

Exploration of Student Development through Songwriting

By

Patricia E. Riley
The University of Vermont

Abstract

This research explored the personal development resulting from songwriting interactions of undergraduate liberal arts students in two sections of a first-year experience course working to develop and refine songwriting skill. The goal of the course was to help students communicate and express themselves through songwriting in a supportive and collaborative environment. In-class activities included students collaboratively analyzing and discussing existing songs, interacting with guest songwriters, and discussing two texts. Student assignments included creating five original songs, analyzing pre-existing self-chosen songs, mentoring and collaborating with each other regarding their original songs, performing in a coffee-house presentation, and reflecting on their development in a songwriter's journal and final reflection paper. Data were the students' final reflection papers and lyrics from the original songs. Analysis of the data revealed numerous rewards of engaging in the songwriting activity. Songwriting appears to facilitate student development through enabling emotional stability, offering therapeutic benefits, and providing a vehicle for self-expression, self-discovery, and overcoming challenges.

Keywords: music, composition, songwriting, personal development

Enrolling in a songwriting class was not something I was expecting to do during my first semester in college. I don't have a great singing voice nor do I play any musical instrument very well. What I do have is a love for music and a desire to learn about it. They say in college one should try different things and branch out to find their passion. I decided to try a songwriting class and am so glad I did... I learned so much and really have come to appreciate music on a whole new level. I still do not sing very well, nor can I play a musical instrument, but my love for music and joy in listening to it has grown immensely. Thank you for broadening my views and enriching my musical background. My new knowledge and the experience of going "out of the box" and taking chances with expressing my emotions have helped me grow as a person. (David, reflection paper, 12/09)

Songwriting is a creative activity that helps persons express a range of ideas and feelings. Through songwriting, people can often address personal issues. Songwriting also reaches many, as it is an appealing activity for those who may not participate in traditional school performance ensembles. Typically, songwriting courses exist as electives with the goal of providing creative musical experiences for students who may or may not have music reading skills. Often, activities in these classes include students writing, performing, listening to, discussing, and critiquing songs.

It has been 5 years since Kratus' (2007) Centennial Series article in the *Music Educators Journal*, "Music Education at the Tipping Point," yet many music educators still struggle with the question of how to keep music education relevant in today's society. According to Kratus (2007),

History shows that American music educators have been most successful and their positions most secure when they satisfy the prevailing musical desires of the public...Conversely, music education has suffered when it has been perceived as

culturally irrelevant and unnecessary. History also tells us that the public's experience of music does not stand still: it keeps moving forward. For music education to remain relevant and provide value, it too must change with the times...(p. 42)

Kratus (2007) went on to encourage educators to look at how music is used in the real world, as opposed to in school, and cited innovative programs that the author felt exemplified relevancy, including a ukulele program in Australia, the Metropolitan Opera Guild's "Creating Original Opera" program, and the Vermont MIDI Project, an online music composition mentoring program. Kratus (2007) continued:

Other new directions for music education such as ethnic ensembles, popular music ensembles, songwriting classes, and composition classes offer additional means to connect with young people in musically and educationally rewarding ways. (2007, p. 47)

This current research was an exploration of the personal development of undergraduate students in a semester-long songwriting course. It should help inform the profession about potential personal rewards to be gained through participation in this relevant and important area of musical creativity.

Related Research

Research exists regarding a variety of topics relating to songwriting including social music-making, risk-taking, reflective journaling, and collaboration. Draves (2008) studied undergraduate non-music majors ($N=20$) enrolled in a songwriting course to determine the relationship between their music aptitude, music achievement, and musical self-esteem. The researcher found statistically significant relationships between the three areas, and that support or recognition from others played an important role in the participants' musical self-esteem and perceived musical ability. Draves (2008) concluded that "...promoting more social music-making activities in school music classes could

increase self-esteem and encourage more students to be involved....The support and recognition that students received in the class was strongly related to their music achievement” (p. 45).

Marade, Gibbons, and Brinthaupt (2007) investigated the role that risk-taking played in writing successful songs. The researchers argued that taking risks increased the likelihood that a song would be viewed as creative. According to Marade et al. (2007), “songs are considered creative when they tell a story in a novel way through words, music, or their integration” (p. 127). In this study, the researchers examined case histories of songwriters they regard as successful, including Irving Berlin, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, Loretta Lynn, and Toby Keith. In all of the examined case studies, Marade et al. found that risk-taking was a key ingredient to achieving success. Areas of risk-taking included the songwriting process, marketing, and distribution; “Not only did these successful songwriters take risks, they did so with persistence, stubbornness, preparedness, and high self-efficacy concerning their creative abilities” (Marade et al., 2007, p. 142).

Cantor (2006) also reported encouraging students to take risks and described how theory about songwriting evolved from his experiences in teaching. The author articulated how learners can be inspired through “arts-based practices that support innovation and creativity – promoting teaching and learning success for *all* children” (p. 57). The author also discussed incorporating visual art, movement, listening, discussion, and team-building activities to contribute to the songwriting environment and how reflective journaling is also a part of his songwriting pedagogy. Cantor (2006) concluded, “...my songs, as well as those my students have written are powerful

expressions of our experiences. They help us explain and interpret our current circumstances. We apply what we have learned and create something new from our perspective” (p. 62).

Similar to the contribution of team-building activities to songwriting environments described by Cantor (2006), collaborative relationships was an area that DeVries (2005) examined in an ethnographic study. The researcher investigated the relationship of two adult, beginning songwriters working collaboratively over a three-month period. Data were collected through observation and interviews. Results included that the pair capitalized on each other’s strengths and counterbalanced each other’s weaknesses. The songwriters also focused on the shared goals and values of the collaboration. The pair felt that songs are primarily comprised of melody, harmony, and lyrics; that originality is important; and that there is an element of mysticism to writing songs (DeVries, 2005).

Also addressing collaboration, Väkevä (2010) explored the idea of music educators moving beyond predominantly considering the pedagogical practices of rock bands when thinking of popular music, to embracing a broader view. The author suggested digital options such as GarageBand for creating music, Guitar Hero for simulating music performance, and YouTube for producing music videos. Väkevä (2010) also recommended remixing songs, online collaborative songwriting, and creating online musical communities, writing:

The global eminence of digital music culture can be taken as one indication of the need to reconsider music as a transformative praxis. By examining the ways in which music is produced and used in digital music culture, we can prepare for new forms of artistry that have yet to emerge from the creative mosaic of digital appropriation. (p. 59)

The outcomes of these related research studies informed the current research and contributed to its design. In the current research, social music-making and collaboration were both regularly incorporated in songwriting-class activities. Participants sharing and mentoring each other's songs, as well as creating collaborative songs characterized the social music-making atmosphere of the classes. In addition, the sharing of songs with the class by participants was a substantial risk-taking enterprise. Reflective journaling was another aspect of the current research that was a required component of class activity.

Several articles have appeared in the MENC publications *Teaching Music* and *General Music Today* sharing projects that incorporate songwriting (Bolden, 2009; Riley, 2006; Siegel, 2004). There is also a chapter entitled "Songwriting 101: Clef Notes for Music Teachers" in the MENC book *Spotlight on General Music: Teaching Toward the Standards* (Music Educators National Conference, 2005). The inclusion of these articles and chapter indicates interest in this topic, and supports further investigation into the songwriting activity.

The purpose of this research was to explore whether personal development resulted from songwriting-class interactions of undergraduate liberal arts students in two sections of a first-year experience course working to develop and refine songwriting skill.

The research questions were:

- Does songwriting activity impact student personal development?
- What, if any, personal development themes emerge as predominant?

Method

Participants in the current research were undergraduate liberal arts students ($N=40$) in two sections of a first-year experience course, Exploring Songwriting. The

goal of the course was to help students communicate and express themselves through songwriting in a supportive and collaborative environment. Most frequent in-class activities included participants collaboratively analyzing and discussing existing songs, sharing and mentoring their original songs, interacting with guest songwriters, and discussing two texts, *Songwriting and the Creative Process* (Gillette, 1995) and *Songwriters on Songwriting* (Zollo, 2003). In each of the two sections, the class met three times a week for 50 minutes. The researcher, a music education professor at the university at which the course was offered, developed this course and served as its professor.

Typically on Mondays, the class was mainly instructor-driven. The professor gave instruction on a variety of topics, including creating melody, creating lyrics, fitting lyrics to melody and/or melody to lyrics, harmonizing melody or adding melody to harmony, harmonic progressions, and song forms. The professor also addressed questions and concerns. These classes also included discussion of assigned chapters in the course texts and engagement in group song-study. Toward the beginning of the semester, the professor chose the song to be studied on particular days in order to illustrate the topic(s) of the class. As the semester progressed, one or more of the students in the class would choose the song to be studied in order to illustrate points they wanted to make. A song-study worksheet helped to guide the discussion and focused on items such as the music's melody, rhythm, harmony, form, expressive elements, repetition and contrast, unity and variety. Study worksheets also focused on the lyrics' coherence, effectiveness, authenticity, and/or word-play; the relationship between the music and lyrics; and the overall impression. Guest songwriter visits would usually also occur on Mondays.

Over the course of the semester, participants were required to create five original songs and also to mentor their classmates' songs. Wednesdays and Fridays were devoted to participants sharing and mentoring each other's songs. This occurred in an alternating-week format. On "A" weeks, the class was divided in half with one half of the class sharing their songs on Wednesday, and the other half sharing their songs on Friday. Participants sat in a circle and took turns presenting something of the song on which they were currently working. It could be a fragment of lyrics, melody, harmony, a verse or chorus, or a relatively complete song. The remaining participants were encouraged to comment on the song in a format starting with stating a positive, continuing with providing one or two substantive suggestions, and ending with stating a positive. Participants were required to comment in writing, using this format, on ten of their peers' songs in each of the "A" weeks. This occurred on a course blog created for this purpose. On "B" weeks, each participant was assigned another participant to be paired with for an in-depth mentoring session. Each participant in the pair shared their current song, but with more time to do so. Mentoring in these in-depth sessions was encouraged to be more detailed and complete. Two pairings occurred on each of the two "B-week" days, and pairings were rotated so that over time, participants received a variety of perspectives. All of the in-depth mentoring comments were required to be submitted in writing, but this time via email to the mentored peers and the professor.

Participants were encouraged to sing their own songs, and to accompany themselves as they sang. Most of the participants played either guitar or piano, but on rare occasions when a participant did not feel comfortable singing or accompanying themselves, a peer would either sing or accompany a classmate's songs. Also, one of the

songs created by participants was required to be a collaborative song, in which participants who characterized themselves as stronger musically were paired with those who characterized themselves as stronger lyrically to create and perform the songs.

Additional class activities included participants choosing two best-work songs and performing them in a coffeehouse presentation, either publically at the campus pub or privately at an in-class coffeehouse session. Participants also were required to reflect on their development in a private, ungraded songwriter's journal and to use this journal as the basis for their final reflection paper. The assignment for this final reflection paper was relatively open-ended, and consisted of participants including lyrics as evidence of the five songs created, and tracing their musical growth from song to song. It was offered that this paper might be informed by reflecting on mentoring comments, developments sparked by the collaborative song pairings, ideas sharpened through readings in the Gillette (1995) or Zollo (2003) texts, and/or elements taken from song-study activities. In addition, the final assignment included three prompts:

1. What did you learn about yourself this semester through your songwriting?
2. In what ways, if any, has your songwriting helped you deal with challenge, resistance, disruption, and/or the unexpected this semester?
3. In what ways, if any, have you developed as a person through this songwriting experience?

The data in this research were the participants' final reflection papers, including lyrics from the five original songs generated in the class. All names used in the reporting of this study are pseudonyms. The researcher compiled, sorted, and analyzed the data. The analysis was a content analysis, and was guided by the Patton (2002) model. The

data were coded and predominant themes identified. The researcher employed both member checking and peer review to compensate for potential researcher-bias and ensure validity. The themes generated in this research served as a snapshot of these particular participants perceptions, and are not intended for generalizability and/or transferability to other participants and/or settings. It is important to note that many of the activities and assignments included in this course/research project originated with John Kratus and his work with student songwriters at Michigan State University.

Results

The data were analyzed for emergent themes regarding student personal development resulting from the songwriting activities. The following are the prominent themes: emotional stability, therapy, self-expression, self-discovery, and overcoming challenges.

Emotional Stability

The first theme, emotional stability, was mentioned, alluded to, and/or discussed in many of the participants' final reflection papers. Jesse wrote,

Songwriting helped me get a lot of emotions off of my chest this semester. Sometimes I would be backed up with so much work and would stress out. I would then make music to help remind myself that everything will work out, and everything will be okay.

Coming to songwriting and hearing how people with problems would express their emotions is also something I really enjoyed about the class. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

The course was a Teacher Advisory Program (TAP) offering, meaning that the students were in their first semester of study at the university. With the classes capped at 20 students, this program was designed to provide first-year students with a small-class experience in which the professor also served as the students' academic adviser for the

semester. First-year students are usually faced with time management issues and workloads that are different from what they experienced in high school. Due to these and other factors, students usually feel much stress in their first semester living away from home. This is reflected in Jesse's statements, as well as how songwriting helped provide him comfort. Similarly, Jack stated how songwriting helped him manage having difficulty finding new friends and adjusting to the new situation. According to Jack,

This semester has been a little tough, but songwriting has really helped me get through it. I had a hard time finding friends and adjusting to college life at first. My songwriting journal was a great thing to have during this time. If I felt bad about something, I would write my feelings down on paper, and then they would turn into lyrics. The process of writing what I was feeling calmed me down, and really helped me cope with my emotions. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Annie had more serious issues than many first-year students, and wrote the following

For about six years now I have been battling depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. In the more recent years, I have found that writing poetry helps immensely with my troubling emotions. I discovered that writing down my emotions rather than letting them bubble up inside of me and take me over helps me maintain emotional stability. During the beginning of the semester I felt as though my depression had been building and my emotions were starting to interfere with my schoolwork. When I was finally able to accept songwriting (in and out of the classroom) I found that my emotional state quickly got better...I am very grateful for the gift that songwriting has given to me. It has allowed me a new way to deal with anger, hate, love, and everything else in my life. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Jesse wrote of songwriting as an emotional release, Jack wrote of it providing an emotional outlet, and Annie wrote of dealing with emotions such as anger, hate, and love

through songwriting. The idea of songwriting contributing to emotional stability appears to be an important benefit of engaging in this very personal creative activity.

Therapy

The second theme that emerged was therapy. According to Ellie, I expressed my feelings through songwriting whether it be about my beliefs on the world, the ups and downs with my boyfriend, or just a song to clear my thoughts. After I completed a song, I felt a strong peace of mind. I learned how to match the notes I was thinking in my brain to an instrument. I created songs that I never thought I could ever create. I began to love the way the notes sounded on the guitar along with the vocals and the lyrics...When I feel stressed out or under pressure, I will write a song. It does not even have to be about the core stressor in my life, simply writing and playing with words is truly therapeutic. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Ellie seemed to have moved beyond primarily dealing with the trials and tribulations of being a first-year student to a broader range of ideas. In addition, she wrote about the songwriting process—the musical and lyrical aspects of writing a song and how they provide therapeutic benefits. Similarly, Norm discussed a broader topic and how writing and singing an original song was helpful to him. Norm stated,

For this song I chose to tell a story in my life. This was really awesome for me because there are some underlying things [expressed] in this song that bothered me, and writing a song about them and singing it was like a sort of therapy that made me feel very warm inside. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Ellie wrote of stress relief through songwriting and Norm wrote of working out bothersome issues. Songwriting providing therapeutic benefits appears to be another important benefit of engaging in the songwriting activity.

Self-expression

The third theme that emerged was self-expression. It was not only prevalent in the participants' final reflection papers, but was also illustrated in their song lyrics. Joseph discussed how he expressed himself through reflecting his feelings and moods in his songs. According to Joseph,

I feel like I really learned how to express myself through my words and music more so than I have ever been able to do in my life. I discovered my passion for lyric writing. During times when I have felt down, all I had to do was write dark lyrics and I all of a sudden felt cured. In times when I was happy, nothing felt better than reflecting on my happiness through song. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Joseph's lyrics exemplify his expression of dealing with fear:

Crumple your fears in a ball
And throw them up against the wall
Let them drain and leak out of your skin
No filtration necessary in the scheme of things

Patrick and Nancy referenced the freedom of self-expression in their reflections. Freedom is an important aspect of the college experience and is often acutely felt and celebrated in students' first semesters. Patrick wrote,

Being able to express myself freely with my music has been particularly useful in articulating some of the challenges I have faced in my relationship with my girlfriend, Susan. The song "New Hampshire to Vermont" references not only my longing for her, but also some of the adventures we hope to have together some day. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Patrick's lyrics illustrated his expression of longing for his girlfriend, and also anticipation of and hopefulness for the future:

I will brave frosty roads towards the state line
Just to catch a glimpse of you.
Old brandy and a bottle of fine wine,
My visit is well overdue.

Nancy's reference to the freedom of self-expression regarded sharing thoughts without fearing judgment. According to Nancy,

Collaborating with so many talented people has really widened my range as a songwriter, and performing for the class has lifted my confidence. I finally feel excited to share what I have to say with people, rather than being so afraid of judgment that I cannot let them in.
(Reflection paper, 12/10)

Nancy's lyrics exemplified this newfound freedom of self-expression and illustrated her articulating her thoughts without filtering. They ended with open acceptance:

I'm a helpless mess
In an emotional wasteland
I can't help but feel ashamed
I can't react
There's too much in my head
I've forgotten my own name
But I'm not saying I'm not glad you came

Similarly, Sarah's statement and associated lyrics spoke to seeking acceptance and connection as well as to happiness and state of mind. Sara wrote,

Songwriting has allowed me to express myself, hoping that different people will be able to relate and accept my music, like I accept theirs....Although I am not a cigarette smoker, I wanted to use the concept of stepping outside to smoke a cigarette because of the stresses in life. These breaks are times for thinking...I think of it [the song] as my acceptance to the endless thoughts that I have been having all my life. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

I'm too high for the lows
And I'll sigh in happiness
I'm too high for the lows
And I'll sigh in happiness
And on this cigarette break
I'll find another way to be awake

Joseph, Patrick, Nancy, and Sarah all discussed self-expression through songwriting, seemingly another benefit and byproduct of songwriting. Additionally, as

referenced by Patrick and Nancy, being able to use songwriting as a vehicle for freedom of expression was yet another important aspect of this creative activity.

Self-discovery

The fourth theme that emerged was self-discovery. Jack wrote about discovering his strong emotions and how to let them out, stating,

I learned so much about myself this semester through the songwriting process. One of the big things I learned is that I have strong emotions, and it feels great to talk about them.

For most of my life I really never would talk about my emotions. This summer was very difficult for me, and helped to change that. When I was getting ready to leave for school, my father was having trouble walking. The doctors found a tumor in his femur. I was incredibly scared, but I didn't talk to anyone about it. After starting this class, I started to write about it in my song journal instead of bottling it up inside. It made me feel infinitely better to do this. It felt like a weight was lifted off of me. Luckily my father is fine and cancer free, but this experience really has changed me. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Similarly, Mary discussed letting out emotions and discovering a tendency for writing about unhappy topics. According to Mary,

I discovered many things about myself this semester through my songwriting. One thing that I really noticed is that I have a tendency to write about events that I wouldn't consider happy topics.

I guess it's understandable though, because writing is a good way to get out emotions. I hope to eventually be able to write happier songs, but for now it's a good way to let loose. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Mary's lyrics reflect the tendency she discovered:

Cause our love is like a roller coaster
Every fall only brought us closer
I can see the fear in your eyes
Don't worry love, this isn't goodbye, this isn't goodbye

In a more uplifting excerpt, Meghan referenced a different sort of self-discovery.

Meghan stated,

My fourth song is about my friend and my plan to move to California after college, not to live an extravagant life, but just to live, to play music, to make art, just to live. That song has a lot to do with me finding myself and figuring out who I am and what I want.

(Reflection paper, 12/10)

This optimistic self-discovery theme is also illustrated in Meghan's song lyrics:

I'm caught in this place
Where my dreams are bigger than reality
And that's just fine with me
Cause one day we're gonna break free

Jack wrote of discovering strong emotions and the great feeling of expressing them; Mary wrote of discovering a tendency to write about unhappy topics; and Meghan wrote of finding herself. Discovering things about ones' self is an integral part of the maturation process, and seemed to be facilitated by the activity of songwriting.

Overcoming Challenges

The final theme, overcoming challenges, was mentioned, alluded to, and/or discussed in many of the participants' final reflection papers and supported in associated song lyrics. Will wrote about the challenge of a hall-mate's death:

I learned a lot about my creative self throughout this semester and experience.

Notably, with the death of a fellow hall-mate, I was able to overcome what a lot of other friends couldn't, and that was the ability to bounce back and show creativity while others sat around and were melancholy. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Seth's challenges also had to do with loss, but for Seth, it was two instances - a friend's leaving school and a friend's death. Seth stated,

Some people may have a favorite band or song that helps them feel better on a bad day. It may remind them of something good in their lives, it may help them appreciate what they have more,

but no matter what it specifically does for those people, it is similarly something they all turn to. Songwriting has done that for me on a more personal level. Instead of always turning towards a song or artist to feel better, instead of trying to identify with someone else's lyrics, songwriting allowed me to cope with situations unique to me. My first college semester has been very hectic to say the least. Among things such as the death of a friend on my floor, and my best friend going home for the semester with bipolar disorder, I have been able to relax myself and use music as a healthy medium for coping with these tough social situations. (Reflection paper, 12/10)

Seth's song lyrics illustrated how he overcame the substantial challenges of his first semester of college and ended in an uplifting way:

But I, I like the way that it is
I like the way you smile
I like the way you kiss.
And I, I love the way you shine
The way your eyes they always seem to smile back at mine...
And I like, the way, that it is.

Will and Seth both wrote about overcoming challenges due to loss. Songwriting as a vehicle for overcoming challenges appears to be another powerful benefit of this creative activity.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore whether personal development resulted from songwriting-class interactions of undergraduate liberal arts students in two sections of a first-year experience course working to develop and refine songwriting skill.

The research questions were:

- Does songwriting activity impact student personal development?
- What, if any, personal development themes emerge as predominant?

Based on the results of this research, it appears that songwriting activity does impact student personal development. The areas in which personal development was impacted most emerged from the data as predominant themes. These themes were emotional

stability, therapy, self-expression, self-discovery, and overcoming challenges. The themes seem to be intermingled and interconnected benefits of the songwriting activity, rather than isolated, discrete entities. Self-expression, therapeutic activity, and overcoming challenges might lead to emotional stability; self-discovery could lead to self-expression; self-expression to self-discovery; and emotional stability may well lead to overcoming challenges. Additionally, participants often referred to stress relief, which contributing to the themes.

The data in the current study were also consistent with existing research. Similar to Cantor (2006), songwriting serving as a vehicle for self-expression was a prominent theme that emerged from the data. In addition, Marade et al. (2007) found that risk-taking was a key ingredient to songwriting success, Cantor (2006) found that songwriting helps to explain and interpret circumstances, and DeVries (2005), Draves (2008), and Väkevã (2010) referenced collaboration of varying sorts in their studies. Risk-taking, explaining and/or interpreting circumstances, and collaboration also emerged as lesser-prevalent sub-themes in the current research.

Conclusions

Analysis of participant reflection papers and original songs revealed numerous rewards of engaging in the songwriting activity. Songwriting appears to facilitate student development through enabling emotional stability, offering therapeutic benefits, and providing a vehicle for self-expression, self-discovery, and overcoming challenges. Given the relevance and apparent benefits of students engaging in the creative activity of songwriting, implications for the profession are that music educators should consider including songwriting in their existing courses, and/or including discrete songwriting

classes in their course offerings. Additionally, music teacher training programs should provide preservice music teachers with experience in writing songs and teaching songwriting. This can be accomplished by including songwriting in existing courses as well as in separate courses.

The results of this research also point to the following specific recommendations regarding songwriting pedagogy:

- Students should be encouraged to take risks, not only in writing their songs, but also in sharing them.
- Reflective journaling is important, and can enhance songwriting processes and products.
- Collaboration is a valuable component, and should be used regularly to inform and enrich songs.

Future research might include exploring the songwriting of high school, middle school, and/or elementary school students. It could also include investigating songwriting in technology-based contexts, such as online courses, and/or examining the potential benefits of songwriting as an element in large-group performance contexts, such as choral settings.

Throughout the course of this semester, the person I was is much different from the person I have come to be. I have become more self-confident, open-minded, musically knowledgeable, and a bit more eloquent with the words I use and the message I speak. I have gained a lot as a songwriter but equally as a person and a student. I will carry these attributes with me for every song I write, and for every next time I perform. (James, reflection paper, 12/09)

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Patricia Riley (priley@uvm.edu), D.M.A. is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Music Education Program at the University of Vermont. Prior to this, she taught at The Crane School of Music, State University of New York at Potsdam. Previously, Dr. Riley taught instrumental, general, and choral music for 25 in the public schools of New Jersey and Vermont; and for five years maintained a woodwind and brass studio at Green Mountain College. She has published in *Music Education Research, Update: Applications of Research in Music Education, Research and Issues in Music Education, Visions of Research in Music Education, Journal of Technology in Music Learning, The Vermont Music Educator*, and *Teaching Music*; and has contributed numerous chapters to edited books and symposium proceedings. Dr. Riley is a frequent presenter of sessions at international, national, regional, and state conferences. Her research interests include student music composition, cultural studies, technology, and assessment.