traditions on the other. Each of these is in turn linked to a wider set of conventions relating to social organisation and expectations as well as musical content. (p. 133)

Informal music learning practices are not the sole property of “amateur” musicians. Sting (2003), noted pop musician, describes his engagement strategies as teacher at St. Paul First School near Newcastle, England, a post he held in the mid-1970s. He recalls working with eight-year old students where he “play[ed] guitar for them ... and encourage[ed] them to sing their favorite pop songs” (p. 150). In this vignette, Sting regales, “I will recognize shy kindred souls who will be transformed by the act of performing” (p. 150).

Finnegan (1989) shares that classical musicians also self-, peer-, and group learn by partaking in exactly the same informal learning processes described by Green (2006) who distinguishes informal music learning from formal learning by outlining five characteristics learned in her field research in a school outside London:

1. Learners select their own music. In school, the teachers select music.
2. Music is learned by ear, whereas in school, notation is valued more highly than aural learning.
3. Informal music learning involves self and group teaching. School music teachers, on the other hand, provide much guidance.
4. Preference guides music learners; acquisition, hence, may be haphazard.

Formal realms generally include curriculum, syllabi, and grades.

5. Creativity is emphasized in informal music learning environments: Integration of listening, performing, improvising, and composing is key. Reproduction of music is central in school. (p. 106)

Green's characteristics of informal music learning (above) are reflected in Woody and Parker's (2012) study that involved honors-level university freshmen, but non-music majors, enrolled in a psychology of music class. They investigated the musical lives of students (N=86) in four sections of the class over four years to determine their participation and propensities for music making after high school. Findings were given that indicate that students, without the aid of a professor, were likely to perform music with encouragement from peers and family members; perform music on instruments or voice with which they were most comfortable (e.g., harmonica, guitar); and create music with a range of skills based on past musical participation in high school (e.g., band, choir, orchestra, garage band).

Allsup (2003) reveals the findings of his qualitative study of nine high school age instrumentalists in New York State where peer music learning "had less to do with the transmission of skills ... and more to do with the process of discovery" (p. 33). Jaffurs (2004) similarly found that members of a five-member, high school age garage band were responsible for every aspect of the band from logistics to musical genre: "There was a feeling that they [the band] were all in this together and that they all contributed in some way or another to the creation of the music they composed and performed" (p. 197).

Fornäs, Lindberg, and Sernhede (1995) note the findings from their study of three bands in Sweden that aside from the benefits described above, adult-lead youth work has value

if the participating adults “respect the unique qualities and autonomy of youth cultural expressions” (p. 258).

What is critically important about informal music learning when operationalized in a school music class is that the teachers refrain from “stepping in” to help students. Their interests in the music they choose and how they go about learning to create it is vital. Though students will often proceed to learn a song “in holistic, often haphazard ways with no planned structure of progression” (Green, 2008, p. 25), they have learned something of value together in peer groups, much like a rock band might in a real world studio or jam session.

An area of teaching and learning that is not captured by Green or Finnegan, for example, is learning through enculturation that is intergenerational. Addo (1997) reveals in her research from a Ghanaian primary school how she learned singing games from children. She notes that in Ghana, emphasis is placed on “informal methods of enculturation” and that those “methods are functional, in that they exist within the lived situation” (p. 17). Among musicians engage in similar kinds of enculturation and intergenerational learning of music.

Musicians obtain their skills in multiple ways that include both formal and informal methods. In most cases, it appears in the literature that they may participate in some kind of school or applied lesson with formalized training, as well as in their own garage band or bedroom settings (Finnegan, 1989; Green, 2002, 2006, 2008). Guidance, when offered, lacks the structure of standards and benchmarks. Providing opportunities for formal and informal music making, regardless of where it occurs, is a good strategy for engaging students where they are by inviting them to explore sounds and lyrics on

their own. The next and crucial step is to encourage students to say something important with their music that is of personal, group, social, or political value.

### **Hmong Music Culture**

Bennett (2000) believes that “On the one hand, music informs ways of *being* in particular social spaces; on the other hand, music functions as a resource whereby individuals are able to actively *construct* those spaces in which they live” (p. 195). As part of the present study, it is helpful to investigate the meaning of spaces, particularly those of Hmong communities in the Twin Cities. Following is an investigation of the meanings of community and a look at the music community forged by Hmong musicians who participated in this study.

### **Community**

A contentious term, community is both problematic and powerful (Higgins, 2007, p. 282). Community is a fairly ambiguous word and lends itself to various interpretations: The word community is etymologically bi-polar. Its complexity is bound up in what Kant defines as two separate ideas: Though both Latin in origin, *communio* and *commercium* appear to be related, they are in direct conflict to one another. *Communio* makes its appearance as an exclusionary and defensive term whereas *commercium* is the process of exchange and communication (Kant as cited in Higgins, 2007, p. 282). Higgins cites other definitions of community, but the point here is that its roots, no matter how they are dissected, are poisonous to one another. How communities thrive when they



simultaneously repel outsiders as in *communio* and simultaneously invite them with welcoming gestures as in *commercium* is a conundrum.

As mentioned before, Higgins (2007) defines community and its roots. He examines community without unity, an idea that he gleans from the etymological roots of the word. The essence of community lies in the idea of exclusion, not inclusion. Inclusion is the connotation of community; it is the feel-good notion that community is inherently worthwhile. Higgins writes that community is the exact opposite. When community truly demonstrates its original meaning it shows that exclusion, keeping out those who do not belong, is the imperative. Community in this sense unifies the insiders, those inside the city walls, and keeps out those who come from the outside. Community without unity is Higgins's way of explaining that community should not be unified unto itself; community must share its insider qualities, talents, gifts, and bounty with outsiders in a sort of welcoming gesture. A musical embrace of newcomers is one way to establish a hospitable community that invites wide participation from as many participants as possible.

Musical activism in community is strong when music makers are granted agency and are recognized by their own people and moreover by those who hold power. Nzewi (2007) gives a perspective on musical activism, a topic closely related to my own study, that paints a picture of responsible, democratic processes in community music. He approaches music first from Regelski's (2002) perspective but replaces the terms method and methodolatry with *systems*. Systems tend to become more important than a life filled with music. Nzewi (2007) writes that "Human survival ... has become endangered by materialistic and egomaniac psychopaths who blatantly commandeer and demonize ...

academic systems for wealth and power without conscience” (p. 305). He does not resolve the issue of systems and their grip on music’s true and beautiful power; however, he, like Higgins, engages in welcoming language that affirms the community as a space without unity – lacking exclusionary in-group and out-group tendencies.

### **Music in Community**

Banks (2009) is a proponent of learning from, in, and with the community that comprises a school’s geographic setting. He believes that there are lessons that can be learned outside the school building that directly affect the curriculum, and thereby connect to students’ knowing, values, and attitudes as they become citizens of their communities and the world. He states, “The school should affirm and recognize the home and community cultures of students. ... [and] develop a critical consciousness of their home and community cultures” (pp. 106-107).

Webster (2005) notes that community arts in Great Britain, for instance, grew out of a “movement to try to reestablish the link between people and culture, to stimulate and inspire new types of activity and to value and promote latent or hidden skills and talents in community” (p. 1). He further distinguishes the characteristics of participation in English community arts that describe what happens in the Hmong community:

- Participation is promoted regardless of skill.
- The work is “undertaken by a group who either have the same or collective identity, or a goal greater than the art form itself, or both.”
- The work is “developed primarily to provide opportunities” for music making among those who have little chance to participate elsewhere. (p. 2)

To the first point, participation is welcomed in friendship groups (Green, 2011, p. 139). Stokes (1994) speaks to the second point that cultural relocation is a process where “the places, boundaries and identities involved are of a large and collective order” (p. 3). The last point addresses the experience of Hmong youth regardless of the kind of music they make, either traditional or contemporary.

### **Traditional Hmong Music**

The literature pertaining to Hmong traditional music focuses heavily on music as language, not necessarily art, as well as the foreseeable demise of ancient ceremonial language and music in the near future. Books and articles about Hmong arts do not place an emphasis on music. Chia Youyee Vang (2008) mentions music and Hip-hop in passing. She recognizes that Hmong New Year celebrations feature a “variety of music and dances [that] illustrate how Hmong culture has evolved and been enriched by influences from other traditions, whether American popular and Hip-hop music and dance styles or Chinese, Bollywood, and Korean dances” (p. 46).

Vang (2008), like other authors who mention music, describes traditional instrumental music of Hmong people. The *qeej*, a bamboo mouth organ, “is unique in that every note or sound corresponds to a spoken word” (p. 55).

[It] serves two primary purposes in Hmong society: its melody is used to guide the soul of the deceased person to the spirit world during funerals and, at festivals such as New Year celebrations and occasionally during weddings, young people perform to demonstrate their artistic abilities. (p. 55)

Supporting Vang's statement, Hillmer (2010) tells Xai Thao's story about courting rituals of the past:

In the old days, you did not tell each other verbally that you liked each other, but used the traditional pipe instrument and other means to tell them.... These tunes would tell how much you loved someone and that you wanted to marry her (p. 29).

Poss (2005), in his master's thesis about Hmong *raj*, notes, "If the new generation of Hmong-Americans is not learning how to play or understand the flute (*tschuab raj*: *tschuab*, to blow; *raj*, a tube usually made from bamboo), then there are issues of preservation and documentation to consider" (pp. 4-5).

Her (2012) noted during his talk at the Fourth International Conference on Hmong Studies at Concordia University, St. Paul, that funerary music of *Foom Kom*, are meant to teach life lessons such as to be self sufficient, to achieve wealth prosperity, to acquire cultural skills, knowledge and education, and to attain position of status and prominence in society. The conundrum, however, is in the translation and teaching of such songs' melodies and texts. Many Hmong youth do not know the language and cannot understand the deep meanings of the funerary songs, because the songs cannot be sung outside the funeral setting.

Hmong language and music are the same in Hmong culture. Poss (2005) interviewed Ger Xiong, Minnesota-based rap artist and storyteller, who indicated that, "Hmong music is not like normal music. We play word by word into the flute" (p. 3). Poss probes how one knows what is being communicated and Xiong replies that just by being Hmong, one just knows. This, however, is not the case for young people. Hillmer

(2010) describes the sophistication of Hmong communication: “[They] hear sounds and know what they mean without having heard them before. Though preliterate, the Hmong have for centuries been ‘eminently literate in terms of interpreting musical sounds’” (p. 35). According to Dyane (personal communication, November 18, 2010), infants are taught language in songful tones. Sound, she adds, is critical to language development, and Hmong children growing up in the United States do not have that any longer.

Studying musical language may improve an understanding of the relationship between speech and music (Poss, 2005, p. 5). Morrison (1998) clearly states the relationship between music and language:

For the Hmong, the indisputable difference between their instrument and those of other ethnic groups is that the Hmong *qeej* "speaks." To the Hmong, the *qeej* is not an instrument designed to produce music; it is a bamboo voice that intones a highly stylized and ritualistic language. Thus "music" and "speech" are inseparable. (p. 3)

The evidence of an inextricable link between music and speech is similar in the youth arts scene of today. Using both English and Hmong language, musicians blend their American and Hmong cultures within their raps, songs, and poems. A difference, however, is that they do not use traditional instruments, opting instead to use modern technology such as guitars, computers, and electronic piano keyboards. By foregoing instruments like the *qeej* and *nplooj*, youth may “lose” some of their heritage, but they are forging a new direction of artistic production that speaks in their lives just as powerfully.

## **Forging Critical, Democratic Music Traditions**

When I think about ethnic or racial groups that represent Hip-hop culture in the United States, Asians or Asian Americans do not come to mind first. The literature suggests that Black youth, as well as Latinos and Whites, participate in Hip-hop culture (Iwamoto, Creswell & Caldwell, 2007; Kitwana, 2005; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Petchauer, 2009). Rose (1994b) writes that Hip-hop is not merely an outgrowth of urban conditions: “Hip hop is propelled by Afro-diasporic traditions” (p. 25). Hmong and other Asian ethnicities such as Laotian and Tibetan are active in Hip-hop culture also (Clay, 2003; S. J. Lee, 2007; Yeh & Lama, 2004). S. J. Lee (2007) notes that many second-generation [Hmong] youth adopted a Hip Hop style” (pp. 178-179).

It is appropriate to revisit identity formation here, because it pertains to Hmong artists quite directly. New traditions in the youth arts and music community are guided by a desire or need to address prevalent issues in Hmong lives. By writing poems, as well as raps and songs, they convey messages that “[deal] with a political, social, or economic problem that [are] important to them (e.g., racism, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, police brutality, poverty, homelessness) ...” (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 91). Schell (2010), a local Hip-hop researcher who has worked with Tou SaiK in St. Paul and Thailand, writes that Hip-hop artists “[t]ackle some of the most important contemporary political issues including immigration reform, affordable housing, support of local and national politicians, health care access, homelessness, an end to youth violence, and greater minority representation in the Twin Cities” (para. 6).

In Morrell and Duncan-Andrade’s (2002) school-based English literature lesson, they postulated that by using Hip-hop in the classroom, teachers might elicit the critical

consciousness of high school seniors to address the kinds of issues that effect teens in urban schools. The use of Hip-hop in the Hmong community, generally not in school settings, echoes Morrell and Duncan-Andrade's school-based lesson plan, because the urban cultural phenomenon "represents a resistant voice of urban youth through its articulation of problems that this generation and all Americans face on a daily basis" (p. 88). "Music," according to Bennett (2000), "not only informs the construction of the self, but also the social world in which the self operates" (p. 195). S. J. Lee (2007) notes that second generation youth embrace Hip-hop culture "as a response to the problems they faced at school and in the larger society" and that it is "a form of resistance to race and class exclusion they experienced as low-income youth of color" (p. 180).

There are two kinds of identity that pertain to Hmong music communities. First is general group identity and second is a focus on claiming/reclaiming national or ethnic identity by the youth artists. To the former type, studies in rock music and other popular genres (Bennett, 2001; Finnegan, 1989) indicate that group identity is among the most important facet of gathering together to make music. Bennett (2001) writes the following:

Playing in a group gives young people a chance to distance themselves from those aspects of life which they find least appealing and to envisage a different kind of life for themselves, one which is based not around schoolwork and subsequently a job or career, but rather upon musical creativity and artistic expression. (p. 141)

The latter point, group identity built on nationality or ethnicity, is more prominent than the former type in the Hmong community, due to the absence of a nation-state. Tatum (1997) notes that "given the impact of dominant and subordinate status, it is not surprising that researchers have found that adolescents of color are more likely to be

actively engaged in an exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are White adolescents” (p. 53). Phalen, Davidson, and Cao (1991) indicate that immigrant students, for instance, tend to be successful in American schools, but do so at the expense of losing their cultural heritages. Loss may prompt youth to create what Yeh and Lama (2006) call transnational identities that span the gap between homeland cultures and American hegemonic cultures.

S. J. Lee (2005) shows in her research about Hmong youth in a Wisconsin high school that Hip-hop style is “associated with urban youth of color” and that the Hmong youth were classified by teachers as “becoming Americanized in a bad way” (p. 142). Nevertheless, Hmong youth, especially boys, embraced the Hip-hop style of Jet Li, actor in the then-newly-released film *Romeo Must Die*.

In their study of Tibetan youth who adopt Hip-hop culture, Yeh and Lama (2006) show that there can be dissonance between national identity and that of the “intergenerational struggles over the ‘blackness’ associated with Hip-hop style” (p. 828). Participants in my study indicated that immigration and refugee status are a centerpiece in Hmong Hip-hop in the United States. Hence, creating a collective and transnational identity that is both Hmong and American can be a challenge for youth musicians who call St. Paul their home.

From the existing literature, there appears to be little research on Hmong Hip-hop, though recent University of Minnesota graduate Justin Schell has begun to uncover the work of local Hip-hop artists across Hmong, Puerto Rican, and Ghanaian diasporas. His documentary about Tou SaiK, Maria Isa, and Manifest will premier in April 2013. What is known about the new traditions among Tou SaiK and his role partners is that this



relatively new Hmong art form transforms musical and artistic lives of youth in critical ways from which music education might benefit.

### **Inviting Critical Democratic Education to Music Teacher Preparation**

“How much longer can educators proclaim the virtues of democracy without actualizing it in their own teaching” (Brubaker, 2012, p. 16)?

Pre-service teachers are excited about their future careers as educators; some, according to elementary education majors I teach, are interested in discovering innovative ways to engage students by incorporating music into their teaching of other content areas (e.g., English language arts) (Hansen, Bernstorff, & Stuber, 2004; Lamme, 1990). However, my own elementary education students are unwilling to interrogate the process of schooling. They do not ask probing or critical questions, because they are accustomed to taking directions from their teachers *carte blanche*. Often, students are reticent to engage in conversations regarding democratic choices about curriculum or daily activities (Brubaker, 2012). Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage (2005) indicate, “It is important for teachers to understand their roles and responsibilities as professionals in schools that must prepare all students for equitable participation in a democratic society” (p. 11). It is in teacher preparation curricula, then, where the ideals of democracy in education might be instilled, because educator-professionals have a responsibility to serve others (p. 12). This kind of democratic teaching and learning must be modeled during pre-service training.

Jorgensen (2003) introduces a perspective of transforming music education in ways that do not merely “tinker on the edges” (p. xiii) of music education, but challenges the institution of music education by questioning the status quo. She laments that students of music education come to the field with uncritical minds and essentially seek to emulate their own elementary and secondary teachers for better or worse. “Instead of attracting the best and brightest students, education often interests those who cannot get into other fields.” Jorgensen continues, “A pervasive anti-intellectualism in education manifests itself in such problems as lack of interest in scholarship, uncritical acceptance of ideas and practices, idolizing of science, and obsession with instructional and research methods” (p. x). Regelski (2006) corroborates and extends this sentiment writing, “[n]ew [and ‘student’] teachers, then, teach as – and thus what – they were taught, or teach as – and thus what – they were taught to teach (Regelski, 2006, p. 11). As an example, he writes:

Part of the educational problem, of course, is that large ensembles are led by teacher-directors who, as highly trained musicians, make all musical judgments and decisions. Students, then, become mere functionaries of the director’s musicianship and do not acquire the personal musicianship skills that can guide their own musical decisions. (p. 6)

Jones (2007) and Regelski (2006) consider how teachers might meet students where they are and ultimately reconnect music education to society and community. “The entire practice of school-based music education must be reevaluated and many of our traditions jettisoned if we are to be relevant to the society we are entrusted to serve” (Jones, 2007, p. 3). Jones argues that “school curricula must include both musics with

which the pupils identify and musics present in the communities from which they come” (p. 7). This could be complicated because it raises questions of identity. Jones also states that music education must be responsible to society, particularly local communities: In the case of this study, Hmong traditional and new musics could be the link to students and their personal interests that bridges home and school environments.

Regelski (2006) shares his viewpoint that current school music programs perpetuate past models that preserve old ways – ways that look backward, not forward. But inviting change is not as easy as simply incorporating democratic practices into the curriculum. In a three-semester self-study to forward a democratic model of teacher education at a comprehensive university, Brubaker (2012) recounts undergraduates’ discomfort with the freedoms associated with curricular choices offered to them by him, the instructor. Students, according to the author, were weary of the freedoms that they had been given in Brubaker’s student-centered teaching model; they needed more teacher-directed guidance during class, for assignments, and for grading. Not all students were unhappy about Brubaker’s approach, and some welcomed his fresh ideas about teacher education. Though Brubaker intended to teach in a democratic fashion, he was faced with changing his approach to one that seemed more authoritarian – more mainstream. “In other words, [he] construct[ed] a class climate that was aligned more directly with what students were ready to experience while reflecting a more gradual approach to educational change” (p. 10). The key to student buy-in might be to ease them into the democratic learning model gradually and not fully immerse them in a way that takes students outside their comfort zone.

Teacher preparation programs that include the power of voice through music education coursework might expand student discourse through thought provoking discussions that activate deep thinking about how and why democracy should be a necessary part of the teacher education regimen. Here, student empowerment and student centered learning are vitally important. Woodford (2005) laments, “Many undergraduate music education majors are ... profoundly ignorant of the world around them and of the grand political, philosophical, artistic, and social movements that shape their culture” (p. 74). Undergraduates need the tools to use their own voices in powerful ways so that they can forward democracy in their own careers. Horowitz et al. (2005) believe that “[d]evelopmentally aware teachers encourage strong identity development by providing opportunities for all students equally.... They give students increasing opportunities to make decisions and to act responsibly within the school and the community” (p. 113). The challenge, as Shepherd (1991) writes, is to get teacher preparers to “reform and reinvigorate undergraduate music education such that undergraduates must engage in meaningful and sustained dialogue” (p. 113) with people outside music disciplines and outside the academy so that a broad conversation might contextualize music in more holistic, global dimensions.

As young teachers grow to embody their musical lives as thinkers and doers, they also must consider the powerful impact of their art and teaching on cultural production or reproduction and the ways that they safeguard or create opportunities for order and liberty in their classes. Wink (2011) recorded a speech given by Paolo Freire in the late 1990s, just prior to the speaker’s death. In it, Freire notes, “Education is political” (p. 103). Musical enculturation as an existing societal paradigm, to some extent, is a

necessary component of music education so that students can enjoy the benefits of contemporary living, as well as value certain musical practices and ways of thinking that will prepare them for future learning (Western canon and beyond). However, enculturation that only reproduces an existing culture for the sake of preserving yesterday's or today's ideals is not adequate to stir a democratic spirit within future teachers so that they may, one day, forge those new pathways to and *in* democracy.

The case for music education reform begins by raising pre-service teachers' consciousness of critical issues and democratic education in and out of school music programs. However, the challenge remains that pre-service teachers come to their undergraduate programs with a mind for preserving what they love about music. Their fond recollections of chilly nights spent at marching band competitions and warm spring trips to Disney World fuel the status quo. It is not to say that these kinds of music department events are not important to the socialization, and even musicianship of our students, but pre-service teachers' schemata is limited by what they know. The adage "familiarity breeds contempt" is expanded by Dewey (1902/2011) who adds, "... but it also breeds something like affection. We get used to the chains we wear, and we miss them when removed" (p. 35).

What does music teacher education look like in a new century? Schmidt (1998) and Conway (2012) investigate the effectiveness of pre-service music teacher education by examining the student teaching experience. Schmidt's focus is on undergraduate student teachers and their definition of "good" teaching while Conway tracks participants' from their student teaching experiences to their professional in-service careers by conducting a longitudinal study from 2000 to 2010.

Schmidt (1998) searches for definitions of “good” music teaching by examining four student teachers. Her findings show that among the definitions of “good” music teaching (e.g., personal qualities, classroom management) provided by her participants, they indicate that “‘good’ instructional strategies were informed by instruction presented in university music education courses, tempered by models provide by their university studio teachers and ensemble directors, and by their own musical practices” (p. 29). In sum, Schmidt notes that good teaching practices revolve around pre-service teachers’ personal experiences, “effective supervisory supervision” (p. 39), and the sense that communities will foster “good” teaching.

Good teaching is not just about good experiences, supervision, and community. Conway’s (2012) research extends Schmidt’s (1998) study by reporting the results of a longitudinal study of teachers by comparing participants’ perceptions of pre-service music teacher preparation from 1999-2000 to the time of her study’s completion (2010). The factors for good teaching outlined by Conway show that excellent musicianship (p. 330) is still valued by experienced teachers, despite the author’s initial thought that musicianship skills would be less important to participants ten years after their undergraduate training. An area of teacher preparation that appears disconnected with teachers’ feelings about pre-service training is coursework taken in the education school or department; its relevance, even to participants in 2010, seemed “out of balance” (p. 331) with personal and professional musical goals. Conway’s participants suggest that pre-service teachers experience various kinds of schools, gain pedagogical knowledge, and learn about the teacher certification processes.

Schmidt (1998) and Conway (2012) are helpful for understanding the importance of student teaching experiences to undergraduates; undoubtedly, the musical training and community feelings associated with teacher education are crucial to the pre-service teachers' development as artistically responsible individuals. However, these studies do not address how teacher preparation programs could be expanded to include democratic frameworks within existing music teacher preparation programs. New directions that enhance and even enlighten the traditions of music education are necessary.

Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010), as well as Potthoff, Dinsmore, Stirtz, Walsh, Ziebart, and Eifler (2013) examine new directions in teacher education that address the kinds of enhancements to teacher education for which I advocate in this thesis. The former investigates improvisation and teacher education, and the latter expands the definition of pre-service field experiences. Both studies are appropriate to this thesis, because they relate to the Hmong youth artists propensities to improvise and to work for justice in community (i.e., non-school) settings.

In Wright and Kanellopoulos's (2010) study "Informal Music Learning, Improvisation, and Teacher Education," they share the significance of improvisation as a "critical perspective on both music education theories and practices" and that "improvisation might offer a route for creating an intimate, powerful, evolving dialogue between students" (p. 71). Their study involved 91 pre-service teachers enrolled in a free improvisation course. Researchers show that autonomy, empathy, mutual respect, and willingness (p. 81) were chief characteristics fostered by improvisation. This model hints at democratic teaching and learning but is still situated within the traditional school

building. The present study extends these ideals by taking into account the surrounding community, in this case, Hmong, as an important aspect of music teacher education.

The move toward yearlong student teaching experiences, varied placements (e.g., urban-rural or private-public), improvisation as a teaching tool, or more stringent certification process (a.k.a., licensure) does not aim to expand music teacher education outside schools. Potthoff et al. (2013) investigate community-based field experiences for pre-service teachers taken within human service agencies. Counter to Conway's (2012) results about connectedness to collegiate departments of education, Potthoff et al. (2013) found that pre-service teachers and human service agency personnel thought the service-learning opportunities were valuable and that the experiences closely related to the goals of the college's education department. Of the participants in this study, only 14% were enrolled in art, music, physical, or special education. However, the aggregated data among all participants from across education fields shows that much growth was "attitudinal" (p. 86) and that the experience can encourage citizenship and a wider view of diversity.

Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010) and Potthoff et al. (2013) show that new directions in teacher education are possible. Though the former study is more closely related to music education through the investigation of improvisation in pre-service teacher coursework, the latter has implications that also closely relate to the Hmong community in St. Paul. It shows that universities are interested in providing non-school settings as part of the teacher education experience.

Aside from expanding the experiences that pre-service music teachers have while learning the profession, I hope to extend the traditional training model to include Hip-hop



and other popular music “pedagogies” as possible avenues for teaching and learning. The relevancy of meeting students where they are should not be underestimated, particularly if “where they are” includes popular music genres and not classical music as in the Hmong community.

The assessment that Rose (1994a) makes about issues that birthed Hip-hop in 1970s New York are similar to the present conditions in modern-day St. Paul where Hmong youth create their arts, addressing similar urban issues. “Substantial postindustrial shifts in economic conditions, access to housing, demographics and communication networks were crucial to the formation of the conditions which nurtured the cultural hybrids and sociopolitical tenor of hip hop’s lyrics and music” (p. 73). Of the Black community, hooks (1994) says that “rap music has become one of the spaces where black vernacular speech is used in a manner that invites dominant mainstream culture to listen – to hear – and, to some extent, be transformed” (p. 171). The same kind of transformational space, one that is emancipatory, is evident in Hmong communities as well where there is “a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies” to emerge (p. 171). Jorgensen (2003) implores educators to unpack what it means to transform education by “narrow[ing] rigid concepts, classifications, theories, and paradigms to embrace a broad and inclusive view of diverse music educational perspectives and practices” (p. 119).

Drawing a hypothesis that popular musics are a gateway to engaging students who, in turn, might see themselves as democratic agents, I agree with Reimer (2009a) who notes a practical issue that “in many places around the world our carings about music and our students’ carings are alarmingly discrepant; even, perhaps, contrary”

(Reimer, 2009a, pp. 383-384). The question that Reimer (2009a) asks music educators to consider is, “Are we out of touch?” Reimer, by way of example, shares that rock history and popular music in general are paramount, keys to the musical experiences of today’s young people. “Giving popular music its full due as an essential experience for young people... [it] will go a long way toward reestablishing both the relevance of music education and its capacity to delight and enchant” (p. 393).

Horne (2007) writes, “The relevancy of the music being taught in school and the type of music a student listens to outside of the classroom has inspired interesting research and dialogue” (p. 39). Providing a space in contemporary music education for other kinds of musical-cultural production such as pop, rock, rap, or spoken word poetry is one way (of many) to invite democracy to the door, but that would seem far too tokenistic, a conciliatory gesture, for real change to occur. In the Hmong community, for instance, music preferences vary among youth. Some listen to, sing, or play traditional music indigenous to Southeast Asia while others, like my participants, are deeply invested in American popular musics. For students in school-based music courses, popular music may meet them where they are (i.e., schema) more readily than, say, Western classical art music. Utilizing strategies such as the national standards for music education such as composition, performance, listening, and evaluation, Hip-hop’s musical genres might be for some students the means to the greater end of helping students find their voices, hence, living democracy in music education.

There is a place for including topics related to democratic education in music education throughout teacher preparation programs. Teacher educators must evaluate the relevancy of their curricula based on a multitude of issues such as national teacher and

student demographics (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002, p. 88); community and school culture; and yes, budgetary issues. Ensemble courses; methods and techniques classes (e.g., strings and woodwinds); pre-service and student teaching fieldwork (Conway, 2010); and general music education curricula (e.g., music history and theory) are chief among professors' concerns

Reynolds (2010) queries how music teacher educators, then, come to their careers, journeying from youth school musicians and undergraduate music education majors to graduate assistants and eventually teacher educators. How specifically, might pre-service teachers be exposed to teaching as early as possible in their time at university? At her university in Pennsylvania, Reynolds explains that the senior administration instituted a peer-teaching experience for undergraduates to partner with faculty who would serve as mentor teachers, giving pre-service teachers the opportunity to experience teaching under the tutelage of expert educators in their chosen field. The author indicates the whole experience is not only good for the undergraduates who develop a music educator identity, but she, too, "luxuriously learned from such a span of music educators [pre-service to graduate teaching assistants]" (p. 266). Reynolds's sentiment is evidence that critical pedagogy occurs in this kind of peer teaching experience.

Teacher preparers will further the case of democracy in music education by believing in their own efficacy as torchbearers for a new journey in our field. They will need to commit to being agents of positive change through their life works of music making and music teaching. They should serve as guides for undergraduates to explore their musical pathways so that they will grow intellectually through a *process* of

development (Dewey, 1902/2011). “Guidance is not external imposition. *It is freeing the life-process for its own most adequate fulfilment (sic)*” (p. 22).

### **Giving Voice to Music Learning Practices**

“There is a deeply troubling deterioration of democratic powers in America today” (West, 2004, p. 2). West writes that free-market fundamentalism, religious fundamentalism, aggressive militarism, and escalating authoritarianism are the three greatest threats to democracy. Palmer (2011) thinks that democracy will be lost when people begin to fear each other, fear differences, and fear the future (p. 9). Despite these predictions, I argue that Hmong youth actively seek stages – emancipatory spaces – on which to voice their concerns (e.g., fears, hopes, and joys) as a way to name issues and at the same time “give something back to the community” (Hones et al., 2012, p. 206). By telling their stories through Hip-hop arts, performers have found ways to move democracy forward in St. Paul, Minnesota.

West (2004) argues youth are positioned to “push democratic momentum” (pp. 174-175). Hmong artists, particularly the musicians, are moving ahead with new ideas for democracy in three important ways: They (a) name issues in their communities; (b) establish coalitions of neighbors and neighborhoods that reclaim community pride; and (c) host youth gatherings such as open mic nights in order to provide venues for self-expression. However, the absence of popular music genres in our school music programs (Allsup & Shieh, 2012; Green, 2002/2006; Reimer, 2009a) may be partially responsible for disenfranchising students who are not interested in Western classical art music.

Music learning practices that empower students' voices are important to consider when developing curriculum: What topics should be covered in order to provide pre-service teachers with practical experiences around content that they could teach in their own P-12 classes? Strand and Sumner (2010) introduced a unit on informal music learning practices based on Green's (2002, 2008) research related to how youth learn music aside from teacher-lead instruction. The authors wanted to give their undergraduate music majors an opportunity to not only discuss the pedagogical options associated with informal teaching and learning, but were interested in operationalizing the rock band experience. Students' benefitted from Strand and Sumner's instructional unit, because students were the chief designers of the unit itself and performers in a final production that emulated a real rock band in a live classroom concert.

### **Summary**

It is evident that youth do not learn solely on their own without some form of mentorship or apprenticeship. Assistance is still necessary and comes in the form of loosely guided exploration and modeling (Green, 2008, p. 27). Youth leaders create the space for trial and error and model their art from the standpoint of community organizers, colleagues, and mentors to youth in the community.

Though it is undeniable that some type of education, no matter how formally or informally organized, is necessary for learning how to rap, sing, and speak, the value of various kinds of music learning practices where accumulated knowledge is put into action is invaluable to the youth who were part of this study. It is this premise on which I base

my position that Hmong youth artists have effectively captured the spirit and action of democratic education through musical practices that allow each of them to explore their own powers of voice. Further, I postulate that a variety of music learning practices along with critical pedagogy make democratic education in music education possible as a way to energize teaching and learning as observed in the Hmong youth arts community.

This review demonstrates the integral role society and community play in music education. The marriage between community, school, and music education is not new; it is, however, one that has undergone many changes, but could be re-framed (hyphen intended) to determine how students will connect to music(s) of many kinds to their own lives.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

The methods and procedures used in this ethnographic study were designed to explore the distinct aspects of music teaching and learning practices in Hmong communities that will inform democracy in music education for pre-service teachers and their future K-12 students. Focusing on rap, spoken word poetry, and lyrical songs, three guiding questions are explored. First, “In what kinds of musical activities do Hmong youth participate and how do they teach and learn their arts?” To help answer this questions, interviews, focus groups, field observations, and artifacts were collected to form the corpus of data. Since school music tends to be about aesthetic education (or music for the sake of music), the second question, “For what purposes do Hmong youth create their arts?” is important because community artists use music specifically to address personal, group, and socio-political issues, not reasons related purely to aesthetic education. The third question, “How might what Hmong do in their community inform music teacher preparation?” is discussed by looking at the data and related literature in order to project forward a model of music education that is informed by the democratic actions and spirit of Hmong community-based music making in St. Paul.

This chapter is organized to give readers a sense of who was involved in the study; how I collected, organized, and analyzed data; and what measures were taken to negotiate bias and account for limitations. Readers are introduced to the community of youth artists and me, the researcher, by describing our relationship to one another

centered on the topic of this study. I continue by sharing how I addressed ethical issues such as the use of pseudonyms for participants and the places in which they live and work. A description of the data collection process and the data itself is explicated in such a way that readers will know what kinds of interactions occurred between my participants and me while in the field. The data analysis process, bias negotiation, limitations, and finally a timeline of activities associated with the research is presented.

Before committing to an ethnographic design, I investigated the possibilities of case study and grounded theory designs. The former would have been appropriate to this study since its primary purpose is to “richly describe, explain, or assess and evaluate a phenomenon (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 549). Conducting a case study would have yielded valuable information about my participants. However, it might have restricted my document to positivist reporting without the benefit of considering participants’ voices, attitudes, and feelings. The latter, grounded theory, was interesting because of the iterative data collection and relationship analysis processes through which I might have derived a theory or expected outcome (Creswell, 1994, p. 12). Though the iterative back and forth, bottom-up and top-down, ongoing analysis is utilized by ethnographers (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 46), my research does not lend itself to an “expected outcome” (Creswell, 1994, p. 12) in that my participants are not going to display some kind of predetermined product or characteristic.



## Research Design: Ethnography

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) describe ethnography as “[an] analytical description of social scenes and groups that recreate for the reader the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of those people” (pp. 2-3). The impetus for this study came from two classes I took in Fall 2010: Music in Adolescence and Qualitative Research Methods. The former provided me with an interest in Hip-hop while the latter gave me several opportunities to work in the field. The themes of my research, as I later discovered during fieldwork, had their origins earlier in my life: My engagement with music from childhood to adulthood has been both expansive and restrictive. Teachers and friends have exposed me to an enormous amount of music during the span of my life beginning from kindergarten until the time of publication; yet somehow, the music to which I have been exposed is not inclusive of Asian musics, popular music, or informal music learning practices.

When I moved to the Twin Cities, I discovered over the course of three years that I have a great deal in common with the Hmong immigrant and refugee population since I, too, am of Southeast Asian, though Vietnamese, descent. My identity as a transracial adoptee adds another layer of complexity to my own story and how I relate to the Hmong people involved in this study.

Two important questions related to my own place in the Hmong community are, “Who am I?” and “Where are you *really* from” (Henry, 2010, p. 363). My research in the Hmong community is not meant to displace my Vietnamese birthright; rather, it is a way to identify with a part of myself that is separated from Asian culture in that I grew up in a

predominantly White community and had no opportunity to interact with other Asians. Identifying with my Hmong participants meant becoming an insider; this is fairly easy given my physical Asian features. However, I still consider myself an external-insider. Banks (2010) notes the typology of cross-cultural researchers. The external-insider is one who “was socialized within a different culture...[but] has come to adopt the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims within the studied community....The external-insider is viewed by the new community as an ‘adopted’ insider” (p. 46). The question that still remains for me, however, is whether I have truly adopted the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims of the St. Paul Hmong community as an external-insider?

There are two disclaimers that will show my ignorance and curiosities – my “external-ness” – regarding my research topic. First, I am just now learning what it means to be Asian, but I am not truly Asian. I was raised in central Pennsylvania in an all-White community. There were no Asians and certainly no “Asian-style” music was present, at least not to my knowledge. Second, I am not a rapper and did not grow up listening to rap. Hip-hop culture was foreign to me just like Asian culture. To combine the two in this study represents a strange and fortuitous alignment of my newfound interests that meld my academic and personal journeys into one study.

There are two areas in particular where I feel inadequately prepared to teach and learn music in a pluralistic society such as that of the United States. First is in the realm of Asian musics. As a child and young adult, I was not exposed to music of Asia. The second area where I lack experience, not exclusively related to Asian music, is in the area of this dissertation: Raps, lyrical songs, and spoken word poetry associated with Hip-hop

culture were neither part of my life at home nor during my formal musical training as a child, teenager, or pre-service teacher.

### **Researcher's Journey**

It must be clearly understood by readers that I do not intend to supplant the value and importance of formal music education. I respect my primary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate teachers for their excellent instruction and their ethic of care (Noddings, 1984, pp. 4-5) for me as a person and as a musician. My master's degree, one that I regard highly, is in wind conducting. I love bands, orchestras, and choirs and the repertoire and rehearsal/performance experiences that accompany those ensembles. However, in the years of my childhood and college I rarely had the opportunity to explore music informally; I did not know that this kind of music making was an option. Hence, I fully embraced my studies to become a music teacher by immersing myself in coursework and routines of college. I suppose my type-A and high-strung personality, as well as a strong classical music enculturation process were partially responsible for the way I delved into my studies of Western art music. Very rarely did I consider any musics aside from those taught in school. Simply stated, a wide variety of genre, style, and period were absent from my undergraduate and graduate music training.

Reflecting on my own informal music learning practices and my encounters with others' informal music making, it is somewhat embarrassing that I do not have many memories associated with creating my own music or performing popular songs. In the following stories, I remember my childhood, college, and career experiences as an

“informal” music maker. These recollections and perhaps the actual occurrences of informal music making diminished as I aged and experienced increasing amounts of formal music education first as a student and later as a middle and high school music teacher.

### **A Musical Childhood**

I loathed popular music when I was a child. After school, I would come home to Michael Jackson’s “Thriller,” my sister’s favorite song, blaring from her bedroom. She would sing the chorus loudly as if at a live concert. She was what I now call an informal music learner. Despite my efforts to avoid her kind of music making, three memories surface when I recall my own encounters with informal music learning.

One of my earliest remembrances places me in the Christmas tree-lit playroom of my childhood house with a miniature Casio keyboard working out a countermelody to “Good King Wenceslas” for which I was incredibly fond. I had heard it on a vinyl album or tape as an elementary school youngster and really wanted to play it on the piano. It took me quite a long time to perfect it since it was difficult to play by ear and technically challenging. If my memory is correct, I played the melody into my tape recorder and then attempted to perform the countermelody in time with the melody. It was a frustrating process. I do not know if I ever got it right.

Another memory is of marching band from my high school years, and this story emanates from band camp 1989 or 1990. I can still picture Jen, Matt, Wendy, Ashlee, and a gaggle of other teenage friends clumped around the camp dining hall piano singing the then-popular Bangles song “Eternal Flame.” The lyrics are, “Close your eyes, give me

your hand, darling, do you feel my heart beating ...” That moment, thinking as a now-scholar, was the epitome of informal music making – teenagers learning a song unaided by adults, fumbling with words and piano fingerings, struggling to sing in the right key or register – there was no teacher feedback, just laughter and joy.

My final childhood memory places me at a non-denominational Christian camp in the summer of 1993. I was a first-year counselor whose proclivity for the soprano recorder was perhaps annoying to campers and staff, but I did not care. I learned how to play the “childhood” instrument quite well that year. Joel, my program director approached me and asked if I knew the song “As a Deer.” Unfamiliar with contemporary Christian music, Joel tutored me so I could “pick up” the melody and play along with him as he accompanied me with his guitar. It was hard for me to play by ear, and I had no sense of intervallic relativity, and learning the melody of “As a Deer” took me a day or two. By the time summer camp ended, I was playing that tune along with other camp songs that I had learned by rote like a real pro.

I was reminded of each of these childhood experiences only by having encountered Hmong youth who use informal music learning practices in their daily and not-so-unusual lives. That is to say that Hmong youth musicians seem to think nothing of their song-writing skills as if they were born with the ability to make music informally as an innate, second-nature blessing. The ubiquitous ways in which they create and perform impresses me, and I wonder why I never had or recognized opportunities to make music on my own outside school. Perhaps I lived too comfortably in central Pennsylvania; I had no systems to defeat, no oppressors to confront, and no personal reasons for which to raise my voice. In my mind, I was in the majority – I was White.

## **Groomed for Music Education**

Immediately following summer camp, I departed home for Westminster College in rural New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. Popular music seldom intersected with professional preparation coursework at college. This is not a negative critique on the teachers or the curriculum, since I believe that my professors set me on a good trajectory toward musical and educational excellence. The music I learned in ensembles was considered standard repertoire for collegiate bands and choirs, as well as engaging for me to play or sing.

I was prepared to become a well-rounded music educator by taking the standard coursework associated with teacher preparation school such as music theory, history, and general education classes. The most exposure I had to popular music came to me in the form of marching band arrangements of tunes like Nicholas Ashford and Valerie Simpson's "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" and Bobby Scott and Bob Russell's "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother." In chamber choir, our group sang an arrangement of Billy Joel's "And So It Goes." These songs were not exactly current during my college years, so maybe my experiences with popular music were neither numerous nor informal. The only informal part might have been when I forgot the music and improvised my part hoping that no one noticed me grumbling errant bass lines.

Improvising due to forgetfulness is not a trait I would readily associate with Hmong youth artists. Their propensity for wordsmithing and "spitting" lyrics in the form of rap or poetry impresses me; I wish I had developed skills akin to theirs when I was younger. My version of "spitting" a rap, song, or poem is not nearly as profound as that

of the college-aged youth in this study, but it is worth mentioning how I laid claim to improvisatory music making as a college student.

I recall making music informally only twice in college during my junior year. The first time was at a late November football game when snow began to fall sometime after halftime. Bryan, Kelly, and I, all marching “bandees,” lamented that there were no Thanksgiving carols to sing. We simply improvised a song called “There’s a Turkey in the Air.” Our song had a chorus and multiple verses with an original melody set over a simple, repetitive harmonic structure (I-IV-V7-I). Later that year, Mu Phi Epsilon, the co-ed music fraternity on campus, hosted an evening of music for which my friend Garrick and I created a rap. I recall sitting in my dorm room brainstorming ideas, bouncing them off Garrick, and establishing a coherent set of lyrics with a primitive beat. It was incredibly difficult to replicate our rap, so we improvised what we could not remember. These two moments during my college years were quickly forgotten when I departed to take my first music teaching job.

### **Missed Opportunities**

I spent ten years teaching public school music after college graduation interspersed with graduate school and a year of volunteer work in Romania and New York State. During my first three years, I moved from place to place searching for the right job. In each school, informal music learning practices occurred around me. *I never had an interest to learn from the phenomenon*, because I had neither the skills nor the interest to make music without having it in print. At the time, my relationship to Western classical music as a “thing” that supported my agency (i.e., my personal identity) limited

the scope of my knowing. "... [M]usical interest is not formal but functional," notes Jorgensen (2003), "It serves primarily as a means of agency. It entertains, brings pleasure, constitutes a diversion, and accompanies ritual and dance" (p. 101). Today, I wish I had paid closer attention to the students' musical interests and relished in the musics that gave them freedom – agency. Following is an account of the student-led musical groups and their informal music making that occurred in schools where I have worked from 1997 to 2010. In each case, music makers were usually enrolled in a high school band, orchestra, choir, or some other teacher-led music ensemble (e.g., jazz band and handbell choir).

Rural Virginia was a difficult place to live and work as a first year music teacher, because I was confronted with a culture unlike the one from which I had come. African American students, many of them among the poorest in the community, outnumbered White students who came from predominantly middle-class families. Though not a correlate among class, color, or music preference, regardless of their backgrounds, the students did not love the music composed by Beethoven or Mozart. Ladson-Billings (2010) disagrees with my personal experience noting that there is a disjuncture between school music education and the musical habits of African Americans. She queries, "How can we sing our sacred song in a strange land?" and continues to note, "We hear your song. Here's our version" (keynote speech, Committee on Institutional Cooperation, October 22, 2010).

In my school, many of the students, particularly Black students, listened to a kind of rap I perceived inappropriate for its misogynistic, racist, and vulgar content. Gangsta rap was popularized by Music Television (MTV) in the late 80s and early 90s: "African-



American, Chicano, and Latino urban style [became] instantly accessible to millions of youths” and was reified under its “claim to street authenticity, its teen rebellion, its extension of urban stereotype, and its individualist ‘get mine’ credo” (Chang, 2005, p. 320). One of my White students referred to this music derogatorily as “boo ha,” a colloquial term for the music Black kids liked. Unfortunately, I failed to ask him if he was referring to the students who listened to gangsta rap or just the music.

I witnessed informal music making in two styles while teaching in Virginia: spontaneous, impromptu rapping and beat boxing by Black and White students; and Kevin’s Garage Band (KGB), a 90s covers band made up of three brothers and their friend Kevin. Both types of music making seemed incredibly natural. *I was not ready to learn from my students.* Their music was different than mine, and I had no inclination to become my students’ student when it came to learning about popular music – their music.

The following year I was offered a teaching position in a suburban school near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where my students primarily came from White, middle- and upper-class families. My students’ listening habits centered on the music they were performing in band, orchestra, jazz band, and choir. They rarely mentioned the popular music that permeated the radio waves of the late 1990s. As a passive observer who was busy readying the band room for rehearsal, I recall my jazz students’ pre-class activity of covering top 40 charts on their guitars, basses, keyboards, and drums. For the most part, however, music students in this school were more invested in Western classical art music than popular music.

Before attending Penn State for my master’s degree, I taught in a rural, northern Pennsylvania town not far from Elmira, New York, for three years. My students were

peripherally interested in classical music, and I perceived that they joined music for mainly social reasons; they were decent musicians and incredibly kind students who were dedicated to the bands, choirs, and handbell choirs. Of these students, some of them along with non-music department students participated in a covers and originals band called Gaping Maw. The students were what looked and sounded like modern-day hipsters. Academic stars, wholesome youth, and progressive thinkers, these skinny-jean wearing high schoolers played Indie rock, alternative, and popular music equally well. Their performances at homecoming dances and the prom delighted the audience with doses of live music to offset the DJ-spun tunes that usually dominate the high school dance scene; their renditions were very well prepared. I was aware of the “Maw’s” impact on the school, but again, I thought of the group as a social group. *Again, I did not consider what I might learn from them.*

The last public school teaching job I held was located in rural, but not out-of-the-way Northeastern Connecticut, just 25 minutes from Providence, Rhode Island. The demographic profile of the town was racially mixed. Band and choir students were primarily White and came from middle and upper class families. Students’ musical interests were varied: Some downloaded and listened to current ensemble repertoire on their iPods and MP3 players in order to “study” their music while others were more “typical” popular music devotees whose tastes gravitated toward Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber. These groups did not exhibit mutually exclusive listening habits. Though I was really just an outside observer of the popular music culture among my students, I paid attention so I could, at the very least, talk with my students about other musics aside from

classical repertoire. I think they liked that I possessed enough interest in “their” music to listen to it and bring my opinions to the table for their consideration and conversation.

While in Connecticut, my colleagues hosted two annual, but unrelated events that celebrated students’ musical interests. The first was Pops Night. Established in the early 1980s, it was an auditioned event organized by the school’s choir director, Pam. Pops Night was originally created with only her chorus students in mind to give them an opportunity to prepare and perform music of their “own choosing.” Eventually, Pops Night grew into an all-school event that provided students, not just choristers, with an opportunity to showcase their musical skills in a non-competitive “talent night” forum. The event was a huge success for more than 25 years. According to Pam:

Pops night was a big success largely because the content was current original humor by our emcees and also because students were pressed to prepare something entirely on their own. The fact that the show didn’t feature any competition between acts allowed students to support each other in their individual endeavors. It was open to all ... students partly as a recruitment tool for the music department, but also to allow students to express themselves in a performance venue on music of their own choosing. (personal communication, September 17, 2012)

Baggy Plaid Night was the second event. Martha, the school’s family and consumer science teacher and Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) advisor, and her GSA students organized it. Baggy Plaid’s popularity stemmed from the manner in which it invited students and families from many communities, not just the local school, to come “together through music and diversify across backgrounds” (Martha, personal

communication, September 19, 2012). Students who occupied the margins of the school's social fabric (e.g., emo, Gothic) were the principle performers and attendees. Each year Baggy Plaid received more support than the preceding year from students, faculty, administrators, and community members alike. Martha expressed that at the core of Baggy Plaid was the sense of pride and identity that the participants claimed around the GSA concert event.

Each event above is a testament to the informal music education to which I was privy throughout my life. *As I got older, I became less involved in and eventually stopped paying attention to informal musical practices.* The lessons that I could have learned from my students and colleagues were lost to me, and I may have missed out on some important lessons that would have helped me as I entered the Hmong arts community as a doctoral student.

Disjointed and sparsely peppered throughout my life, memories around informal music making surfaced not because *I* called them into play, but because my doctoral coursework and my Hmong research participants required these recollections to come forward. I uncovered a kind of passive negligence to care for the inner music maker who I might have been in my younger life. Today, I feel jealousy toward anyone who can easily “spit” a rap, play music by ear, sing with a pop-style voice, or perform in public easily any music that has the potential to say something about social well being, political status, or self identity.

This, in turn, prepared me to ask, “What motivates my participants to make music so passionately about their lives?” The informally created music that I heard performed in the Hmong community was purpose-filled; it was music that allowed youth to speak their

minds, to really say something of value about their situations. Their intensely vivid music made me think that my own encounters with informal music making as noted above were somewhat banal, without personal, social, or political purpose. From my Hmong participants, I learned that, in order for me to drive music education into an emancipatory space where students and teachers give voice to critical issues, I have to participate in a *personal journey* to sing, rap, and speak about me first. I wish I had had the courage to step up to the mic to say something when I was younger. Silence no more – I speak.

## **Research Community**

### **Lay of the Land**

St. Paul, the capital of Minnesota, is located on the eastern edge of the state along the central western border of Wisconsin. According to the 2010 census figures, its population is 285,068. Hmong people constitute ten percent of the total numbering 28,591 ([www.factfinder2.census.gov](http://www.factfinder2.census.gov)). This large number of Hmong in one city alone has resulted in many Hmong-owned and operated businesses, including non-profit cultural organizations, which aim to serve this ethnic population.

The primary locations where my research was conducted included downtown St. Paul, East St. Paul, Frogtown (west side of the city), and the central corridor along University Avenue that connects the state's capitol building on the eastern end to the University of Minnesota on the west. I conducted fieldwork in places like Hmong Village in East St. Paul, Hmong Town Market in Frogtown, and Hmong American Partnership in

St. Paul (see Figure 2 below). Fieldwork consisted of interviews, focus groups, and observations (both participant and bystander).

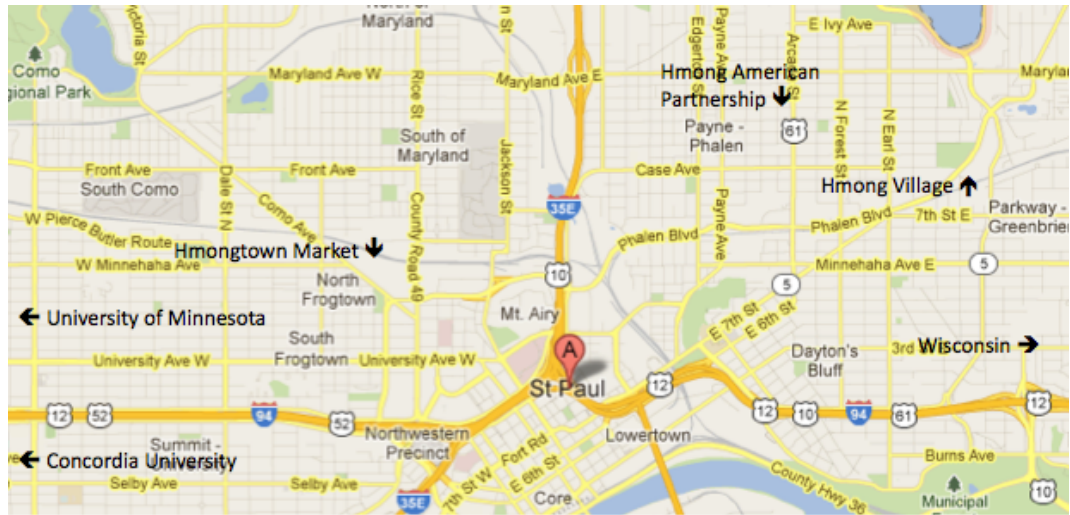


Figure 2: Research Locations, St. Paul, MN (maps.google.com) with labels added by the author to identify areas associated with the research study

## Music Community

In this dissertation, I focus my attention on the music that addresses issues of social justice, music that embodies a critical message about the people, places, and identities that are important to my participants. It would be unfair to say that all Hmong youth create music for politically and socially active purposes. Some create music that is not centered on issues of social justice. The variety of topics about which they sing or play includes love and relationships, heritage and folklore, popular songs, covers, comedy, and social justice. In addition to these different topics, they perform by using different media such as guitar, piano, computers, keyboards, and microphones. Some youth, though none of my participants, perform on traditional instruments such as the

*qeej*, the ceremonial mouth or reed organ. Tou SaiK, occasionally performs by speaking/rapping using traditional *kwv txhiaj* (sung poetry) as in the case of Fresh Traditions, the duo in which he and his grandmother perform together. Though my participants make and use music as a means to social and political ends, not all of their friends agree with this ideal.

Erin (pseudonym), an undergraduate elementary education major who attends a college in the Twin Cities, just wants to make music that does not have a political message. She thinks that music stops being music when it implies (overtly or not) a political message. During an organizational meeting, Erin expressed that there need to be spaces for traditional and non-political music (e.g., folklore) in the Twin Cities. This is an important opinion and one that I support from a wind band conductor's point of view. I wholly agree that music can be and often is performed for the sake of making and enjoying music. It is not within the scope of this dissertation, however, to delve into an in depth conversation about the beauty of traditional art music forms performed within the Hmong youth arts community.

## **Participants**

Culture is important to ethnographic research, because to anthropologists in particular, it has served as the framework for their work (Bogdan & Biklen, 2010, p. 37). McDermott (1976) describes the relationship between ethnography and the events observed within a culture this way: "At its best, an ethnography should account for behavior of people by describing what it is that they know that enables them to behave appropriately given the dictates of common sense in their community" (p. 159). The

Hmong community in St. Paul provides a rich context in which to study youth culture and their music making that ultimately invites expression among individuals and groups. The complexity arises in that youth artists do not simply identify themselves as “just rappers” or “just lyrical singers.” They oftentimes participate in more than one activity (e.g., rap, lyrical song, and poetry) within the larger Hmong youth arts culture domain.

Youth leaders and peers alike encourage each other to be rappers, lyrical singers, spoken word poets, masters of ceremony (MCs), disc jockeys (DJs), and break dancers (b-boys and b-girls) where the combined personages are greater than any one identity. This resonates with Paräkylä (2008) who states, “[p]eople are usually referred to by using categories” (p. 356) and they refer to themselves using “alternative categories” (p. 356) such as rapper or dancer. The membership categorization by participants (Sacks, 1974, 1992) allows participants to talk about themselves in particular ways. Though specific labels do not prevent my participants from entering monologues about themselves in multiple ways, the hat(s) they wear at any given moment informs their perspective and how they tell their stories to me.

Tou SaiKo Lee was my primary participant. He introduced me to potential participants who, in turn, organized additional meetings so that they could learn about me and my research and also for me, their new associate, to become acquainted with the Hmong youth arts movement and its key players. These players included seven youth and two additional youth arts leader. Youth participants were selected using a snowball sampling procedure; this process allowed me to connect to people logically associated with Tou SaiK. The downside of this sampling procedure is that other viewpoints and opinions are missed along the way. This procedure is discussed later in this chapter.



I discovered Tou SaiK via a YouTube video produced by Justin Schell and distributed by State of the Re:Union (Letson, 2010). Tou SaiK, a nationally known Hip-hop artist and community organizer who is well-respected and well-known for his Hmong Hip-hop (Schell, 2008), moved to the Twin Cities in 1990 and is now in his early thirties. He has worked with Hmong youth in St. Paul, Minnesota, for about ten years. As a leader, both mentor and colleague to his youth artists, Tou SaiK provides young people with arts educational activities to help them navigate issues particular to teens and young adults. He encourages artists to create music (rap, song, poetry), multimedia productions, and other kinds of art to express themselves. Following an initial, structured interview in November 2010, Tou SaiK invited me to attend events of the Hmong arts community.

As an indigenous insider (Banks, 2010, p. 46), Tou SaiK was needed in order for me to gain access to the youth artists. As gatekeeper, he provided me with access to his musical friends in St. Paul's Hmong community. At the time of this study, youth artists in this study were college-aged but not necessarily college attendees; their ages ranged from 18 to 24. Participants who attend post-secondary institutions were enrolled at a college or university in Minneapolis or St. Paul, Minnesota. Some attended a large research university and others attended smaller liberal arts, state, or two-year colleges. In the case of one youth participant, he/she left college to work for a non-profit organization in Minneapolis. Participants engage in various kinds of musical activities including rap, lyrical song, or spoken word poetry; and some also participate in break-dance, MC, or DJ activities. Oftentimes, participants do not view their diverse activities as mutually exclusive skills. All youth participants attended high school in the Twin Cities and have a

developed sense of empowerment through the youth arts movement inspired by Hmong youth arts leaders such as Tou SaiK, influential school teachers, or college professors.

During this research study in which I visited the community on 27 separate occasions, I met many people associated with Tou SaiKo Lee. Some contributors, like Dyane or Erin (pseudonym), were not formal participants, but rather attended events and meetings where Tou was present as a leader or audience member. These non-participants and I often talked before or after events and included Tou SaiK's former students, friends, teachers, and colleagues. Though I did not include them in interviews or focus groups, their contributions to the study are invaluable and provide additional context in and around this investigation. For all non-participants, permission was sought to use statements that would perhaps be useful to this report. Another kind of participant includes the people who were not originally part of my sample of musicians; however, their opinion is worth noting, such as in the case of Fres.

Fres, a Hmong youth arts leader who was born in Chicago in 1980, moved from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to the Twin Cities three years ago to work at the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (CHAT) as the youth leadership program coordinator. His involvement at this prominent Hmong-operated non-profit organization was more formal than his previous work in Wisconsin where he had worked with youth, but not in this capacity. Fres's experience seemed to me to be operationally organized in a way that was different from Tou SaiK's grassroots efforts in the same community. Whereas Tou SaiK appeared to be free to experiment and try many new ideas at will, I sensed that Fres's work was established with a more traditional business model that maintained a consistent clientele of 12-18 year old students, met on a regular schedule, and procured steady arts

funding.<sup>1</sup> If Fres had become my primary participant, I think that my sample of youth artists and the story told here would have been somewhat, but not totally different.

The relationship among participants is shown in the artist connection below (see Figure 3). The technique that was utilized to identify participants is called a snowball or nominated sample, one “in which participants already in the study recommend other persons to be invited to participate” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 221).

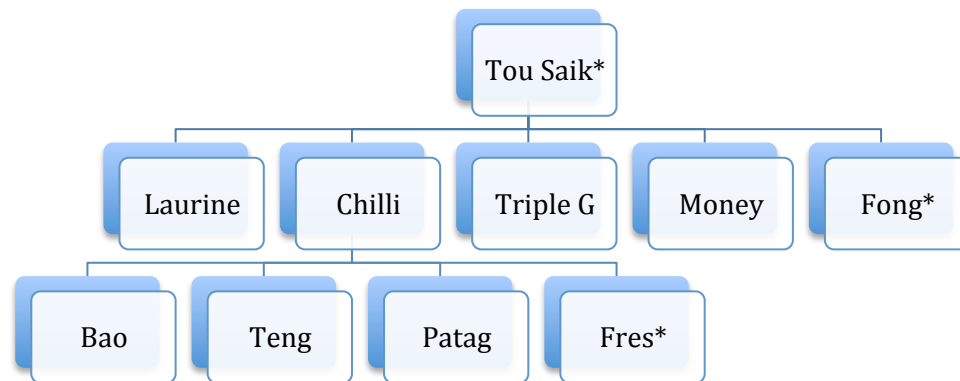


Figure 3: Artist Connection (\* indicates youth arts leader)

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<sup>1</sup> In Spring 2012, the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (CHAT) lost much of its funding. As a result, Fres was laid off. CHAT regained some financial traction in late Summer 2012. Fres did not return and is (at time of publication) working on an independent venture to develop a record label that will assist 18-30 year olds build sustainable livelihoods as working musicians. When I called CHAT in November 2012 to ascertain some information, Fres answered the phone. He was re-employed as program director because a new funding stream became available to CHAT.

## Ethical Considerations

In the following section, I describe how I worked to safeguard participants from misrepresentation and “do no harm” during my research process. Since I was reliant on observations, interviews, and focus groups for the main method of data collection, I provided participants with opportunities to review and edit notes, transcripts, as well as this document as a member check, and even disengage from the study. No one chose to separate him or herself from the study. Participants were given opportunities to select pseudonyms for themselves in order to protect their identity. Institutional Review Board policies governing human research is also discussed.

My first concern was whether or not to disguise the identities of my participants. When I wrote my first papers for qualitative research class, I used first initials to identify my participants. Tou SaiK became “T” and Chilli became “C.” As a researcher of people of color, the Hmong, I felt that I somehow silenced my participants by not using their names, or at least real pseudonyms like Tom and Charlotte. Were not the Hmong, a minority ethnic group, already silenced as reported in the court cases of Fong Lee and Chai Vang? Glense (2011) writes, “To protect the anonymity of research participants, researchers use fictitious names and sometimes change descriptive characteristics such as age or hair color” (pp. 172-173). Participants may also choose to decline anonymity (pp. 172-173), as in the case of this study. No primary participants refused to have their names changed for the sake of anonymity.

In their essay *Unraveling Ethics*, Halse and Honey (2010) relate, “Research ethics policy positions research participants as the ‘object’ of the research and assumes that

these ‘subjects’ form an identifiable, knowable constituency whose members share particular characteristics that distinguish them from others” (p. 125). Somehow, relegating my participants to the status of objects or subjects seemed incomprehensible, another silence bestowed upon Hmong people by yet another researcher. Defining my research population in a way that is devoid of the individuals who collectively comprise the Hmong youth arts community is considered by some to ignore “the plurality of modes of being human, and differences among humans” (Benhabib, 1987, p. 81). This erasure of individual’s names, hence, runs the risk of “disregard[ing] one of the four fundamental principles of humanist research ethics policy – respect for persons” (Halse & Honey, 2010, p. 133).

“To name” is the first tenet of critical pedagogy (Wink, 2010). This applies to people in the same way it applies to the issues that affect my participants and their arts. As I took into consideration the voice of my participants, I simply asked this question in conversation, “What do you want to be called in my dissertation?” All participants indicated that they wanted their own names to be used either in their legal forms (first and last names) or their stage names, which, incidentally, are neither considered secret nor pseudonymous for their real identities. In most cases, stage names (e.g., Chilli or Triple G) are more recognizable than the artists’ given names. Occasionally, I refer to comments or quotes made by people who attended meetings or presented music at concerts but were not participants in my study; in those instances, I sought permission to use their real or pseudonymous names and their words.

In terms of the geographical location, it was important to include the actual name of the city as opposed to “a large metropolitan region in the upper Midwest.” That

seemed simultaneously ambiguous and obvious since this dissertation was completed at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. It is not a secret that more than 60,000 Hmong live in Minnesota and that nearly half of that population lives in St. Paul alone.

Clearance, or class protocol, to conduct research for the first two semesters of doctoral study was obtained by the professor, and my preliminary study of Hmong youth arts culture was included under the same class protocol (IRB #1008S87695). For my preliminary study that continued into my third semester of doctoral coursework, the professor obtained a class protocol for students to conduct research during her course, Critical Pedagogy and International Education (IRB #1108S03789) (see Appendix A). I took the fourth semester away from working in the field to focus on my preliminary examinations and oral examination. In June 2012, my personal IRB approval was obtained for primary research (IRB #1205E15033) (see Appendix B).

When I entered the field, I always carried consent forms. Interview and focus group participants were asked if they would be willing to take part in a 45-minute (maximum) interview or one-hour focus group. Risks, benefits, and confidentiality, as well as the voluntary nature of the study were explained. In the case of non-interviewees, those who were observed in public meetings, people were asked if photographs, audio, or video recordings could be taken during portions of those events.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection procedures included four informal interviews conducted early in the study, six formal interviews, two focus groups with participant artists, 24 formal

observations, as well as attendance at multiple meals and informal get-togethers. As noted by Fontana and Frey (2008), “[i]t is hoped that in a structured interview, nothing is left to chance” (p. 125), but participants and I realized during the interviews, that more details worth investigation emerged. These authors note that semi-structured and open interviews, both of which are variant forms of unstructured interviews provided “greater breadth than [did] the other types [structured interviews] given [the] qualitative nature” of the study (p. 129). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were employed to allow for both a short list of standard questions as well as allowances for emergent discussions to occur since I did not know the vast range of discussion topics prior to this research including concerns about police brutality, family, school, and traditions. All the structured and semi-structured interviews included open questioning at the end of sessions based on participants’ answers to interview protocols. Only one interview session with Chilli was explicitly an open conversation discussion that was useful as a follow-up interview following the focus group in which she participated, as well as organized voluntarily. I intended to record more interviews, but the opportunity was not always possible due to timing, sensitive topics, or participants’ feelings about being interviewed.

Focus groups were helpful, because they encouraged discussion around particular issues raised by youth artist participants Chilli, Bao, Teng, Triple G, Laurine, and Patag. According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2008), “focus groups are collective conversations or group interviews...[they] offer unique insights into the possibilities of or for critical inquiry as a deliberative, dialogic, and democratic practice...” (pp. 375-376). During the first focus group, six Hmong artists named above gathered at an arts production studio in downtown St. Paul’s Lowertown artist quarter. Each participant

introduced him/herself and answered questions from a short set of structured questions (see Appendix C). After the first half hour, the focus group became dynamic and conversational about items not on the list of questions, providing a varied assortment of discussion topics.

Text messages and email correspondence; telephone conversation notes; interview and focus group recordings and field notes; observation field notes and reflective notes; and artifacts (e.g., newspapers and CD recordings of Hmong rap, lyrical songs, and spoken word poetry) were also collected.

### **Snapshot: Meeting My Primary Participant**

November 4, 2010: I met Tou SaiKo Lee for the first time. We talked for three hours at Saigon (not the city), a restaurant on University Avenue, about six miles from the University of Minnesota's School of Music. After ordering food, we immersed ourselves in a long conversation. I presented my research questions, and we began talking about youth arts culture in the Hmong community. Tou SaiK told me about youth organizations, non-profits, and their limitations due to funding sources. He indicated that the youth organizations in St. Paul are not about to be politically active or even socially active since most non-profits are primarily educative in nature. Tou SaiK agreed that the education part was good (e.g., anti-drugs and anti-violence), but youth can do more than that (field note 1, November 4, 2010).

We eventually talked about his music and media productions. After leaving CHAT where he was once employed, Tou SaiK began working as a mentor to youth at In Progress Studios in St. Paul where he helps young artists integrate their visual and



performing arts using technology. When I asked Tou SaiKo about his music, he shared that what it has allowed his students to do is express themselves (field note 1, November 4, 2010).

## Observations

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note that “[p]articipant observation provides the opportunity for acquiring the status of ‘trusted person’” (p. 39). It was important that I attended as many events as possible to gain access to the community and show that I was serious about working in the Hmong community to discover why they employ informal music learning practices. Sometimes I was a bystander and at other times a participant-observer. In the former case, I simply watched from the side of the room or in the case of concert-type performances, from within the audience area. In the latter, I was invited ahead of time or during the event to participate along with youth artists as a contributor.

### Vignette: MetroTransit and Me

*MetroTransit has made me really mad lately; the result is a real disdain for mass transit and the Midwest in general. I was really cursing the whole way home.*

T.K. Vu, March 19, 2011

Data collection can be affected by the researcher’s personal mood. The Twin Cities’ MetroTransit busses provided my main mode of transportation to and from my research sites in St. Paul. Often, I was angered by the infrequency of busses, as well as riders who smelled bad, talked too loudly, or exhibited crude behavior. Based on my reflective notes about MetroTransit that appear throughout the data set, I apparently allowed the iniquities of public transportation to bother me. Tou SaiK, however, alleviated some of the stress by offering me rides home after most events.

I always communicated with participants prior to events about attending concerts, workshops, festivals, etc. In many cases, invitations to attend arts events were extended via telephone, email, text message, or Facebook. On occasion, I would arrive at an arts event unrelated to my study and find that one or more of my participants were either in attendance or a performer; therefore, I took field notes during the event and reflected afterward in order to add material to my data set.

Because an observer must always “analyze his or her observations for meaning and for evidence of personal bias” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 39), I was careful to understand my role during each observation whether it was an organizational meeting of youth leaders or a public performance. The most difficult part of monitoring for bias during Hmong events was separating my own experiences as a teacher who is used to organizing meetings, classes, and concerts from that of the organizational strategies of my participants. Reflective remarks were used in my field notes, particularly during preliminary observations, to help me “sort through” my feelings. Miles and Huberman (1994) comment on reflective remarks stating that they can “add substantial meaning to the write-up” (p. 66). Marginal remarks, like reflective ones, help researchers record their “ideas and reactions to the meaning of what [they] are seeing ...” (p. 67).

## **Interviews**

Interviews occurred from November 2010 to November 2012, and they took place at restaurants, coffee shops, and university/college commons areas. Each interview ranged from 15 to 45 minutes in length. Among the first interviewees were Tou SaiK and Chilli, followed by Laurine, Triple G, and Fres. Interview questions for preliminary

research served to pilot potential questions and were intended to glean information about the artists, their work, and the community organizing in which they are involved in St. Paul (Glesne, 2011, pp. 56-57). Interviews that occurred from June 2012 were mainly focused on informal musical learning practices and how those practices intersect with community organizing activities and social justice. Seven questions by Lucy Green (2002, pp. 12-13) were utilized as a starting point for semi-structured individual interviews and are printed in Appendix D.

Transcripts were typed following each interview and sent electronically to each participant for his/her feedback for a member check. Creswell and Miller (2000) notes that member checking is a process by which the “validity procedure shifts from the researchers to participants in the study” and allows participants an opportunity to “confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account” (p. 127). Participants were given an indefinite period of time to reply with additions, deletions, or modifications to their interview transcripts. Only Fres replied to a member check indicating that his transcript was fine. I informally compared transcripts and found emergent themes that were common among interviewees’ responses. The aggregated data when formally analyzed (compared and contrasted) corroborated my initial hunch that Hip-hop music teaching and learning in the Hmong community was not merely music making for the sake of music; it was meant for other purposes.

### **Focus Groups**

I conducted two focus groups to investigate participants’ stories around informal music learning practices. The first group interview was structured in order to provide a

glimpse of the broader arts community (i.e., music, dance, MC-ing) while in the second I was more concerned with peer music learning strategies. Glesne (2011) indicates that focus groups

help you learn about aspects of the research site – language, norms, customs, in addition to helping you figure out overall research questions, participant selection and data collection strategies, and, perhaps, ways in which the research can better involve and contribute to the community or group being researched. (p. 131)

The first focus group of six youth artists took place at In Progress Studios in May 2011; it was organized by Chilli who suggested during a January 2011 meeting that she could host a focus group. During this session, I intended to learn about the kinds of art created by the Hmong youth arts community and included rappers, singers, poets, dancers, as well as MCs and DJs. The participants, Chilli, Teng, Laurine, Triple G, Teng, Bao, and Patag, claimed to participate in multiple arts such as rap *and* poetry or MC-ing *and* dancing.

I utilized a second focus group at Black Dog Café in September 2012, to investigate how Chilli learned *30 Year Secret*, one of her favorite tunes by Tou SaiK and his group Delicious Venom. This particular meeting provided information directly related to teaching and learning in informal ways, as well as addressed critical issues of belonging, identity, and heritage. All were recorded and transcribed. Again, transcriptions were sent back to participants for their feedback, including additions, deletions, or modifications to their statements. Like the interviews, no participant provided any edits to the text; verbal approval of transcripts was obtained.

## **Artifacts**

Collection of secondary materials such as newspapers, CD recordings, photographs, videos, and online resources provided a way to contextualize my own learning about the Hmong arts community. Though most of the information contained in the artifacts was general, some, especially audio and video recordings provided background about artists' performance styles. A sample of artifacts is provided in Appendix E.

**Print documents.** Ethnographers use documents collected in the field to help “recognize the formal properties of talk, the codes of cultural representation, the semiotic structures of visual materials, or the common properties of narratives and documents of life” (Atkinson & Delamont, 2008, p. 289). Ignoring print documents, for instance, would seem counter to holistic analysis thereby “*preserving* those forms that are indigenous to the culture in question rather than collapsing them into an undifferentiated plenum” (p. 289). I gathered artifacts produced by my participants, newspapers like Hmong Times (printed in English language), business cards, and events posters. Each of these items tells a part of the Hmong story in St. Paul by providing a description of settings – time, place, and context – that enriches the story for both the research and readers by contributing to my dissertation either as a supporting element or as a primary piece of information that is useful to my thesis. The print documents were helpful, because they helped me learn about the musicians and the community in which they live. The artifacts also showed how Hmong youth have spun a narrative tale of local people working for local good.

**Audio recordings.** There are three kinds of audio recordings: interviews/focus groups, compact discs, and radio broadcasts. Interviews and focus groups were recorded

during preliminary and primary data collection and later transcribed for coding purposes. Other recordings include Hmong-produced albums such as Tou SaiK's compilation CD *Blackbird Elements* that features youth musicians, the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent's (CHAT) compilation CD *The Best of CHAT Radio: Vagabond Sounds* (Volume 1), and Fres Thao's latest album *Mind Full Of*. CDs such as these, particularly *Blackbird Elements*, serve as good examples of music produced by Hmong youth who, in their own ways, demonstrate critical pedagogies: to name, critically reflect, and act. The process of developing a compilation CD contributes to my argument that Hmong youth create music in critically imperative ways to sound off about issues that affect them (e.g., freedom of speech and gang violence).

Two radio broadcasts were downloaded to my iTunes playlist from archived websites. My purposes for using these secondary sources, were to learn more about Hmong in Minnesota. In Mary Stucky's report for a Minnesota Public Radio broadcast on April 2, 2004, she discusses the impact of a recent immigration wave of Hmong people and the impact that would have on the city of St. Paul. The other archival broadcast, a satire on Hmong people, was aired on Minneapolis radio station KDWB on March 30, 2011. When it was broadcasted, the Steve-O parody promulgated a palpable backlash from the Hmong community, as well as others who were outraged by the stereotypical content. Hmong youth, as part of their response, created poems to decry the station's decision to air inappropriate, racist content on its morning show. The second recording described above contributes to my argument that Hmong youth use their music to speak on atrocities committed against them in public spheres.

**Photographs and videos.** I took photographs and videos at public events. Since the places were new and sometimes strange to me, these artifacts helped me to recall settings and actions while conducting fieldwork. Examples of photographs include interview sites, performance venues, neighborhoods, participants, and even Hmong food. Videos were taken of participants or other performers during public events such as concerts, open mics, and youth workshops. Harper (2008) gives credence to this kind of collection: “cultural studies generally use images as a referent for the development of theory” (p. 186). Yet one must be careful when interpreting this kind of data, since “[t]he video document shows only an artist at work; he appears confident and self-assured. There is not the slightest indication of the anguished fretting internal dialogue” (de Cosson, 2004, p. 147).

**Social media.** Millennials, also known as digital natives, are a generation of people who have grown up in an age of media technology. Their use of computers, software, and websites like Facebook and YouTube is ubiquitous. According to Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010), youth ages 8 to 18 use media more than seven hours per day (p. 2). Connecting via the web is easier than ever before and with more families owning computers with household Internet access, connecting with people across town or across the globe is both convenient and fun. Because my participants connect to the web so frequently, like participants in Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts’s study, it was useful to refer to videos from Facebook and YouTube posts, photos, and video links as part of my data. Facebook was necessary to stay connected to some of my participants, because it served as their favorite mode of communication.

Social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube, have provided an excellent way for Hmong youth to community organize and share ideas. Performances, festivals, as well as social justice efforts are disbursed via social media sites. There is a somewhat new strand of research emerging on social media. Mazman and Usluel (2010) reported that adoption of Facebook and its use for educational purposes are related. Adoption (one of three latent variables including purpose and educational use) among users (N=606) was based heavily on usefulness of the social media site rated very high. In terms of Facebook's usefulness as an educational tool, three observed variables emerged: communication, collaborations, and resources/materials.

YouTube, often linked by users to their Facebook accounts, is one source with incredible potential to broaden intellectual and artistic knowing: One can connect in a matter of seconds to listen to music, watch videos, attend lectures, *and* make contributions to massive conversations in a matter of seconds by “respond[ing] to this video” capabilities offered by YouTube. An area of minor interest specific to my research centers on YouTube and how it is used by youth as a way to learn music. One of my participants noted that she learns songs on the Internet by watching and listening to videos of her favorite musicians on YouTube. As a personal example, I learned one of Tou SaiK's songs, *30 Year Secret*, by using a YouTube video uploaded by some of his fans who added lyrics and pictures. One negative aspect of using these forms of data is their temporary lifespan on the Internet. Some videos or links to videos may not work, because the videos may be flawed or disrupted by Internet services or the owners have taken down the videos.



## **Analysis of Data**

Research was conducted from November 2010 to November 2012 and included interview, focus group, and observational field notes. The data organization process began immediately by creating both hardcopy and computer files for interviews and field notes. At first, I kept participants' identifying information and the data in separate locations; however, when participants agreed that their real or stage names should be used throughout this dissertation, I collated names with data. All electronic data including audio/visual files, typed field notes, interview and focus group transcripts were stored and backed up on a MacBook Pro hard drive, audio writable compact discs, and Seagate 2TB external drive. Software employed included Microsoft Word, ExpressScribe, and HyperRESEARCH. Electronic equipment was set with passwords.

### **Within-Case Content Analysis**

Data were coded and analyzed using HyperRESEARCH. Preliminary codes emerged early in the study. These codes formed the basis for a provisional start list of patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58) that appeared to “hold” for the duration of the study. Codes were added and deleted as the study developed through November 2012. As part of building trust and respect, emergent themes were discussed and edited with the assistance of my participants.

As I delved into the data, my initial research questions needed to shift to reflect what was happening in the field. The first and third questions remained the same: (a) In what kinds of musical activities do youth participate and how do they teach and learn their arts? and

(c) How might what Hmong do in their community inform music teacher preparation?

The second question shifted from “What do Hmong youth artists tell music educators?”

to “For what purpose do Hmong youths create their arts?”

### **Cross-Case Content Analysis**

Cross-case content analysis was utilized (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 173); it was an iterative, back and forth way to compare individuals’ within case characteristics with other role partners’ characteristics as a way to deepen my understanding of the community of Hmong musicians. Inscription, “mental notes prior to writing things down,” was used in order to informally organize major themes (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 13). Recurrent themes include Hmong cultural events, arts education, police brutality, Hmong history, and to a lesser extent, but woven throughout discussion were Hip-hop cultural signifiers (e.g., dress code, handshakes, hugs, greetings).

Constant comparison among each datum is imperative. As events occurred in the Hmong community, I exercised caution in documenting events to ensure that each was preserved for future reference. To answer questions that have deductive origins as well as those that have inductive ones, the process needed to be reflexive. Observing the data from top down and gathering it from bottom up contributed to a working understanding of how music education activities in community settings functions organically. Keeping an eye on the changing nature of the data throughout, that is, longitudinally, helped to attain verisimilitude within this document.

## **Negotiating Bias**

I spent the first several months of the study checking for personal bias. For instance, events such as open mic nights or meetings rarely started at their appointed times. I realized after several observations that in order to host an event that is welcoming to performers and populated by audience members, strict adherence to printed event times was infeasible. Music teachers like me, however, perceive time management as a form of responsibility to our students and the tenets of a quality school music program. Hence, teachers model for students that maintaining a schedule is somehow directly correlated to becoming or being a good musician or productive citizen. As a researcher in “their” community, I needed to reconsider my expectations for the research setting.

As a participant-observer, my work is deeply rooted in the events that take place in the research setting. The inherent dangers of participant-observation, however, include but are not limited to biased collection and reporting due to continuous close proximity to participants; and modified or altered results due to my presence in the research setting. One problem with my presence at events is that I had the power to change the dynamic of the moment whether I consciously intended to make a difference or not. Miles and Huberman (1994) warn that the researcher may “create social behavior in others that would not have occurred ordinarily” (p. 265). Establishment of close relationships with participants, indeed, may enhance a study while simultaneously prohibiting the researcher from making important discoveries that would otherwise prove useful to the generation of an excellent report. In turn, an inferior report that ignores those same details, in fact, will not benefit the people for which the study is intended to serve to the same degree of success.

James A. Banks (2010) describes the typology of cross-cultural researchers. Aside from being a participant-observer, I am also an external-insider, one who comes from outside the research setting but is “adopted” as an insider by the people in the Hmong community (p. 46). My perspective within and outside the community is new; fresh eyes are always scanning the landscape (research-scape) for details. In the process of *becoming* an insider through my participant-observation, however, I risk losing long-range sight of my research questions.

Through the process of becoming an insider, my experience is one where minutia, the smallest details become prevalent. Minutia is inflected and reflected in data collection, analysis, and synthesis yielding massive amounts of otherwise useless materials that do not necessarily address my primary research questions. Establishing boundaries on the research is paramount. “Bounding the territory” helps to establish limitations by defining setting(s), concepts, and sampling that are most useful to a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25).

Solutions that address research problems are easily achieved through validity checks. Internal validity establishes whether or not “truthiness” is evident. External validity aids generalizability of the study; however, this in itself may be untenable, even questionable, in qualitative research.

### **Internal Validity**

Validity is a matter of choosing among competing explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279). In the case of this project, there is less competition among my principle participant Tou SaiK, vested others, and significant events; corroboration

occurred. The truth-value appears to be high between my informant's self-telling of his life work and the subsequent events that have occurred since the first interview. Subsequent events include planning meetings, coffee talks, and concerts. Attending these events opened the door to meeting my informant's friends, family members, and business/arts partners who verify what Tou SaiK shared in our interviews and conversations. I believe that the actions I observe in the Hmong community are authentic.

Two verification procedures helped guide my research process as I sought verisimilitude in the study: member checks and inter-rater procedures. I briefly discuss the two methods below.

Following interviews and focus groups, I transcribed the notes and sent them to participants electronically for feedback. Member checks such as this helped to confirm the text and allow the participant to make any changes. This is an important part of telling the truth and leaning to a fair representation in my written document about Hmong youth arts culture.

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 264) note that operating alone without any instruments aside from myself and my own power of observation is dangerous. Inter-rater procedures require setting up a type of checks and balance system for confirming data. "Is what I am observing true?" "Do these events make sense?" "Have I exercised good caution when describing, interpreting, theorizing, and evaluating my participants' actions?" These questions can be addressed effectively when other researchers and outside readers are involved in reviewing data sets and discussing them with me.

An inter-rater reliability exercise, or as Grbich (2007) calls it *inter-coder* reliability, was conducted to ensure the "reliability of [the] findings" (p. 120). An

independent reviewer and I separately coded three interview transcripts for salient themes. The reviewer is an experienced qualitative researcher in the field of educational studies at a local college. We compared notes by searching for similarities and differences between our independently coded segments of the transcripts. Focus was placed on problematizing discrepancies to determine why they were so. The differences in codes opened a space for free dialogue to re-imagine how all codes might be organized for the final analysis.

For example, I coded “education” as a major theme whereas my coding partner weaved it throughout other themes. Considering the various kinds of occurrences of informal and formal “education” in community and school indicated by interviewees, we coders imagined education as both an overarching theme as well as one that could fit inside other themes (see Figure 4). After a closer look at specific incidences of education (formal and informal), the subtext led us to believe that education is a sub-theme of “purpose for art forms” and also “broadening cultural norms” (see Figure 5).

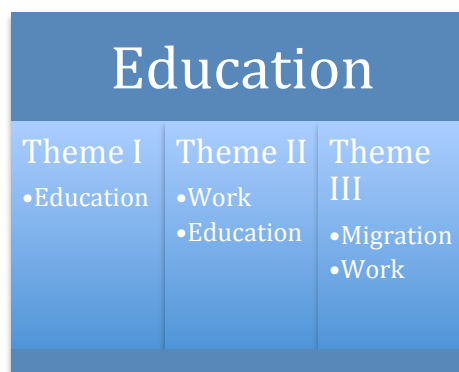


Figure 4: Initial Organization of Code “Education”

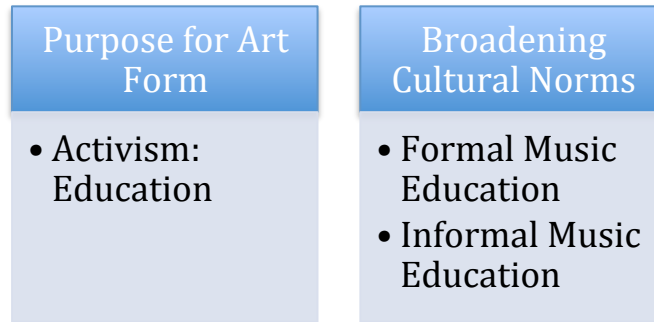


Figure 5: Final Organization of Code “Education” (simplified example)

The importance of having different kinds of measurement tools ensures that the researcher’s work is trustworthy, that is to say “plausible and credible” (Glesne, 2011, p. 49). I employed interviews with my primary participant and his role partners; conducted focus group interviews with his co-workers and youth participants; and attended performances, meetings, and other cultural events in order to “get at the findings” to arrive at verisimilitude. I also kept detailed marginal and reflective notes, as well as analytical memos based on supporting evidence found during this study.

**Representation (external validity)**

Maxwell (1992) notes that generalizability requires connection making, either to unstudied parts of an original case or to other cases (as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279). Making larger assumptions based on specific data is dangerous without support from related literature (secondary sources) or observed activities (primary sources). How then, might I fairly represent the Hmong youth arts culture within a more national scene of youth activism through the arts?

While conducting this study, I met youth leaders from across the United States who work with Hmong youth, as well as youth of different ethnicities, in similar ways as Tou SaiK. One man who is involved in a similar project that organizes Hmong youth lives in Sacramento, California. Fong is a recent graduate of the University of California – Berkeley and current graduate student at the University of California – Davis. He has spent the last two years establishing a grassroots project aimed at unifying Hmong youth in suburban Sacramento. His work serves as a model for and reflection of Tou SaiK’s St. Paul-based grassroots organization United Prodigies. I also met youth and their leaders from Detroit, Michigan, during the Minneapolis-hosted Asian Pacific Islander American Spoken Word and Poetry Summit in August 2011. The work that this group performs with youth who address issues of equity, diversity, and social justice is similar, again, to the movement in St. Paul. Based on the comments made by Fong and Detroit leaders, an adequate comparison can be made among the California, Michigan, and Minnesota youth organizations and missions demonstrating that youth arts and activism are important among Hmong organizations in urban areas of the country.



### Research Timeline

Task	Fall 2010	Spr 2011	Sum 2011	Fall 2011	Spr 2012	Sum 2012	Fall 2012	Spr 2013
Conception of Study and Pilot Study								
Data Collection								
Interview-Focus Group Transcriptions								
Analysis of Data								
Interim Reports								
Selecting and Editing								
Final Reports								

Figure 6: Research Timeline

### Summary

In this Chapter, I provided a detailed description of the qualitative method I used to investigate my research questions. I discussed the research design; provided an autoethnography that places me, the researcher, within the study; gave an account of the community and its artists; and accounted for data collection methods. Analysis procedures were outlined for the narrative data from interviews and focus groups, as well as information from field notes, observations, and artifacts. The next chapter will be a presentation of the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE

*I think that this kind of education that's been done underground, like much of what Hip-hop has always been – I think that its ability to inspire, to empower youths has not been present in the education system. I think that music education has become, has been westernized.*

Chilli, December 9, 2011

Democratic education is evident among participants in this study. The use of Hip-hop arts, specifically rap and spoken word poetry, are the primary kinds of compositions endeavored by Tou, Chilli, and others. Hones et al. (2012) writes, “The arts appear to have a high profile in the Hmong American community” (p. 191). This statement holds true in St. Paul where Tou SaiKo Lee and other “Hip-hop musicians are encouraged to share their voices with one another in their neighborhoods to confront issues centering on stories of home and social justice” (unpublished Eastside Rising application, August 2, 2012). Alongside adult arts leaders, youth build networks that give a powerful, democratic voice to Hmong residents, empowering them to work for equality among citizens, not just Hmong people, in Minnesota’s capital city.

The informality with which youth make music lends itself to creating music that has special purposes including social justice, youth development, Hmong identity (or “Hmong-ness”), and art for the sake of art. By focusing on rap and spoken word poetry,

as well as lyrical songs, three questions are explored: (a) In what kinds of musical activities do Hmong youth participate and how do they teach and learn their arts? (b) For what purpose do Hmong youth create their arts? and (c) How might what Hmong do in their community inform the current state of music teacher preparation? The data provided by participants paints a picture of music making that occurs in non-school settings. Seven youth artists and three youth arts leaders were observed and/or interviewed alone or in focus group settings in order to learn about the music education-like techniques used by youth who are college-aged but not necessarily college attendees, as well as their mentors. Additionally, as confirmation, the voices of role partners such as workshop attendees or open mic night performers are also included, because they represent a larger body of youth aside from the main participants. Findings indicate that not only are music education-like techniques employed by teaching artists (uncertified music teachers) and youth, but the resulting music has more to do with issues in the community than with the music itself.

The quotations, some of which are lengthy, have been preserved in their original forms so that participants' voices are heard throughout this chapter. For the purpose of clarity, I have removed extraneous words such as *um*, *uh*, *you know*, and *like* (when not used for a simile), but the extraction of those "out loud thinking" words only occurs if the artists' meanings and expressions are not altered. Artist profiles are provided first and are intended to give readers a glimpse at the biographical nature of each person's life. Following the profiles, artists' voices are shared to highlight salient themes within the data.

## Artist Profiles

I think that there's a lot of value in that voice – that perspective of the artists that we bring. Through our words and as well as now that we're doing this music that connects to this generation, and the generation, the younger generation. And seeing us as role models for that, that are doing music, that that's expressing our stories for Hmong American perspective. And so I see that they can have value in how students can make that connection.

Tou SaiK, November 18, 2010

Tou SaiKo Lee is a Twin Cities Hip-hop artist and teacher whose work with youth in St. Paul, MN, has had a major influence on the artistic/musical creations that come from the Hmong community. He was born in a refugee camp in Thailand and moved with his family to Syracuse, NY, then to the Twin Cities. As a founding member of United Prodigies and Speakers of the Sun (a.k.a., S.O.S.), he encourages youth to use their voices in powerful, democratic ways to address issues centered on social justice. Lee's work as a community organizer has garnered him the respect of local, national, and global Hip-hop artists who, like himself, believe in the power of music and poetry to positively shape people's lived experiences, especially Hmong and other Asian teens and young adults. He is a performer in Fresh Traditions (a rap-*kwv txhiaj* collaboration with

his grandmother), Delicious Venom, FIRE, and PosNoSys. His work has been featured by New York Times Magazine<sup>2</sup> and can be viewed on YouTube.



I really tried to depend on what I learned in the past, like, what I observed in Tou SaiK's open mic or other open mics I've been to.

Chilli, December 9, 2011

A rising star in the Hmong community, Chilli is a beacon for Hmong people, particularly women, on her college campus and in the St. Paul community at large. As a twenty-one year old community organizer and Hip-hop artist, she advocates for the efficacy of Hmong women and their roles as leaders. She participated in CHAT's voter registration campaign during the 2012 presidential elections. Chilli's recent internship with TakeAction Minnesota gives her an opportunity to organize around Hmong issues related to the Central Corridor Light Rail Construction Project on University Avenue, a six-mile business district that connects the University of Minnesota to the State Capitol building. Chilli is a member of United Prodigies and S.O.S. Her numerous art forms include MCing, b-girling (break-dance), rapping, singing, and spoken word poetry. She can be seen at many open mic nights and social justice forums throughout the Twin Cities. In high school, Chilli sang in women's choir for one year where she learned about sight singing and vocal production.

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<sup>2</sup> "Hmong Hip-Hop Heritage – Tou SaiKo Lee" by Patrick Ferrell. Retrievable at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIrN9hV62D8>



I think other than just personal experience, it's also just being able to share my experience with others, because I know of other people don't have that voice that they can share themselves ... that other people are in the same boat as them, have the same opinions or the same experiences. So it's just being able to be that person who can show them that they have the ability to be up there and share what's important and what matters to them, too. So it's more like being someone to pave the way and for other artists to be able to speak up.

Laurine, September 18, 2012

Laurine is a spoken word artist whose poetry speaks to the power of individual voices. Through partnerships with colleagues such as Tou SaiKo Lee, Triple G, and Chilli, Laurine has created a sense of place for herself as well as educated others to use their voices for positive change either for themselves or for the greater Hmong community. Her current work at a local human services agency is focused on youth and entrepreneurship. She is an activist, artist, educator, and writer who is leading the way in the Twin Cities' social justice scene by cultivating artistic voices and providing space for growth through participation in her university's spoken word poetry and rap organization and Speakers of the Sun.



So it's not just playing the music. It's not just playin' the instrumental or not just making the beat. It's not just teaching. It's knowing what to teach, knowing the history behind it, how well to perform it so they understand it.

Triple G, September 23, 2012

Minnesota born producer, rapper, MC, instructor, and visual artist, 22-year old Triple G is mainly a self-taught musician. He did not take music in school, but enrolled in a music therapy class in college where he said, "So taking this course it really opened my eyes. Music can help others in a different way. And this course, it taught us a lot that music can help soothe the soul; it can help soothe patients with disabilities, because music affects everywhere in your brain." His work through In Progress Studios, St. Paul, includes the use of technology (e.g., ProTools) to create beats and write music electronically. With encouragement from his peers and arts leaders from In Progress, Triple G has mentored boys and girls in media arts as well as lyric writing in informal and formal settings. As an organizer, he is extremely active as the public relations coordinator for his university's international student association, because the association brings together more than 25 affiliate student groups across campus that focus on large cultural issues, not ones specific to any given group.



So I just feel caring for my artists resulted from both experiences [in corporate and non-profit business]... I don't feel that success for them would mean, um, or success for myself actually would be if I were to not

be in their lives that they [youth artists] don't succeed. So success for me is instilling these ideals and morals into them so that they can succeed, rather than just teaching them technical skill that is just utilizing a zombie form rather than a genuine love for what they're doing.

Fres, October 30, 2012

Fres is a youth arts leader who works at the Center for Hmong Arts and Talent (CHAT). During the last three years, he has grown as a teacher-artist who employs rap as a way for Hmong students to learn music that they find interesting. Originally from Wisconsin, Fres played trumpet in middle school band for a short stint before exploring Hip-hop arts such as rap, spoken word poetry, lyrics writing, poetry, and even break dancing. His most recent compact disc is called *Mind Full Of*, a collection of uplifting songs and raps. In April 2013, Fres will host a vinyl release party of *Mind Full Of*, an unplugged, acoustic show where “each artist will be working with a guitarist or hand drummer!”



Panda Express <sup>TM</sup>, gourmet Chinese food. Made un-indigenous....

Sprayed with hazardous chemicals. Cleansed by migrant worker hands.

Fong, January 23, 2011

A community activist and youth arts leader from Sacramento, CA, Fong is a Vietnamese American who works to improve the lives of Asian youth in California's state capital region. He is a spoken word poet who currently attends a graduate school in California where he also works as the program advisor and coordinator for the cross-cultural center. During his January 2011 visit to the Twin Cities, Fong was keynote speaker at the first



meeting of United Prodigies; he delivered a message about grassroots organizations and social justice movements.



Telemarketing beat? We gotta talk to Chizzo. I gotta be angry to get on that beat.

Money, November 20, 2010

A producer of electronic music, Money is a young adult who creates his music at In Progress Studios. He is the only participant I observed using computer assisted technology. Money was among several youth artists to collaborate on the album *Blackbird Elements: A Mixed Tape*; this album proved to be popular on Hmong radio programs in the Twin Cities.



We were called Young Legends. And so, there was like a few of us. And that's when I met other artists. You pick up their ideas on how you write ... I was into my music, started recording. I was very curious on to where to start, how to record my music. And so, that's pretty much it and that's how I got into it. And that ever since then, you know, it's always been back of my head, like, that's something like, you know, that I would do.

Bao, May 22, 2011

Bao, at the time of the focus group in June 2011, was enrolled in a nursing program at a local college. She is a rapper whose music has been recorded on a few albums and videos, including *Blackbird Elements: A Mixed Tape*. Her brothers turned her onto rap when they introduced her to Hmong rap. As an artist, Bao notes, "I feel like

rapping is a good way for me to express how I feel, not singing. You know, like, if I was to compare it to singing, so. Yeah. Cause it's kind of aggressive.”



[referring to radio parody by KDWB] I feel it's very hurtful, and a lot of the younger generation, a lot of us who you know are growing up not knowing much of an identity, not really having much of an identity, growing up being between the American culture and our Hmong culture, and being torn between these two cultures. We usually end up feeling, feeling very lost.

Teng, May 22, 2011

Teng is a spoken word poet who entered the poetry world by learning from Tou SaiKo Lee, who also happens to be his cousin. Tou asked Teng if he was “into any kind of arts.” At first, Teng thought of the art form as something “very academic” and he just went along with it. But Tou “kind of nurtured me in that he encouraged me to keep going with it. And he would critique me and help me improve in my art.”



I joined Hip-hop dance crew that a few of the high school alumni started. And it was interesting because there was this type of underground friend, group of friends who did a lot of dancing.

Patag, May 22, 2011

Patag, a student at a local women's university, is a dancer who teaches through St. Paul Public Schools in extended day classes and summer programs. Interestingly, she learned her art in school and has continued to work as a teacher of Hip-hop dance. She

notes that as a dance teacher, “I want to make sure these kids know that dancing is a type of expression; they can have fun.” She uses her dance as a way to bring her Midwest Hmong community closer.

Because this dissertation pertains to teaching and learning situations in the Hmong Hip-hop music community, it is helpful to summarize the ways that artists teach or learn their trades. In Table 1, the kinds of arts training and experiences youth artists had as pupils and students in formal education as well as their informal arts education is presented. No artist explicates how long s/he spent in informal training other than to say that they had been doing rap, poetry, or singing since middle school (Chilli) or for eight years (Laurine).

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Informal Musical or Other Arts Training</b>	<b>Formal Musical or Other Arts Training</b>
Bao (B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loved to rhyme as a child</li> <li>▪ Learned from her brothers</li> <li>▪ Learned from Tou</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No answer</li> </ul>
Chilli (CL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ YouTube</li> <li>▪ Open mics</li> <li>▪ Community organizer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High school (HS) women’s choir</li> </ul>
Fong Tran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community organizer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No answer</li> </ul>
Fres Thao (F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Listening to recordings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Middle school (MS) trumpet player</li> <li>▪ HS creative writing course</li> <li>▪ College jazz course</li> </ul>
Laurine (L)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lyric and beat instructor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Theater group</li> </ul>
Patag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No answer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ HS Hip-hop dance team</li> <li>▪ Teaching artist in schools</li> </ul>
Teng (T)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Learned from Tou</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MS &amp; HS recreational classes</li> </ul>
Tou SaiK (TS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Band member</li> <li>▪ Community organizer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MS &amp; HS English class</li> <li>▪ Teaching artist in schools</li> </ul>
Triple G (3G)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No answer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ College music therapy course</li> </ul>

Table 1: Participants’ Training

## Activities in Places and Spaces

Hmong youth and their arts leaders work alone and gather together to make music – rap, poetry, and songs – to develop their artistry in St. Paul. The way that the Hip-hop artists teach and learn music informally was the initial reason for this study. In this section, I note the musicians’ specific art forms, the activities in which they participate, and highlight how growth as musicians is related to their vocal tone.

### Art Forms

Artists tell their stories from specific points of view centered on their particular art forms. Laurine states, “So I was in theater first and I learned about spoken word performance poetry from there. Pretty much my whole high school career was centered around theater and poetry and being part of [my high school’s] touring theater.”

In our first meeting, Tou SaiK stated that young Hmong people do not take up traditional instruments such as the *qeej* (a bamboo, free reed mouth organ) and the *nplooj* (any type of leaf blown between the lips). Note that none of the youth artists or arts leaders participate in Hmong traditional instrumental or vocal performance (see Table 1); however, Tou and Chilli occasionally rap in Hmong language, but not necessarily by using traditional chant such as *kwv txhiaj* like Tou’s grandmother (i.e., Fresh Traditions). Triple G indicates that he took Hmong language for a year in college, but shares that he does not rap in Hmong. He enthusiastically talked about his observation of Bao when he saw her at an open mic, “This girl, she’s dope.... This girl got her game on.... This girl, she can rap in Hmong.” In Table 2, participants and their chosen art forms are indicated.

Participant	Break Dancer	DJ	Emcee	Hip-hop Artist	Musician (generic)	New Instruments	Poet	Producer	Rapper	Singer	Spoken Word Poet	Other (e.g., visual art)
Bao									X			
Chilli	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Fong											X	
Fres	X			X			X		X		X	
Laurine							X				X	X
Money								X				
Patag	X											
Teng							X				X	
Tou Saik		X	X	X	X			X	X		X	
Triple G								X	X			X

Table 2: Participants and their Art Forms

### Activities

Events that bring together musicians in the Hmong community include open mic nights, workshops, meetings, and arts festivals to name a few. It is during these activities, some of which are private and others public, that artists create their raps, poems and songs. The spaces include parks, college commons spaces, recreation centers, and cafés. Green (2008) notes that, in non-school environments, it may be easier to work informally than in more formal school settings (p. 27). The Hmong artists provided evidence of this idea during many of the workshops, meetings, and performances that I attended. The effectiveness of informal music learning in community settings appears to hold true in the Hmong youth arts community.

Using Green's (2002) idea that people learn in self-directed, peer-directed, and group activities, I share six stories about youth activities where each kind of teaching and learning is employed.

### **Stories about Teaching and Learning Activities**

During the many activities I attended, youth artists employ an educational approach that Green (2002) calls "informal music learning practices" whereby "young musicians largely teach themselves or 'pick up' skills and knowledge" (p. 5). These kinds of informal music education "techniques" are not ones that Freire (1970/2011) would call "banking" concepts of education, ones "in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (p. 72). Generative and transformative teaching models are employed instead. The former uses a "hands-on approach to learning" while the latter model "gets [the learner] out into the real world and [helps him/her] participate in real activities" (Wink, 2011, p. 8).

**Self.** Among youth participate in the arts by learning music on their own and for their own personal expression. Without the aid of teachers, they have honed their crafts such as rap, spoken word poetry, and electronic music production by experiencing it first hand. Given the opportunity and basic tools to succeed in production arts by a mentor, Triple G states that he is able to "do my own thing." The freedom to experience music making on one's own is important because it takes stress out of being right or performing up to another's standards. The opportunity to self teach and learn also allows artists to work on their own time, perform music as works-in-progress, and seek the advice of

peers. Two stories follow showing the way Hmong musicians learn on their own for the purpose of developing their music learning skills.

***Googling, watching, listening.*** The way Chilli learned *30 Year Secret* (see Appendix F) is a form of self teaching and learning. In this song, composers Tou and his brother express the hardships endured by Hmong people who fled Laos for refugee camps in Thailand and eventually migrated to the United States. “It raise[s] awareness about the injustices, human rights injustices that were happening to Hmong people that are in the jungles of Laos. After 30 years, over 30 years of persecution, being punished for their role in helping America during the Vietnam War through the Secret War in Laos,” states Tou.

Chilli (CL) says that she Googled the song as well as watched and listened to *30 Year Secret* on YouTube. She explains how she learned the song on her own.

CL: You know, it didn’t become a passion to me, at least it didn’t hit me like why I should care about my Hmong people. Until listened to the whole song, and you know, I mean, I was so like, it-, it resonates so much with me, and I was so moved by it. I rapped it over and over and over again until I could memorize it.

TK: How did you rap it over and over? Did you listen to a recording? Did you-

CL: Oh yeah, I listened to it on YouTube and then I downloaded it. And so I Googled up the lyrics. I was using the lyrics for a while. So I would rap it in the shower, when I was walking, you know. So that was really like the beginning of my passion for my Hmong people.

*30 Year Secret* has become an important part of Chilli's repertoire as a rapper; it seems to have helped her crystallize her identity as a Hmong person. She recalls listening to the song and her favorite line.

CL: I burst into tears because, like, especially you know, because every stanza ... resonate with me. But it was like the imagery. And like the first stanza was talking about the Hmong people how their blood spills over the rice fields, how their tears is enough to flood the Mekong River. I was crying. I was in tears. I think that all along there's such a strong Hmong consciousness here in the Twin Cities.

Tou proudly shares that aside from Chilli, youth around the world claim Delicious Venon's hit as part of their own musical repertoire by "immers[ing] themselves into the lyrics and the music" in ways that are self-directed. Interestingly, Tou SaiK has never uploaded the song to YouTube himself and notes:

TS: If you look online, a lot of the youth that cover *30 Year Secret* [have] their own version; it was all on their own. They listened to it, learned it, and they performed it on their own. And so it was something that was powerful ... young people learned themselves how to immerse themselves into the lyrics and the music, and the flow of the song *30 Year Secret*. So when I say music it means there are people that will learn the guitar rift (sic) just by listening to it, you know, and create tabs for it.

***Listening and reading.*** Fres learned his skills without the aid of teachers.

TK: Okay, cool. How have you gone about acquiring the skills of the things that you do whether it's being a rapper, a lyricist, a poet?



F: Most of what I know now, whether it's techniques and writing or just content or any of that, I learned on my own. I sought out structure, musical structure from just songs I listen to and writers and poets that I got interested in. It was never any formal education when it came to creative writing except for in high school.

Later in the interview, Fres explicates his love for creative writing and how he continues to develop as an artist by collaborating with other musicians. He ends this part of the conversation by stating that learning his art “was all from I guess just from listening to music and reading poetry.”

Youth artists are self-motivated music learners. In the cases of Chilli and Fres, their self-directed learning styles show that they work on their own time; listen to examples and copy them or use them as inspiration for their own music; read other poets' work, use the Internet (Google and YouTube) to search for and practice along with songs; and engage in repetition as a learning device.

**Peer.** The second area of exploration is peer teaching and learning activities. This form of music education in community focuses on friend groups (Green, 2011; Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010; Miell & MacDonald, 2000). Hmong artists create a strong community around which to make music. They gather in pairs and trios to write, compose, and perform their music. For example, Chilli, Tou, a friend of theirs, and I were in Tou's car traveling from St. Paul to Minneapolis. Without hesitation, both Chilli and the friend shared their most recent poems. A brief and informal affirmation and critique followed each poem. Dancer Patag has similar feeling and says, “I really think that you can't do anything yourself. You know. And this group of friends, they really helped, supported.

We supported each other; we learned everything from each other.” Two stories are presented below of peer learning in the Hmong youth arts community.

*Story around the beat.* Prevalent in the Hmong community are peer learning activities where youth acquire musical skills during open mic events or side-by-side in workshops or meetings. Below are field notes (italics) I made of Money, a twenty-year-old producer, who is working at In Progress Studios where he is sitting next to Tou SaiKo Lee while working at two computers.

*I look up to see Money working from his laptop and the desktop computer. He's got one beat going on the desktop and other applications open on his laptop, then switch, switch, switch again. Now both are playing beats, different, uncoordinated beats. After some time, Tou looks over Money's shoulder and begins critiquing the beats that Money has to offer. Finally one particular beat finds them both in a trance. [Money exclaims], "This is hot!" They've found Chizzo's beats and really spend time talking about them. They end up calling Chizzo, but don't get in touch.*

A back and forth banter continues for nearly an hour as Tou and Money work on finding beats online for their next creation. The creativity between the two artists is energetic. Money continuously streams beats by constantly playing them from various websites.

*More beats begin to stream on the computers. One mainstream Hmong rapper who happens to be a woman is criticized by Money, "I can do better than that." Beats and who creates the beats are two important aspects of Hip-hop culture.*

The criticism is not continuous and is limited to one moment during the observation.

Eventually, Tou and Money find a beat that intrigues them:

*Money is still listening to beats for his song and continues his commentary. Each reminds him of something and one particularly reminds of WuTang. Just then, Tou finds a beat and plays it for Money. The beat begins with a harp and evolves into a complex series of musical events. The teacher leads his mentee through the listening. Money listens intently and decides that he could add things to it. Then another beat; maybe he could take a beat by Chizzo and another by Tieng [both are local friends of Tou and Money] and combine them, say, take the drums from one and music from another. Suddenly, Money queries, “Telemarketing beat? We gotta talk to Chizzo. I gotta be angry to get on that beat.” Tou explains that some producers are just trying to give up beats.*

After the two settle on the beat by Chizzo, the one with harp, they dig into the storyboard for Money’s rap.

*By 5:35 p.m. the two are listening to the harp beat pretty seriously, making statements about its musical qualities and potential to support a story. Money feels like the beat “brainwashes” him and then talks about gangsta rap. More talk about Jason Yang while the harp beat pulsates slowly underneath the conversation. Tou opens a Word document and begins typing. I realize that he’s beginning to put a storyboard together.*

*“Damn, I like that ending.” Money makes a comment about how it sounds like the guy’s hands are open at the end of the beat track. He’s already begun to*

*create a program for the beat. He comments on how the harp beat starts sad but ends more happy.*

It quickly becomes evident to me that the story is developed around the beat, not the other way around. The characters that Money and Tou select for the storyboard are pseudonymous for some of their friends. Money has to go; it's nearly 6:00 p.m.

*Tou, "I want to get the structure before you go," speaking to Money who is seemingly ready to catch his ride. What happens at the end – the happy part? Maybe the people start to hear the guy's music and appreciate it. Resuming, Tou says, "I feel like there needs to be some kind of conflict, not a fight."*

This statement is important in that Tou's constant message of positivity and change caused by and through art is always evident.

***Repertoire – 30 Year Secret.*** Peer learning also occurs during open mic events where, for example, participants Tou (TS) and Chilli (CL) perform Delicious Venom's *30 Year Secret*. Chilli is a big fan of Tou and vice versa. About eight years ago, Chilli met Tou when he visited her junior high school to give a presentation. A few years later during high school, she met Tou's younger brother who happened to be Chilli's bus driver.

CL: So coincidentally Tou SaiKo Lee's younger brother, he was my bus driver [laughs]. So, I think, we have a Hmong bus driver, and he's young, okay.

TS: Go and get his autograph [laughs].

CL: I didn't know who he was until one of my peers at In Progress; he was like, you know that guy's famous, right? I was like wait, what? And he's like, yeah, he's Tou SaiKo Lee's younger brother. They're in a band

together called Delicious Venom. You should look it up. I'm like, oh my gosh, really? Now you know, I remember Tou SaiKo Lee from sixth grade, so I was like really, so, I want-, I did some research on him. I did a Google search about Tou SaiKo Lee and about Delicious Venom and then I came upon a website and it was talking, you know, it had an interview about how Tou SaiKo Lee started doing spoken word and the story behind Delicious Venom, how it was formed. And then, a part of that was their song *30 Year Secret*.

On at least a few occasions since high school, Chilli has performed *30 Year Secret* with Tou at open mic events. The first time they performed *30 Year Secret* as a duet, it set them on course for a long-term relationship based on Hip-hop and the arts. Chilli remembers rapping her favorite Delicious Venom song at an open mic event where Tou was in the audience.

CL: So I was like, oh, there's one [Innovative Community Elevation (ICE) open mic] coming up. Let's go. And so, you know, I went there and I was like, wait, if Tou Saik is there, you know, I didn't wanna just pop out of nowhere and be like, hey you remember me? We met when I was in sixth grade, and you came into my classroom? I wanted to show him how passionate I was about *30 Year Secret*. So I did, I was like, okay, I should do something daring. So, behold, I went and, yeah, I went on stage and I asked him to come. I called him out to come on stage and yeah. And I said that it was a wish of mine to perform with him, because I thought he was just so awesome in sixth grade when he was up there and doing his poems.

So I was imagining what it would be like, so I was like, okay, I wanna do this [perform with Tou].

Youth artists, not just the ones highlighted above, participate in peer-directed learning activities. The interactions among friends helps artists create their raps, poems, and dances. Like in self-directed learning styles, Money and Tou used the Internet to help them compose their rap. They also work side-by-side as mentor-mentee duos who play off one another's ideas, hence, creating a dynamic atmosphere in which to make music.

**Group.** While attending meetings of United Prodigies (UP), Speakers of the Sun (S.O.S.), as well as concerts and open mic nights, I witnessed the power of group teaching and learning. United Prodigies' meetings provided rich data showing that improvisation and composition were highly valued by Hmong artists. Tou's activities "We Need Some Elevation" and "A Voice for the Voiceless" are raps that resembled a form of improvisation. Both examples of group teaching and learning are presented below.

*"We Need Some Elevation."* United Prodigies' first organizational meeting/workshop took place at the Hmong American Partnership in St. Paul, and was attended by 13 people including me. Along with special guest Fong from Sacramento, CA, as well as Tou and his co-organizers Jack and Mary (pseudonyms), the youth created a rap or poem about elevation, the act of "rising up."

TS: Ready go.

All: [in compound duple meter] We need some elevation. We need some elevation. We need some elevation.

TS: Elevation's like you're elevating. Like you're rising up. So we're rising up from racism; rising up from war, oppression, right. So, elevation is one of the most rhymable words. Elevation, demonstration, imagination, emancipation, graduation, blazin', Asian; it all rhymes, right? So, you're going to think of a word that rhymes that goes along with the theme, elevation, then we're gonna think of a line from three to five words. For example, mine is "No more discrimination." Three words, that's it. Alright? Anybody got one. What about just the rhyming word? Let's start with that – with elevation.

Though the activity began somewhat haltingly, it was evident that participants could easily create their rhyming words without difficulty. The freedom to choose words and perform their phrases for the group is evidence that the teaching and learning model is improvisatory (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010).

Reflexive practice was utilized for the opening activity; it was a continuous improvisation, modification, and improvement cycle performed by youth. The first iteration of this group teaching and learning activity was performed as a kind of warm-up or experimental round while the second was more performative and inclusive of a "movement that expresses elevation [the chorus];" the third iteration incorporated a movement for each person's individual contribution. You told the group that if they could not think of a move they could "freestyle" it. This, too, indicates a degree of autonomy placed in the hands of participants (Brubaker, 2012).

There are three notable performance aspects associated with the last round of "We Need Some Elevation": (a) individuals were more comfortable with their own

contributions and less hesitant about the texts' delivery; (b) the tone of youth voices changed from mere talking to something more expressive; and (c) the comfort level among participants was high given the amount of laughter throughout the activity. Noteworthy examples from youth or youth leaders are provided, because they demonstrated expertise in all three performance aspects listed above particularly relevant to "tone," as well as the cadence of their delivery.

TS: No more discrimination.

Jack: I have an education.

CL: It takes determination.

Chilli talks about delivery cadence when she discusses the tone associated with social justice related topics.

CL: One thing I do want to point out is that a lot usually get spoken word mixed up with slam poetry. People think that spoken word is aggressive in nature, and it doesn't have to be. When I do like a poem, let's say about the Trayvon Martin<sup>3</sup> case, and I'm really angry, and then I make, I make my tone like, you know, I have a more aggressive tone. It's more straightforward.... We have been ... oppressed so long, and we don't want to continue being stepped on. And I find that it's really effective because it agitates my audience. And it, and it kind of, you know, um, aroused their anger towards injustice, too, in a way.

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<sup>3</sup> Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old Black male, was killed by a neighborhood watch coordinator in Florida on February 26, 2012. Chilli views this as another incidence of injustice against a person of color.



*“A Voice for the Voiceless.”* At the last United Prodigies workshop I attended, “A Voice for the Voiceless” was the opening activity. It was intended to give youth organizers the opportunity to say something for those who do not necessarily have a say in their own lives. As an example, Tou notes that his grandmother does not speak English, so he speaks for her “when she needs to do something or purchase something.” Giving voice can be less literal in the sense that organizers become *advocates* for those who are poor and/or do not have access to human services or influential people who can make a difference. Table 3 shows two versions of the “Voice” activity: The first is an improvisational performance, and the second is more performative and includes physical gestures coordinated with the chorus “I speak” and individuals’ verses. Tou begins the activity by saying, “So just think of one thing that you would speak up for.”

Though both versions are essentially the same, the second becomes more rap-like or poetic. The addition of physical gestures makes the activity somewhat more difficult for participants, but all are still able to express the issues that affect loved ones, friends, or themselves. What is most important in the above example is that Tou SaiK facilitated teaching and learning in this workshop-esque meeting, but youth attendees provided a majority of the text. The issues that participants and their friends expressed during “A Voice for the Voiceless” were both global and local in scope and in specificity. The copious laughter that occurred during the second iteration indicates a sense of ease – comfort – in the community-building setting, one that encourages youth development by, for, and with youth.

	<b>First Time</b>	<b>Second Time (with physical gestures)</b>
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>TS</b>	For my grandmother that wants to garden year round.	For my grandmother that sings <i>kwv txhiaj</i> so she can pass on her stories.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>TK</b>	For Vietnamese orphans who are left alone in their cribs.	For Vietnamese orphans who spend time in their cribs alone.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>1</b>	For lots of debt and borrowing	For lots of debt and borrowing.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>2</b>	For helping people with organizing and also with their finances.	For going out there and spread the word about how to manage money.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>3</b>	To be an advocate for those who are living with mental illnesses.	For the thousands of people that take their lives every day. For the young adult and teens. So I'm gonna be an advocate for those with mental illness.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>4</b>	For Hmong youth back home in Seattle.	For Hmong youth in Seattle, Washington.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>CL</b>	For Hmong women.	For Hmong women afflicted by the structure of patriarchy.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>Erin</b>	For first graders who want to learn to read.	For little kids who come from hard homes.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>5</b>	I speak for minority students who can get into college but don't have the resources to stay.	For minority students who can get into college but don't have the resources.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>6</b>	For my mother who's a widow but has been working so hard ever since I've been born and I see it every day.	For my mom who gives me the strength every day to go forward.
<b>All</b>	I speak ...	I speak ...
<b>7</b>	For the next generation leading by example.	<i>(left meeting early)</i>

Table 3: A Voice for the Voiceless

Group learning activities from United Prodigies meetings are provided as a way to show how youth and their leaders create raps together. Their improvisation and

composition activities provide insight into Tou SaiK's vision for participatory action that spreads from music making to community making.

### **Growth as Artists**

Throughout interviews, participants discussed their growth as artists. They shared how they were developing as rappers, poets, and teachers because of their personal life experiences. Fres discusses his personal development as a rapper from youth to adulthood, he shares that his tone has changed.

F: My music started off as very abstract, very rapid-fire delivery. Uh, very much in riddles and metaphors that- you, you'd have to really know me or really want to take time to dissect my writings. I feel I did that because I wasn't confident with what I was writing. I was still developing myself; trying to find myself. And wanting to be, wanting to express myself and wanting to put myself out there, but yet keeping myself distant through again, riddles.

Continuing, Fres explains the change in his tone.

F: But through the years I just feel that I've gained more confidence. I've found who I was. Yeah, just about my morals and not afraid to just, you know, express myself in the way where I teach my youth now to express themselves.

Laurine, like Fres, has gained confidence through teaching her skills to others. She says, "I started in middle school. Mostly it was just writing and journaling growing up to help release personal issues." Laurines' early writing focused on racism and cultural

identity issues, but in recent years, she has shifted her emphasis. Her most recent spoken word poems are about her hometown and Hip-hop, and Laurine seems to have developed as an artist whose message has changed. “And I am proud that I have progressed into being able to reach out into other genres other than just those. But it’s also just growing up and experiencing different experiences in life and what matters and what values are important to me.”

As a break-dancer, Patag remembers joining her high school’s Hip-hop dance crew. She recalls, “going into the room and sitting in the dust the whole time while everyone else was dancing. And that, in itself, was fun, but I really wanted to also join them.” Eventually, Patag’s friends left the dance crew to start families: “Then they had babies, and so I felt like because I was still in school, and at that time I did have a boyfriend, but I wasn’t ready to settle down.” Her growth, though not as a rapper, is an example of resilience in the face of a cultural norm – teen pregnancy. She made up her mind to continue dance as a professional instructor.

As artists get older and experience life changes, so too does their tone or their reasons for making art. In the following section, the purposes for art making are recounted including musical and non-musical reasons for rap, spoken word poetry, and songs.

### **Purposes for Music Making in the Hmong Youth Community**

Hmong youth use their specific musical art forms such as rap and poetry as strategies towards non-musical purposes. In this study, four major purposes emerge in the

data: social justice, youth development, Hmong identity, and art for the sake of art (aesthetics). Listed in Table 4 is a summary of the main purposes for music making in the Hmong youth arts community.

<b>Social Justice</b>	<b>Youth Development</b>	<b>Hmong Identity</b>	<b>Art for Sake of Art</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Education</li> <li>▪ Police Brutality</li> <li>▪ Silence and Oppression</li> <li>▪ Racism and Sexism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Education</li> <li>▪ Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-Expression</li> <li>▪ Identity</li> <li>▪ Migration</li> <li>▪ Generation Gap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-Expression</li> <li>▪ Relationships</li> <li>▪ Folk Arts</li> </ul>

Table 4: Purposes for Music Making

### **Social Justice**

Of the many workshops and meetings I attended during this research project, two were of United Prodigies (UP). Among the attendees were leaders from the Twin Cities and Sacramento, California, as well as youth. For the first order of business, Tou and other leaders stated the reason for this convening by noting that they wanted to address issues in the community through the arts and creativity. One youth leader, Jack (pseudonym), feels like the arts and his community has blessed him and that he wants to give back to the next generation.

Social justice is a major theme, and a somewhat lengthy discussion among youth about its definition ensues at the outset of the meeting. Together, UP members brainstorm that social justice means equality, equal rights, peace, goodness, and society. A sample of social justice topics raised by attendees, ones that Tou praised as “great issues,” includes domestic violence, discrimination, racism, access to quality education, teen pregnancy,

human trafficking, the generation gap, identity, religion, juvenile delinquency, religion, and sexual orientation.

UP's next order of business was to lift each other's voices by creating and performing "We Need Some Elevation." This activity was not just a pro forma way to open the meeting of a social justice group, it was a strategy devised by Tou and his co-organizers to invite participants' voices to the table. "We Need Some Elevation" gave youth an opportunity to create their own one-measure phrases of rap in a compound duple meter and combine their words with their friends' contributions. Without calling their method informal learning, critical pedagogy, or democracy in education, Tou quickly created a safe environment for improvisatory performance. Youth leaders ended the meeting by inviting youth to express their desires for the organization. Members mentioned salient issues that were listed on large paper sheets taped to the wall (see Table 5).

At the second meeting of United Prodigies that I attended called "Get UP with Us," Tou asked this question: "Where do you see the community and arts for Hmong?" and "What is your vision for the community and for the arts?" Participants noted ways to network with groups outside United Prodigies (see Table 5).

In addition to UP events, In Progress, S.O.S., and CHAT, all exist to support youth voices as they search for ways to express about themselves and their surroundings. Social justice is ongoing work in the Hmong Hip-hop arts community; its prevalence in the music is evidence of its importance to the artists as a way to help youth become self-efficacious and improve their community through art making.

<b>The Informal Creative Process</b>	
<b>Issues in the Community (January 2011)</b>	<b>Networking (September 2012)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interracial-intercultural dating and relationships</li> <li>▪ Intercultural relationships</li> <li>▪ Grassroots process</li> <li>▪ Outreach, connectivity, and networking</li> <li>▪ Hmong artists database</li> <li>▪ Advertising and communication</li> <li>▪ Women’s issues</li> <li>▪ Multi-mother families (polygamist families); divorce – overcoming shame.</li> <li>▪ Self-identity</li> <li>▪ Create a dialogue around culture acceptability</li> <li>▪ Arts Development as a change agent</li> <li>▪ Leadership development</li> <li>▪ Peer pressure</li> <li>▪ Education</li> <li>▪ Tou likes “how to speak up effectively.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase human resources</li> <li>▪ Coordinate existing programs and connect outside UP</li> <li>▪ Attend other organizations’ events and uplift each other’s groups</li> <li>▪ Recruit members</li> <li>▪ Foster traditional arts</li> <li>▪ Support multi-generational activities</li> <li>▪ Coordinate with collegiate Hmong Student Organizations (HSAs)</li> <li>▪ Encourage voters’ rights and participation</li> <li>▪ Create a performance series</li> </ul>

Table 5: The Informal Creative Process – Issues in the Community and Networking

### **Youth Development**

Arts leaders believe their work is important to the next generation. They discuss their work in youth development, a specific purpose that helps young people learn to raise their voices in support of themselves as individuals (e.g., identity formation, artists) and as socio-political activists. Tou talks about his experience as an invited teaching artist working with sixth graders at a local middle school.

TS: I think [the workshop] definitely gave them an outlet to express themselves, to become more creative with the way that they wanted to get their messages out. Whether it was doing it [writing] about their family or just doing it about people that inspire them in their life, whether it’s their favorite football player [or] Harriet Tubman.

Laurine points out that she wants to enable people to use their voices by paving the way “for artists to be able to speak up.”

L: I think other than just personal experience, it’s also just being able to share my experience with others, because I know of other people don’t have that voice that they can share themselves, or you know, they don’t know that they, that other people are in the same boat as them, have the same opinions or the same experiences. So it’s just being able to be that person who can show them that they have the ability to be up there and share what’s important and what matters to them too. So it’s more like being someone to pave the way and for other artists to be able to speak up.

Youth development is not only about promoting self-efficacy or having a powerful voice in the community; it is also about teaching musical and technical skills. Triple G who is both a youth artist and now-mentor, expresses his interest to pass on his production knowledge to students that include young people and adults.

3G: Mentoring. Mentoring is a great thing because in a way you’re mentoring, you’re building that relationship, yet you are still training them, ‘cause maybe one day they could take your place and that’s one thing that I wanted to leave them, you know, a legacy where I told them a great deal of things that they could apply, that they could, you know, hopefully take my place one day.

Youth development, whether about creating a safe learning environment for self-expression or teaching technical skills, is an important purpose behind music making in the Hmong Hip-hop community.



## Hmong Identity

Referring to Hmong identity as “Hmong-ness,” Chilli explains that she grew up hearing stories about refugee camps and migration, but never related to her own heritage until listening to *30 Year Secret*. Hence, one of the dominant themes in the music is about Hmong American identity. Music making helps youth bridge the gap between the generations. Traditional arts mentioned by participants include one form of Hmong chant called *kvv txhiaj* (pronounced “gut-tsia”) and one form of instrumental music played on the ceremonial mouth organ or reeded mouth organ called the *qeej* (pronounced “fang”). New Hmong arts are not specifically Hmong, but rather shared arts with popular musics from the African American communities according to Chilli.

CL: We become mixed with the minorities, particularly the African Americans, with the Black community. And so Hip-hop became something that was introduced to us, you know. That’s why I feel like our Hip-hop foundation is so strong here in the Twin Cities, and that’s a huge key to our generation. I grew up being influenced by b-boys, by rap you know. But then when I started seeing our young people do it, you know, it becomes something like, “Oh, I’m cool.”

Hmong artists who participated in this study believe that the gap between the OGs (older generation) and the youth is widening. Dyane, Tou’s mentor, laments that Hmong do not have songs for children any more, and children are missing music from their culture. She elaborates that limerick learning was part of the culture, and that is something that no longer happens.

One of the larger struggles associated with the gap is related to Hmong identity in America. One Hmong college student I met at conference said that he wrestles with his identity. He ponders whether he is Hmong-Hmong, Hmong-American, American-Hmong, or American-American. Chilli states it this way:

CL: I could tell the adults that I don't think that the youth, the young people are being rebellious 'cause they want to forget about being Hmong. I think that they are struggling, you know. They're really struggling with that, with the notion of becoming Americanized but still being Hmong. Though it's just the way that they choose to express themselves within the American culture. Um, you know, it's the way that it appears right now. Whether it's through Hip-hop or through whatever forms that they choose to.

In order to preserve stories from Southeast Asia, OGs like Tou's grandmother, continue to chant *kɔv txhiaj*, while the youth tell similar Hmong heritage stories through "new" musical mediums such as rap and spoken word poetry. What at first looks like a dichotomy is really a continuum (Schippers, 2010), an overlapping of art forms. Tou and his grandmother provide an example of the overlap through their performance collaborative called Fresh Traditions. This story exemplifies how two artists preserve and create their Hmong identity in an intergenerational collaboration.

TS: So, [Grandma] already has the personality that's out there as a performer, but she is able to do this art form called *kɔv txhiaj*, which is Hmong poetry chanting, [a] traditional art form that is fading in our community, and so she's able to really be able to take it, embrace it, and then show it

to our generation. And so that's why I created this collaboration. So I would be doing spoken word poetry while she does *kwv txhiaj*. We kinda go back and forth and they kinda, it bridges the generations together and allows people to see that, hey, you know, maybe what the elders do is not so, so bad or not so, uh, boring or whatever the negative stereotypes are.

Chilli expresses that youth want to hold onto their culture, sometimes they even want to learn *kwv txhiaj* or the *qeej*. She notes that there are organizations in the Twin Cities that still foster the traditional arts. "And now that the generations is growing older and older and our parents and grandparents are getting older and older," says Chilli, "the young people are trying harder than ever to make sure that Hmong stays alive." Triple G concurs and thinks that recording songs or stories as a form of preservation is one way to keep the Hmong stories alive.

3G: So, I eventually had a vision to make a[n] album or something in the near future. I wanted to preserve our own culture, 'cause people say things. They have so many ideas, you know. I want to do this, that, you know. And I was like, okay. You want to do this now. How can you do it? And eventually it came, it came true when we eventually got a studio and we was able to record.

Preservation of Hmong heritage is an important reason for music making, and it is sometimes fostered through intergenerational collaborations. Addo (1997) notes three kinds of song transmission strategies she found in a Ghanaian primary school: child to child, child to adult, and adult to child. The second two are intergenerational kinds of teaching and learning where knowledge is shared through active participation and

coaching (p. 18). With the introduction of intergenerational collaborations by Tou and his grandmother as well as recordings by Triple G, their stories about Hmong identity will be fostered among both young and old people and hopefully preserved for generations to come.

According to Fres, giving a voice to or helping youth discover their voices is important, because Hmong children generally are not encouraged by their parents to speak out about anything that is not considered Hmong. Building a consciousness for democratic action in the Hmong music community becomes the imperative for leaders such as Fres and Tou SaiK so that youth will learn to speak freely about their lives so that they might one day change their lives and the lives of youth they will mentor in the future.

### **Art for the Sake of Art**

Social justice and youth development are not the only purposes for youth music; heritage and music as an aesthetic experience are important, too. Erin (pseudonym) is a young woman who attended only one event during my observation period. She is not a primary participant but offered a very different opinion about the arts, one that counters the social justice purposes of Hip-hoppers. Erin's interest is in preserving the traditions of Hmong music and other arts. Lamenting the loss of traditional arts, ones that might not present political messages, but folk stories instead, Erin states that she would like to see art for the sake of art come back (e.g., talent shows and folk stories). Erin believes that this kind of art is no longer "celebrated" and that the "voice for traditional arts no longer exists."

Fres notes that stories about migration or refugee status do not necessarily move Hmong music or musicians closer to popularity beyond local communities. Though Fres is a proponent of preserving traditional culture he says, “a lot of the artists in the Hmong American community aren’t contemporary enough and haven’t crossed over outside of our community.”

F: Again, [African American rap is] appealing, it’s America, you know. The struggles of being in the ghetto or the hood that comes across [from] these gansta rappers’ albums are appealing, and I feel that it’s more relatable than us [Hmong] talking about immigrating and having gone through war and all that. That’s great content, but what happens after that? Do you talk about success or do you talk about, you know, the past. Or do you talk about what’s in between? You know, what’s in between is what is happening now and that is what gangsta rap is talking about. What the troubles of being in the United States is, again, relatable. Unless of course we are trying to connect with the youth, the new Somali immigrants, or the Korean community. We can’t, I guess, linger on the immigrant-refugee, story, I would say, in the arts world.

Detached from social justice or youth development emphases of Hmong youth arts, music as an aesthetic experience is valued by participants. At many open mics and concerts, youth performed various kinds of music, oftentimes covers of pop songs, original love songs, and dances. One group from a local liberal arts college called *Hmong Kids on the Block* performed boy band music, complete with boy band outfits that looked like the 1980s/90s band *New Kids on the Block*. Though much of the data is about the

critical social perspectives shared by participants, purely aesthetic purposes are still important to the community of youth artists.

The activities in which Hmong youth participate are designed by community teaching artists to provide spaces for young people to make music. Activities occur in informal spaces such as community centers and cafés, and the resulting music is purposeful beyond the music itself. Artists use their music to address issues concerning social justice, youth development, Hmong identity, as well as aesthetic reasons.

### **Applications to Music Teacher Education**

*I feel that this music education in the Hmong community is not recognized, because it doesn't happen at school.*

Chilli, December 9, 2011

In response to the third research question, “How might what the Hmong do in their communities translate to music teacher preparation,” the results of this study demonstrate that music teacher educators will serve their pre-service music educators by forging a new, critical, and democratic practice that might be learned from community musician. The practice of honoring local music and music making will forward students’ powerful voices inside and outside music classes so that pupils can respond to a musically pluralistic society in meaningful ways. Woodford (2005) posits the position of music education students in his book *Democracy and Music Education* that “Many undergraduate music education majors are ... profoundly ignorant of the world around

them and of the grand political, philosophical, artistic, and social movements that shape their culture” (p. 74). Reimer (2009a) questions whether or not music teachers are out of touch (p. 393) with today’s learners. It appears from the data collected for the present study that Hmong youth artists do believe that music teachers are out of touch.

From Fres’s perspective, he believes there is a disconnection – a sort of being “out of touch” – between school music and the music of his own CHAT participants. When asked about popular music’s presence in his own schooling or of his mentees at CHAT, he indicated that school music teachers tend to train students to sing classical music (e.g., opera). Fres says that some of his youth join band “hoping that they will be able to play some popular music ... but end up just playing some very old classical [music].”

Hmong youth artists are involved in music education throughout their St. Paul communities; however, they do not identify teaching and learning activities as formal music education, the kind that might be taught by certified music teachers inside school buildings. Chilli, a youth singer, rapper, poet, and break-dancer states, “I feel that this music education in the Hmong community is not recognized, because it doesn’t happen in the schools. [I]t happens in the community center ... or café, and it’s organized” (Chilli, personal communication, December 9, 2011).

Chilli expresses a similar sentiment regarding the disconnection between youths’ musical tastes and repertoire chosen by music teachers.

CL: Yeah, so I think that this kind of education [Hip-hop] that’s been done underground, like much of what Hip-hop has always been, I think that its ability to inspire, to empower youths has not been present in the education

system. I think that music education has become, has been westernized, and what I mean by westernized ... I do not want to use the word White education, but it is.... Yesterday [my sister] is in symphonic band, and those music, where did they come from? They're by White composers. Right? And that has been what is considered, you know, to be educated to be like Beethoven. But and yet, the Black or the Asian guy that speaks, you know, like, slangs, or you know, does a bunch of weird stuff when they do spoken word, like, is that not education, you know? I say that that growth within that is something that's really unique and that I feel, I wish that, you know, somebody has drew that connection between that underground work of art to what they should experience in high school, K through 12 today. You know what I mean ... I think this is a revolution.

The disconnection could extend to how Hmong youth learn. Laurine expresses her feelings.

L: I know there are some people out there who are trying to break the whole barrier that popular music is an effective way to teach students and engage them in classroom learning, 'cause not every student learns the same. Not every student comes from the same background, 'cause I think it's very textbook, very let's sit down and have a lecture and take notes.

Responding to the question, "What opinions do you have concerning the current position of popular music education?" Chilli provides an account of her siblings' participation in the band program at their high school. She, like Fres, thinks there is a disconnection between the music that teachers choose and the musics that her siblings



enjoy. Participants express that not only are popular musics such as rap or rock not included in their primary or secondary school music experiences, they lament the lack of international music, especially Asian music (de Quadros, 2009). Banks (2009) states that, “The schools should affirm and recognize the home and community cultures of students. However, it also should help them to develop a critical consciousness of their home and community cultures” (pp. 106-107). In Chilli’s words, she notes, “But you know, sometimes I wonder, let’s say if they [teachers] incorporated international [music] as in a more diverse music, how would – what would the instruments be like? Will they [teachers] potentially change, and ... how would the setting change for the performances?”

Recalling her own high school women’s choir experience, Chilli found that formal music ensemble did not meet all her musical needs as a high schooler. However, she did say that she learned some important aspects about music such as sight reading that contributed to her current music making.

CL: And so, that was my experience, but then during class we will sing let’s say for concert, we will sing songs in Latin, sometimes in Spanish, and the text are chosen by a certain company which decides what is considered good music and what isn’t good music. So that’s my experience.

Chilli discusses an important facet of music education that merits extensive quotation. Above, she talks about publishers’ influence on available music (Abril, 2006); here she explores student versus teacher choice pertaining to repertoire selection. Her inclination is that student choice is important, perhaps more important than that of the teacher.

CL: My sister is part of the IB (International Baccalaureate) program ... she is required by IB to record several songs of her choice. And in those recordings, she has the option to choose a pianist or not. And so she chose me as her pianist for both of her recordings to be submitted to International Baccalaureate. Now one of them she chose [was] a Korean song.... The song is from the Korean movie *Autumn in My Heart* (laughs).... [H]er other classmate chose songs that would be generally composed by White composers, or European composers I should say. But hers was Asian, and the fact that she played the flute and I played the piano to accompany her flute it just sounded Asian. And I don't know how you would describe Asian, but it's just the way that it's being composed and the different, the usual chords that Asian music has. Now I have to explore what makes something Asian and what makes something Euro-, European. Right? (laughs). So yeah, I was really glad that she chose to do something different. It would be interesting to see more students challenge the norms by choosing music that is not composed by White composers.

Chilli's response prompted me to ask a question about student choice of repertoire. She said that her sister wanted to play another popular Asian song as her second selection for the IB project, but her teacher asked her to "try a different genre." Her sister selected *Canon in D* by Johann Pachelbel, and Chilli played piano again noting, "and that was still interesting, too, but I pretty much play it by ear. I had a little bit of fun with her, with the performance." Chilli's reflection about the kinds of music chosen by the teacher and by her sister are divergent, but she seems to exhibit an

emerging sense of musical taste that is inclusive of different kinds of music whether White-European, Asian, or her preferred music, Hip-hop.

Among artists also discuss music instruction techniques, not just repertoire selection. Fres began his teaching life as a sort of sage from the stage. His personal growth as a teaching artist and experiences with youth has helped him reflect upon his past and guide his current teaching strategies. Fres relates his own growth as a teacher of Hip-hop, one that was once a transmission model rather than an experiential, transformational one (Wink, 2011).

Music educators need to consider the role of democratic education in their own classrooms, too, because teachers tend not to explicitly provide emancipatory spaces for self-expression apart from music-centered creativity. While nurturing musical creativity is imperative, I argue that teachers concern themselves with mastery of pre-composed works more often than developing compositional skills among students. Allsup (2003) discusses two self-directed composition projects among nine American high school instrumental musicians and queries whether or not instrumental ensemble classes writ large can be rethought to include “more opportunities for creativity, self-expression, and cultural relevance” (p. 24). He summarizes: “The learning scenario described...required a level of trust that went beyond the neutral practices of normative music education.” He continues, “I needed to teach *with* my students, rather than *to* my students” (p. 34). This shift away from the authority of the conductor toward promoting student leadership from within the ensemble is worth exploring because of its potential to enrich the ways music teachers engage their students in music learning and teaching. I suggest that one way to forward democratic education in music education is to begin by threading critical

pedagogy; music learning practices, especially informal ones; and democratic education throughout pre-service teacher coursework and modeling liberatory education throughout teacher education programs.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have shared Hmong artists' voices as a way to reveal their thoughts about teaching and learning; the way they bridge gaps; and the disconnections between home and school music cultures. Creating music alone, with peers, in groups, and inter-generationally, youth artists make spaces for music making at open mic nights, concerts, workshops, social gathers, and festivals. The musicians appear to enjoy making music at these events, so they are intentional about meeting and supporting each other artistically and personally. The Hmong artists build networks among friends who are interested in issues centered on social justice, as well as on the topics of heritage, youth development, and art for the sake of art (aesthetics). A discussion of the findings will be presented in Chapter V. Attention will be focused on eight salient themes that emerged during this research project.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND EPILOGUE

Hmong youth artists create music during various kinds of community-centered activities to express themselves and their ideas about personal and social issues in their city, state, nation, and the world. Without the aid of formally certified music teachers, informal music making occurs. Though not labeled “education” per se, Hmong artists’ music making practices resemble progressive, transformative classroom pedagogies (Wink, 2011) whereby mentors and peers offer critical, if not democratic teaching and learning opportunities that involve young people as community organizers and activists who use music as a way to address individual, social, or political issues in their lives (Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah, 2012).

Ethnographic research was conducted in St. Paul, MN, with an emphasis on interviewing and observing ten Hmong Hip-hop musicians. Transcripts, field notes, observation notes, artifacts, and reflective notes were mined for emergent themes. During observations and other data collection activities, Hmong youth and their leaders demonstrated informal teaching and learning scenarios that resembled more formal, in-school music education as well as informal, less structured instructional strategies.

Discussed in this chapter are six conclusions related to Hmong youth arts culture and their relationships to music teacher education and the field of music education writ large. These conclusions are derived from the data centered on the themes democratic

education; efficacy and identity; mentorship; improvisation; access; and bridging gaps. I will also present a summary, recommendations, and future research and close the chapter with an epilogue.

### **Freedom of Expression is Fundamental to Democratic Education**

Youth want their music to affect individual, social, and political change. Joan Wink (2011) notes that in a critical pedagogy model, it is imperative to name, reflect critically, and act. The way youth arts leaders Tou, Fres, and Fong approach music teaching and learning is through a critical pedagogy that surveys people's needs, encourages them to reflect and know why they rap or speak their compositions, and act on their lived and reflected experiences. Most importantly, by employing critical pedagogical techniques, leaders forward democracy in the lives of youth. Students and teachers together, indeed, can demonstrate democratic actions through "sharing, negotiating, discussing, creating and performing music together" (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010, pp. 233-234). Much like a pebble cast into a pond creates ripples, the ripples of youth leaders' democratic actions move into and through the community by way of youth artists, many of whom are peaceful activists seeking social and political change delivered through a music and art vessel.

Freedom of expression is exemplified in the emergent themes about education and police brutality, which appeared most important to artists. Less evident but still present in the data were silence, oppression, racism, and sexism. Efforts to create educational workshops that address social justice (or rather social injustice) are important to youth leaders; they tend to bring attention to social and political issues in the community and

make music as a form of political action. Organizers even invite local politicians to speak at concerts and open mics. Banks (2009) comments on citizenship education noting that it should:

help students develop global identifications and attachments, as well as help them internalize human rights values. They also need to develop a deep understanding of the need to take action as citizens of the global community to help actualize social justice and human rights for people around the globe. (p. 107)

In a similar vein, McCowan (2006) indicates that active participation can lead to “social justice for all” (p. 1). Tou feels that when an injustice occurs, people need to speak up and says, “Not only am I letting people know and raising awareness, I’m hopefully giving inspiration or hope to somebody that might be going through the same struggle.”

The most sensitive topic that emerges from the data, particularly in interviews, song/album recordings, and films, is injustice against Hmong and other people of color. Police officers, juries, judges, and district attorneys, who unfairly punish minorities based on the color of their skin, promulgate these injustices. Fong Lee was a Hmong teenage who while riding his bike in North Minneapolis was killed by police in 2006. The Hmong community believes that Lee’s death was staged by police and made to look like the victim was fleeing from authorities. Tou and other musicians have rapped and sung about this event as part of the Twin Cities-based *Justice for Fong Lee* movement.

Similarly, the documentary *Open Season* is a film regarding Chai Vang who wandered onto private property while hunting in Wisconsin. Nine White landowners surrounded him; Vang shot and killed six and wounded three others. The Hmong community did not deny his culpability in the act, but they were outraged by the legal

procedure that included an all-White jury from central Wisconsin that convicted him of all six counts of murder. These kinds of acts against Hmong people and other minorities spur youth artists to perform music about racial injustice and oppression with hopes of shaping positive perceptions about minority populations among non-minority citizens in the Twin Cities. Poss (2013) indicates that no political solutions are evident in Tou or his brother's lyrics, "but they draw connections across the Hmong diaspora to raise awareness about the continuing persecution of Hmong people" (p. 9).

Silence, oppression, racism, and sexism appear intermittently throughout the data, but they do not comprise a significant amount of notations in interviews, focus groups, or field notes. In sum, Chilli states, "I'm talking about racial justice. I'm talking about the White dominant culture and how there has been a repeated history of people of color not getting the justice that they want. And so [the music's] really effective when I express the anger through spoken word or rap versus me going up to a mic and saying, "We want some equality." These sub-themes are more like an undercurrent and they deserve future study.

The code self-expression is one that is carried throughout the data and ultimately is its own emergent theme. It brings to light the reason musicians do what they do: They want to "say" something with their music. Arts leaders, schoolteachers included, can facilitate self-expression by providing music making activities that forward democratic education for, beside, and with students whereby all involved can make a positive difference in their communities by making music and other arts.

Self-expression is an important issue for participants. Allsup (2003), Lehtonen (2002), and McFerran-Skewes (2005) describe self-expression in terms of one being able



to share his or her own ideas about life and personal experiences. Allsup postulates that ensemble music classes could be re-imagined to allow students the opportunity to self-express. In the latter two cases, both studies from the field of music therapy, researchers use music lyric writing or song listening to help patients express their feelings. Chilli shares the power of music in the lives of Hmong youth: “You could express yourself. And by expressing my feeling, my anger, for being singled out and left out. You could say it really saved me.”

Tou SaiKo Lee, Chilli, and others in the Hmong community work diligently to create spaces for youth to speak out about issues that affect them in their St. Paul neighborhoods. Their approach is artistic and capitalizes on the inborn and nurtured talents of rappers, singers, and poets. Hmong youth artists seem to do what I think teachers may not readily or easily do in their classrooms: Hmong musicians raise the critical, democratic consciousness among youths so that they, in turn, will act for the betterment of their lived experiences. Their willingness and enthusiasm to debate and speak clearly through music and other art forms is borne from a sort of Hmong cultural politeness to accept things as they are, that is, to be silent and not make waves.

### **Self-Efficacy and Identity Formation are Fostered through Participation in Music**

Youth become productive individuals in their communities by participating in education and community initiatives that foster self-efficacy, the ability for people to reach their goals. First, education initiatives that build confidence among youth to become self-efficacious are an important part of meetings, workshops, and open mic night events. Fres, who mentions his own increased confidence, discusses his own

development as a Hip-hop teacher at CHAT. He says that you have to teach the music by letting students create it, not talk at them about Hip-hop's history. Abrahams's (2010) research of *O Passo*, a music education method in Brazil, reveals how teachers promote self-efficacy among students in order to master their arts. Fres's work, as well as others, shows how Hip-hop, not traditional Hmong music, is the mode through which youth develop into self-efficacious citizens.

Second, youth leaders find that they must be intentional about creating a community for music and art making. Musicians establish a vibrant arts community in which to share their lived experiences as Hmong Americans in St. Paul. Higgins (2007) discusses the development of collective and individual identity that is fostered through regular participation in community groups. For Hmong youth, opportunities to gather and share stories and songs are plentiful because of youth development initiatives created by Hmong arts organizations. Tou SaiKo Lee and Fres organize additional community events that appear to be effective ways to raise awareness about identity, social justice, and politics. Because there are these avenues to become responsible and self-confident young adults, this process, in turn, shows depth and breadth that informal music learning practices have on democracy making.

Self and group identities are considered important reasons for participating in music and other art forms such as theater and dance. Hmong identity is referred to colloquially as "Hmong-ness," as in Chilli's comment about living in a Hmong household, "I've grown up with this Hmong-ness." Her expression embodies concerns expressed by participants: Music is used for self-expression, identity formation, the telling of migration stories, and as a bridge between younger and older generations.

Laurine says why she joined theater during high school: “[T]o me, racism and cultural identity were always very important to me as something that I questioned – I struggled with growing up.” As a teacher of Hip-hop, Fres grew up as an artist and learned how to really express himself; he says, “I’m not afraid to just express myself as in the way I teach my youth now to express themselves.” The belief that identity and music are connected is supported in the literature about community music making (Webster, 2005; Higgins, 2007) and music therapy (McFerran et al., 2006). Given the opportunity to compose during in-class activities, teachers will forward both an aesthetic experience for students and at the same time provide an identity-building and identity-affirming space for self-expression around what might be important personal or societal issues in the lives of learners.

### **Mentor-Mentee Relationships are Key to Music Teaching and Learning**

Mentor-Mentee relationships are crucial to artists’ development as Hip-hop musicians. Tou SaiK and Money’s friendship allows them to collaborate with one another to write their raps. This thesis shows that Hmong community artists like Tou and Money have a long-time friendship that gives them insider knowledge about each other’s lives, and that seems to foster a safe environment in which to create music. Friend groups (Green, 2011), as well as working together with peers and teachers (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2010), tend to lead to democratic learning; however, if friendships do not exist prior to collaboration, the possibility for musical success is not quickly achieved (Miell & MacDonald, 2000). In addition to peer friend groups is the presence of

intergenerational mentoring among relatives where musicians use traditional stories and songs of Hmong culture as a backbone for coming together.

Migration-refugee history and the generation gap are related sub-themes of Hmong identity, because both are sung and rapped about in old and modern forms of music. So it is in the re-creation of Hmong stories that the duo Fresh Traditions, Tou and his grandmother, perform rap and *kvw txhiaj* (Poss, 2013). This is an exemplar of bridge spanning between generations. The use of music appears to be a way for Hmong youth to tell the stories of a shared past as a people and express their feelings about being Hmong in America. S. J. Lee (2007) notes that second generation Hmong youth have adopted Hip-hop style “as a response to the problems they faced at school and in the larger society” and that it is “a form of resistance to race and class exclusion they experienced as low-income youth of color” (p. 180). Evidenced by Tou’s mentorship of and collaboration with Chilli, Teng, Triple G, and many other youth, participants appear to use their skills in positive ways associated with preserving the migration-refugee story, as well as bridge building between the younger and older generations.

The same kind of mentor-mentee relationships occur in school music settings where teachers and students spend extensive time together at school building communities of music and communities of trust. Teachers and student leaders foster camaraderie among music students by engaging in musical and non-musical activities that develop into friendships based on shared interests in instrumental or choral ensembles. In the best situation, students and teachers build trust bonds that allow them to share their feelings and emotions in and out of music rehearsals. In my experience, these trust bonds deepen and improve music making experiences for all musicians. Compared

to the Hmong mentor-mentee relationships presented in this study, relationship building in school music settings is similar.

### **Improvisation Frees Space for Creative Expression**

Hmong youth arts leaders have not taken coursework in improvisation. When improvisation occurs in workshops, it is neither systematic nor scholarly. Sometimes it is messy and other times participants “spit” raps without hesitation. Tou SaiKo Lee utilizes improvisation as a way to open doors for self-expression. Youth who participate in his workshops are encouraged to contribute snippets of rap or poetry to group-composed raps such as “We Needs Some Elevation.” Through their words, young people talk about their personal and community struggles as well as their aspirations.

However, spontaneous creation is not the forte of some of his youth, but Tou welcomes any contribution. Young artists are free to experiment, make mistakes, and continuously attempt to make up words or motions. In one UP meeting, youth arts leader Jack rapped, “I have a education.” Everyone looked at him and laughed. Tou joked, “You said ‘a education.’” Immediately, he set Jack and others at ease by making a safe learning environment where mistakes are not seen “as errors but as opportunities for reflection and learning” (Gee, 2007, p. 36).

Music teachers I know discuss improvisation and lament that students are oftentimes afraid to play without sheet music or lack the skills to improvise. I lack skills to teach improvisation, because I was trained to reproduce music printed on paper, a practice established in the “music college or conservatory” (Small, 1998, p. 67). Gridley (2003) notes that improvisers need to have both aural and reading skills in order to create

their music, a premise that is also supported by Schippers (2010). In studies by Lapidaki (2007) and Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010), they advocate for improvisation coursework for in- and pre-service teachers. Lapidaki also indicates that teachers need sufficient professional development to make the most effective use of improvisation in classes. However, the youth do not always read music or take classes devoted to improvisation.

Hmong youth follow oral traditions by listening to others, watching YouTube videos, and participating in activities such as open mics and workshops with friends. Their improvisational skills are varied from artist to artist. Though I have heard some rappers and poets improvise spontaneous compositions, the practice of spitting long, improvised raps is uncommon. Providing opportunities as in “We Need Some Elevation” is a way to gradually develop rap skills and help them raise their voices for worthy causes in their homes, schools, and communities.

The music teaching and learning techniques used by Hmong appear to work well among youth participants, because artists are self or peer reliant for guidance in both formal and informal settings. For youth who participated in this study, school-based music education was not a prevalent part of their education, and in order for their voices to be heard, they needed some other venue. Green (2008) indicates that community settings are often better places to enact informal music learning situations because there is generally less oversight.

In this study, Hmong youth seek spaces in which to make music that not only helps them to self and group express, but also has a positive impact on the social and political landscapes of their lives. Dewey (1916/2011) indicates that formal instruction

“becomes remote and dead – abstract and bookish ...” (p. 9). He continues by noting that accumulated knowledge in working class societies “is at least put into knowledge” where formal education is not a priority. Formal education for some young people lacks the relevance necessary to spur creativity. Fear exists that “the hampering influence of a state-conducted and state-regulated education” will limit the “development of private personality” (Dewey, 1916/2011, p. 54).

Tou SaiKo Lee makes a safe and creative space; he bridges the gap between formal and informal music learning by enabling youth artists to create music that has a purpose both for social justice reasons and aesthetic ones, too (e.g., songs about sunshine). While music is sung and spoken from emancipatory spaces and places where full participation, openness, and hospitality (Higgins, 2007) are encouraged, Tou’s critical approach aids Hmong artists in the way Wink (2011) describes critical pedagogy. Without calling it such, Hmong youth name issues, reflect critically, and act on issues in a manner that is consistent with the tenets of critical pedagogy. What, however, does this mean for music teacher education?

Music educator preparers have a privilege and responsibility to guide pre-service teachers into and through their undergraduate education at a formative and powerful intersection where youth and adulthood collide. It is at this juncture where a baccalaureate degree in music education can give pre-service teachers the opportunity to explore democratic education just like they might in teaching methods and instrumental or vocal techniques classes. Making spaces for creative expression, including improvisation, in the music education degree program will show an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) or “right result” (Regelski, 2002) that places value on pre-service

teachers as contributors to their own stories, including their chosen careers as music teachers. The message is this: Effective teaching is democratic teaching.

### **Access to Music by Non-White Composers is Limited**

The Hmong youth artists in this study enjoy popular forms of music such as rap or rock covers to teach and learn informally. They make use of vernacular music from Hip-hop culture and make it into something that is their own, something motivational that gives voice to their personal-social-political needs, wants, desires, hopes, and dreams.

Chilli, in the IB project story from Chapter IV, indicates that she and her sister performed two selections, a song from the Korean television drama *Autumn in My Heart* by composer Yiruma and *Canon in D major* by Pachelbel. She shares two opinions about the selection requirement proposed by her sister's teacher. First, Chilli liked the Korean music; second, she was skeptical about having to choose something other than another Asian piece. Regarding *Autumn in My Heart*, it met Chilli and her sister where they are in their appreciation of musical genres not simply because they are Asian women, but also because they are young (at the time, under 20 years of age). Abril (2006) discusses the importance of cultural sensitivity and music selection while de Quadros (2009) is concerned with the inclusion of Asian musics in the school curriculum. Both point to a need for multicultural considerations regarding repertoire selection. I agree with the teacher; allowing Chilli's sister to perform one Asian song is a way to meet the student where she is musically and introduce her to something she might not have know if it were not for the teacher's professional judgment – his ethic of care.



Second, after reflecting on *Canon*, Chilli says, “And that was still interesting too ... I kind of had a little bit of fun with [my sister].” This statement appears to reveal Chilli’s emerging taste in music. Because this project was her sister’s IB project and not her own, it is difficult to determine whether or not this is an accurate assessment of Chilli’s attitude about music in school. The most interesting idea that surfaces in the data from this interview is Chilli’s belief that flute, her sister’s instrument, and piano “just sounded Asian.” Then she muses, “Now I have to explore what makes something Asian and what makes something European.” In Chilli’s opinion, the challenge of repertoire in school, either in her own ninth grade women’s choir experience or her sister’s IB project, is something that must be addressed by teachers in order to make music relevant to students.

Schippers (2010) employs what he calls the Twelve Continuum Transmission Framework as a system to diagram musical context, modes of transmission, interaction, and cultural diversity (p. 163). By placing these criteria on a continuum, he shows that music selection or transmission modes, for example, are not dichotomous. They can be blended and amorphous given teacher, student, school, or community circumstances (Abril, 2006). Selection criteria must somehow simultaneously be rooted in traditions of Western art music culture and progressive enough to allow popular music such as rap into the school music curriculum and not just the English or poetry class (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Based on Chilli’s reflection about her own experiences and those of her sister, multicultural music from Asian cultures, as well as popular music enjoyed by young people are important, and she would like to see them included in school music programs.

Music selection is an important part of music teaching and learning in both school and community settings. Making the repertoire relevant to students while simultaneously scaffolding learning opportunities for musical growth in traditional musics is the challenge for both school teachers and community-based teaching artists. Bridging the gap is imperative if students' musical tastes will be leveraged in school music programs to give all students a chance to connect with music in meaningful and artistic ways.

### **Bridging the Gaps is a Critical Pedagogy**

Youth artists who participated in this study do not feel connected to the music or the kinds of performance venues selected by schoolteachers. Reimer (2009a) questions whether or not music teachers are “out of touch” (p. 393). The gaps between Western and Eastern musics or new and old ones, for example, may be an example of music's relevance in that school and home musics are often dissimilar. The key to building relationships beyond the school is to find ways to connect the dots – to bridge the gaps. It is possible to bridge gaps by employing a critical pedagogy that advances democratic education for teachers and learners.

Bridging disconnections is a matter of linking peoples community and school experiences by utilizing critical pedagogies in both settings. The critical pedagogies presented in music education research and practice, especially by Abrahams (2005a, 2005b, 2010), Allsup and Shieh (2012), and Regelski (2006) are limited to music teaching and learning in school music settings. Outside the field of music education, Freire (1970) provides evidence that critical pedagogies, though present in schooling situations, can and should be applied within community settings, too.

Critical pedagogy in the Hmong youth arts community is congruent with Wink's (2011) mantra – to name, reflect critically, and act – within school settings. When Tou began visiting schools as a teaching artist, he “didn't realize that [he] could inspire young people to make decisions in their lives as far as what they wanna pursue, what they want their passions to be with music or with activism.” Without calling his work a form of critical pedagogy, Tou empowers youth to name the issues that touch them personally and transform their reflected experiences into action.

Through his work as a community-teaching artist, Tou SaiKo Lee is a model critical pedagogue by the way he engages youth during his workshops and meetings both in community and school settings. He utilizes critical thinking strategies to teach rap and poetry and encourages students to name, reflect, and act, as well as “accept that they have responsibilities towards other people and to the planet which is humankind's home (Tanner, 2007, p. 154). In essence, Tou bridges the youths' lived experiences to each other whereby each informs the other (see Figure 7).

Gap spanning is imperative, and the bridge here is that teacher educators, pre-service teachers, and community members such as Tou, Fres, and Fong might work together in order to leverage the knowledge sets presented by both partners inside and outside schools (Potthoff et al., 2013). Stakeholders need to consider the power of bridging gaps between students' lived experiences so that teaching and learning experiences are edified in ways that edify music making for all involved.

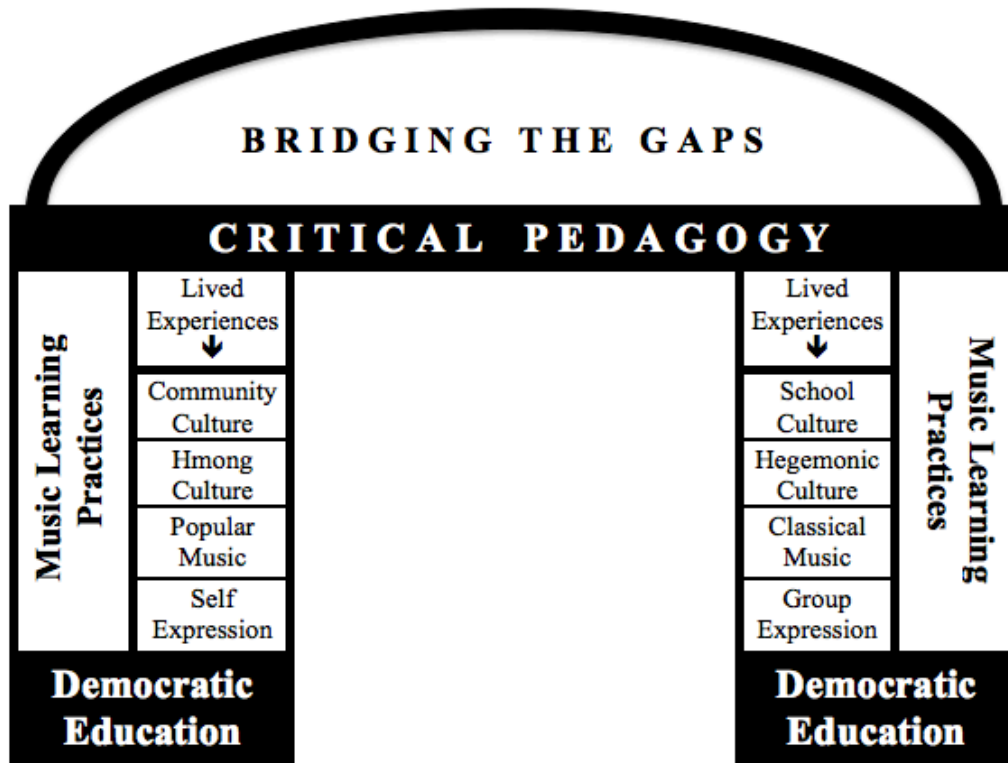


Figure 7: Relationship of Findings to Theoretical Framework

## Summary

Music making in the Hmong community is important and what the Hmong youth and their leaders do is critically important to their development as artist-musician-leaders. Preparing teaches for a changing world means creating many places and spaces for music making – music making of many kinds. We teachers often include music of others in order to address the relevancy question; however, we do not necessarily think outside the realms of our traditional music training and look into the critically personal, group, social, or political possibilities that music can have in the lives of our students as they look to address the big questions (Allsup & Shieh, 2012) of our society such as homelessness, poverty, the housing crisis, war, or acts against humanity.

Self and group expression is a discovery and affirmation process that involves all kinds of teaching and learning situations that allow Hmong youth artists to build and live their identities as individuals and a collective. In some cases, youth become self-efficacious in ways that allow them to contribute positively to their communities. Through their musical contributions they build a democratic society on which others are empowered to do the same.

Gap connecting is a critical pedagogy. It is an act of democratizing education, because through it, teachers empower people like the Hmong youth in this study, to create music for positive change. Creating music for any purpose – social justice, youth development, identity formation, or aesthetics – helps students learn how to make choices for themselves that will hopefully translate to choices that benefit society today and well into the future.

## **Recommendations**

### **Critical Pedagogy and Democracy**

Music teacher preparation coursework can be enhanced if it *includes critical pedagogy as part of the core coursework toward licensure or certification* (Abrahams, 2004; Abrahams & Head, 2005). Although explicit instruction in critical pedagogy is important, another aspect is that teacher preparers must model critical pedagogy in their classes so that pre-service teachers do not only study it as an academic subject, but experience it as a living pedagogy. Additionally, if critical pedagogy is one answer to empowering students, then it must be explicated that democracy in music education begins with teachers who value students' voices as integral to choice-making within and outside schools.

### **University and Community: Expanding the Canon**

Though not within the purview of this study, this is a model for engaged community-university research where community teaching artists and university pre-service teachers (and their professors) work together to inform each others' practices that explicate the importance of forwarding democracy through a critical pedagogy model in music education.

Community-based music teaching and learning experiences should be provided for pre-service teachers. Activities including popular music "methods" (Strand & Sumner, 2010), open mic events, and non-school practicum field experiences (Potthoff et al., 2013) will enrich music education programs by guiding pre-service teachers in new

ways of engaging with students both inside and outside schools with the chief aim to empower young people to sing, speak, and play in critically purposive manners.

Engaged teaching, learning, research, and creative endeavors that leverage the power of community artists and university faculty and students is not within the purview of this study. However, partnering with teaching artists like Tou SaiKo Lee might give pre-service music teachers opportunities to learn and practice music employed in community settings, thereby increasing their critical awareness of musical practices.

Community teaching artists and pre-service teachers might partner in mentor-mentee relationships similar to the ones I witnessed during this research study. By sharing ideas across the gap from informal to formal, community to school, both partners will share and learn valuable tools from each other relevant to community organizing, pedagogical strategies to engage critical learning, and student-artist empowerment. Future research is needed to determine how pre-service music teachers and teaching artists would benefit in this kind of partner program. Additionally, if partnerships were to occur, would pre-service teachers' attitudes about community musics such as Hip-hop be affected so that they implement their learning into the school curriculum? Would teaching artists attitudes shift in a similar fashion that manifests itself in the community settings? This will require *re-imagination of instrumental, vocal, or general methods courses to include both traditional instruction in applicable teaching and learning techniques and informal learning within classroom settings.*

## Future Research

### Self-Expression in Music Classes

When Chilli notes, “You could express yourself. And by expressing my feeling, my anger, for being singled out and left out. You could say it really saved me,” she is talking about how the people and activities associated with Hmong youth arts culture have supported her throughout her life. Patients of music therapy provide information about themselves that is helpful to their treatment and recovery (McFerran-Skewes, 2005). Sometimes, they reveal through music therapy what they might not share through regular talk therapy (Gold, Vorecek, & Wigram, 2004; McFerran, Baker, Patton, & Sawyer, 2006).

Music teachers, I argue, could employ the fourth National Standard, composition, to engage students in song or lyric writing as an ongoing objective in intact classroom music settings that could provide a necessary coping tool for students to be themselves, to self-express, and offer their artistry in non-therapy settings. Future research might include a study that utilizes music therapy-like techniques in intact classes to determine if students, especially those who would benefit from explicit talk or music therapy, are truly supported by the activity of composition. Additional research would center on school-wide open mic events and their effect on student participation in music activities as in my colleague Martha’s *Baggy Plaid Night* event (see Chapter III, pp. 106-107).



### **Self-Expression in Instrumental Music**

This study is an investigation of Hip-hop music, through which youth express their feelings, self and group, about life with words. The limitation, however, is that exclusively instrumental music is not a focus of participants or this researcher. How can people express their feelings without the advantage of text through solo or ensemble instrumental music? In Allsup's (2003) study of the relationship between democracy and instrumental music, he suggests that the friendships and trust that emerge from side-by-side mentoring are ways toward democratic teaching. Further study, however, is needed that addresses the specific aspects of instrumental music composition and performance techniques that could give "voice" to students in similar ways as music with lyrics.

### **Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance**

Many music teachers empower their students to think critically about the music they play and sing. Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP), established in Wisconsin in 1977 (O'Toole, 2003), is the kind of student-teacher engagement I employed as a public school music educator. It is a logical step toward critical pedagogy that gives students a voice about their music making experiences which in itself is an excellent model for teaching and learning in music classes and ensembles. However, the missing link is that the transfer of CMP to issues outside classrooms is limited to music alone unless fully explicated by teachers who wish for their students to be self-efficacious and community-minded.

How might the CMP model be leveraged to help students think critically about the public questions that touch their lives whether school- or community-related? How

could CMP and critical pedagogy be combined to address both music making and socio-political issues? Research and practice need to be conducted that extends the scope of CMP beyond classroom settings and into the public sphere.

### **Middle and High School Focus**

During this study, it became clear that middle and high school students should be included in future research. First, an investigation of how they come to create and perform Hip-hop music might help music educators understand why youth feel rap or spoken word poetry is important in their lives. Second, students who currently participate in CHAT programs would shed light on a younger age group's opinions about music in school, home, and community that might contribute more directly to in-service teachers' professional development around community music making activities; hence, it could help teachers support students in culturally sensitive ways. Third, I discovered through arts leaders like Tou and Fres that Hip-hop is not necessarily an acceptable art form in Hmong households where youngsters live. What about Hip-hop and youth culture is dissonant in Hmong home settings and how could families come together to create artworks including musical compositions that connect the generation gap and build strong communities in which all members share their voices for positive change?

## Epilogue

Music is a powerful life force that enables self-expression, creativity, and communication. Hmong youth artists use music to express their feelings about issues in their communities through the creation of music, because it helps them tell stories about their experiences. Today, grassroots arts leaders work together to affect positive changes in their communities by empowering young people to use their voices to address myriad issues about themselves and their communities. Hmong youth artists who participated in this study have contributed to the musical fiber of the Twin Cities, and they continue to make a positive, life-changing impact on social issues that affect people within and outside their neighborhoods and schools.

As music educators of the twenty-first century, it is important to name issues that affect teachers, students, and communities; critically reflect on musical opportunities that will forward democracy inside and outside classrooms; and act in ways that empower all stakeholders to live and make music creatively. Whether utilizing informal music learning practices to help students become independent music makers or to give them an emancipatory space for self-expression, teachers can positively serve youth by modeling democracy in action through guided and unguided teaching and learning activities.

Hmong youth and their youth arts leaders provide an excellent teaching and learning model that could easily be applied to music teacher education. By partnering with community musicians in the same way that music education majors are currently placed with cooperating teachers, pre-service educators might benefit innumerable from the experiences of people like Tou SaiKo Lee. In our last interview, Tou shared his

feelings about the influence he has had as a teacher, mentor, and Hip-hop artist. Maybe his message is mine, too.

I think the reason why I keep telling this story is because it's a validation or proof that it's possible and that it's very positive and effective and impactful to mentor [and] to give back to community – to be visible as a role model – as someone that is presenting a positive music: Hip-hop that is meaningful or spoken word poetry. So in that sense, that's where I felt like it was very powerful. [Chilli's] story is very powerful for me as someone that continues to visit schools, work with youth, and do art. It helps motivate me to keep going and helps gives me the drive to understand how much of an impact the work that I do could make. And that I should continue doing it and that I should encourage other artists or people in the community to do the same.

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## APPENDICES

- A: Initial Questions for Individuals (Class IRB Code Number 1008S87695)
- B: Consent Form (Individual IRB Code Number 1205E15033)
- C: Interview Protocol by Lucy Green (2002)
- D: Focus Group Protocol
- E: Photographs
- F: *30 Year Secret*

## APPENDIX A

### **Initial Protocol for Individuals Fall 2010, Spring and Summer 2011**

Interview Protocol  
Class IRB Code Number 1008S87695

Hmong Youth Arts Culture: Affecting Change Through Informal Music Education  
Kinh T. Vu, Ph.D. Candidate  
Music Education

Name:  
Date:  
Time Start:  
Time End:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This interview is scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes and will be recorded for transcription at a later date. I will share the transcription with you for your feedback before proceeding with further analysis of this interview.

#### **Research Questions**

1. How do Hmong youth employ music education activities such as composition and performance in self, peer, and group music teaching and learning in informal settings?
2. What can these informal, Hmong community-specific instructional strategies tell music education specialists about how this distinct ethnic group learns and performs?
3. How might what the Hmong do in their communities translate to K-12 music classrooms?

## APPENDIX A (continued)

### Specific Interview Questions for Individual Participant

*Many questions are based on my own knowing about this participant from personal friendship prior to research and during research for Qualitative Research Coursework in MuEd 8118 and 8119 taught by Dr. Akosua Addo, associate professor of music education [IRB Code Number: 1008S87695].*

1. What brought you and your family to St. Paul? How long ago?
2. Are you first generation, first migration, or second migration (or other)?
3. Do you have family in other parts of the United States? In Southeast Asia?
4. Tell me about your Hip-Hop. What term was it that you use to describe your art?
5. How did you get involved with youth leadership?
6. I listened to several YouTube videos and to an audio file you gave me called "Blackbird Elements: Saving the Roots." Talk to me more about Chai Vang and Fong Lee? How does Hip-Hop help you and your community resolve the disconnect between a majority White government and Hmong people in the Twin Cities?
7. What was the lesson you taught sixth graders at Woodbury Middle School? Why Woodbury?
8. Share more information about Nicholas Poss's study of traditional Hmong music/instruments.
9. What angle did Justin Schell take on the Hip-Hop diaspora?
10. Do you think the schools and music teachers will be open to working with artists like you?
11. Tell me more about your band. What do you play? Who else is in it? Do you play in public venues?
12. Who else should I talk to in the Hmong youth community?
13. How do you see this study going in the future?
14. What questions should I be asking?



## APPENDIX B

### Consent Form

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2  
SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS;  
OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

**Study Number:** 1205E15033

**Principal Investigator:** Kinh Vu

### Consent Information Sheet

**University of Minnesota: IRB Code Number: 1205E15033**

## **Hmong Youth Arts Culture: Affecting Change Through Informal Music Education**

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You are invited to be in a research study as part of my research course requirements. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of St. Paul, Minnesota's Hmong community and are interested in music as a career and/or avocation.

This study is being conducted by Kinh T. Vu under the supervision of dissertation advisor Dr. Akosua Addo, associate professor of music education, School of Music, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore informal music teaching and learning in Hmong communities of St. Paul, and to inform music teaching in K-12 settings. By focusing on rap and lyrical songs, as well as spoken word poetry, three guiding questions will be explored: (1) How do Hmong youth employ music education activities such as composition and performance in self, peer, and group music teaching and learning in informal settings; (2) What can these informal, Hmong community-specific instructional strategies tell music education specialists about how this distinct ethnic group learns and performs; and (3) How might what the Hmong do in their communities translate to K-12 music classrooms?

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you participate in a 45-minute interview with attached questions.

## APPENDIX B (continued)

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

- There are minimal risks involved in participating in the study.
- There are no benefits to participating in the study.
- You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant, school, or workplace. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only I will have access to the records.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or your present institution. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Vu Tien Kinh. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at:

Kinh T. Vu  
kvu00001@umn.edu  
612-206-2900

OR

Dr. Akosua Addo  
addox002@umn.edu  
612-624-8516

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), contact:

Research Subjects' Advocate Line  
D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
612-625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

## APPENDIX C

### Focus Group Protocol Summer 2011

Focus Group Protocol  
Class IRB Code Number 1008S87695

Hmong Youth Arts Culture: Affecting Change Through Informal Music Education  
Kinh T. Vu, Ph.D. Candidate  
Music Education

Name:

Date:

Time Start:

Time End:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This focus group is scheduled to last approximately 1.5 hours and will be recorded for transcription at a later date. I will share the transcription with you for your feedback before proceeding with further analysis of this interview.

#### Research Questions

1. How do Hmong youth employ music education activities such as composition and performance in self, peer, and group music teaching and learning in informal settings?
2. What can these informal, Hmong community-specific instructional strategies tell music education specialists about how this distinct ethnic group learns and performs?
3. How might what the Hmong do in their communities translate to K-12 music classrooms?

#### Focus Group Questions for Students of Primary Participant

1. Meet and greet around the room.
2. How did you get involved in the arts (performing or visual)?
3. Where do you go to school? Do you create your art(s) at school?
4. How effective are the arts at conveying critical messages, both positive and negative, about the Hmong experience in St. Paul and the Twin Cities at large?
5. Do you think your artistic endeavors make a difference of any sort in the lives of people, Hmong or otherwise, in your neighborhoods, schools, churches, community centers, etc.?
6. Who plays or played an important role in your artistic development (role models, mentors)?

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol by Lucy Green (2002, pp. 12-13)

1. What is the nature of your skills and knowledge [e.g., MC, rap, lyrical song, spoken word poetry, b-boy, b-girl, other]?
2. How have you gone about acquiring these skills and knowledge?
3. How have you developed as a musician?
4. What attitudes and values are attached to acquiring your artistry/musicianship?
5. What experiences have you had as pupils and students in formal music education?
6. What opinions do you have concerning the current position of popular music education [i.e., in schools, do you think it even exists and if so, how]?
7. What experiences have you had as a teacher [i.e., peer mentor]?

Text in brackets was added for relevance to this study.

## APPENDIX E

### Photographs



Tou SaiKo Lee: Spoken Word Summit  
August 2011



Chilli: Frogtown Open Mic  
September 2012



Fong: United Prodigies Meeting  
January 2011



Triple G: Facebook Image  
March 2013



APPENDIX E (continued)



United Prodiges Banner from UP Launching Event, March 2011



Puppets at CHAT Arts Festival  
August 2011



Tou: Eastside Rising Open Mic  
August 2012



**APPENDIX E (continued)**



Tou SaiKo Lee instructing youth leaders at United Prodigies Meeting  
September 2012



Tou SaiKo Lee and Rebel  
Hmong New Year 2011



APPENDIX E (continued)



CHAT Arts Festival  
August 2011



Laurine: Open Mic  
September 2011



Eastside Rising Advertisement



## APPENDIX E (continued)


**HOW WE STARTED...**

**ABOUT UNITED PRODIGIES**

We are a group of artist/activists who values the arts and feel that there is a need for it to be utilized as a vessel to make change in our community.

We want to help lead the Hmong people, especially the younger generation to be a socially conscious generation and to lead in making a change in our world, beginning from our own community.

Our name describes exactly what we are about. In order to make create positive outcomes in our community, we have to be united as a whole and use our gifts and talents for a good cause.



Tou Saiko Lee is one of the founders of United Prodigies along side with other Artists/Activist PK Yang and XP.

**WHAT WE ARE DOING?**

**>SPEAK UP SESSIONS:**  
Weekly sessions where youth are gathered to get training in community organizing towards social issues using the arts.

**>SHOWCASES**  
Arts Events including live concerts, open mic, rallies, visual arts show case and fundraisers for the community organized by the Youth.

**>SCHOLARSHIPS**  
Youth will have the opportunity scholarship through our fundraisers

United Prodigies Flyer



Tou SaiKo Lee and Chilli enjoying Hmong food at Hmong Village, St. Paul

## APPENDIX F

### *30 Year Secret*

#### **Verse 1**

Thirty years of war persecuted and scorned  
Behind enemy lines a small child is born  
What will he live for, fightin' for the rest of his life  
Gun shots, chemical bombs, or sliced with a knife  
Shrapnel within flesh, children poisoned to death  
Defend the villages. Soldiers killed in combat.  
A contract that's been cracked, split up and attacked with no tracks  
And they only fight back for survival reasons  
And they wish it the sky for the will to keep breathin'  
The jungles are a prison, scarred into our visions  
Now I want you to listen cause our people have risen  
Starvin' for any meal, they kept it concealed  
They're blood spills all over the rice fields for real  
A tragic massacre of tears and emotions that can flood the Mekong River to be an ocean  
Our people are sufferin' and time is runnin' out

#### **Verse 2**

I see my mother workin' late again, father holdin' paper tens  
Drama on the corner we ignore but we relate to them  
Stay within the circle representin' every state we in  
Penetrate the system now the prison wants to take us in  
Listen to my elder folks, cousin loves to sell his smokes  
Sister's in the kitchen cookin' breakfast to the smell of smoke  
Flea market weekend, sleeping sixty minutes two, two hours  
Been workin' overtime and had no time to take a shower  
Family business, slow, still on the go.  
Blow for blow we slug it out against the winter and snow.  
Ever since existence we have been survivors, neglected  
Never claimed a country.  
Just wanted to live and let live  
Now it's been thirty years since imprisonment in the jungle for the Hmong  
Remind your elders and educate the young  
Laotian government, genocide, human rights, a violation  
Clock is runnin' down to total annihilation  
Lift a finger now, stop procrastinatin'  
Save a child, save a mother.  
Throw your clock and watch away the time is now.  
Stop searchin' for time, time is runnin' out  
Stop searchin' for time, the time is now.

*(continued on next page)*

## APPENDIX F (continued)

### Chorus

Don't let our people die.  
Save our people.  
Save our people. Go  
Listen to their cries.  
Voices of sorrow.

### Verse 3

Another dyin' relative sleepin' life away like a sedative  
Death is interactive, don't it make you feel relative.  
Children feelin' negative, repetitive, survival mode, spirits from the old.  
Neglected perspective grows if we let it.  
The mind stays infected, so  
Memories suppress it.  
Mothers fetuses die. Hold your chin high.  
Let the wind dry your eyes.  
Here we go, levitate, aggravate, penetrate, let 'em hate, escalate what you know  
Mental state, gotta grow  
System teach you to fear being bold  
Hmong people on the go, dying slow, so  
Do the math with me, subtract morality, add fatality  
Divide, broken pride, equals America lied.  
Tears blur our vision so we listen to the violence.  
She could be the silence or the sirens  
Divided corner shrieks, fight for the air we breathe  
Tears we see, families we grieve.  
This is disgustin' must it wipe a life or two  
Fallen soldiers yesterday's news  
Father's in the grave, nobody left to fill his shoes.

### Outro

Wake up to gun shots  
Silence is just a dream  
Wake up to gun shots  
Silence is just a dream  
Wake up to gun shots  
Silence is just a dream