

## Thornhill Elementary: Emerging From the Fog of Music Integration

By Alyson Swihart, Eric Swihart, Sallyann Tomlin, and Wesley J. Watkins, IV, Ph.D.

A music teacher walks into an Oakland, California elementary school to meet with her principal and to establish her teaching schedule for the year. As an itinerant music teacher, her job is to provide recorder/songflute instruction to all third graders, as well as music lessons to interested fourth and fifth graders, at *three different* elementary school sites. Excited to begin, the music teacher is informed by one principal that “We can have absolutely *no interruptions* during the morning reading block,” a two- to three-hour block of uninterrupted classroom time devoted solely to Language Arts instruction. This is, of course, the result of No Child Left Behind stipulations that require extra time in language arts when corresponding test scores are low. A reading—or a similarly inflexible math block—is required at many schools in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Because this is federally mandated, when a principal says no interruptions, they mean *no interruptions*! In fact, this music teacher once asked a classroom teacher, “I mean, seriously, what if you aren’t on page 18, paragraph 3, on October 11, at 10:45 am? It’s not like the ‘curriculum police’ are going to come get you, right?” Expecting a witty response and a light-hearted chuckle, she instead received a sobering, “Yes. That’s exactly what will happen. I will be written up for not following the curriculum pacing guide.”

Given these constraints, it is impossible for a traveling music teacher to teach music to third, fourth, and fifth graders at three different schools, because they can only teach in the afternoons. There is simply not enough time in the day. As an alternative, then, would it be possible to design a music program that meets the artistic *and* academic curricular needs of the students at the same time? And indeed, *shouldn’t* we, recalling that Plato’s democracy included music as an essential academic subject?

This kind of thinking led to the OUSD Music Integrated Literacy Enhancement (MILE) Program. Implemented in seven schools in 2005, the MILE Program is an innovative response to the current educational system focused on high stakes testing and mandated, scripted curricula. The vision of the MILE program is to put music at the core of the curriculum, bringing music specialists and classroom teachers together to create integrated music lessons and curricula specifically tied to their students’ unique cultural backgrounds and previous experiences. The program also offers students a rich opportunity to build a strong foundation of learning that includes music-making at its very core—not just as an “honorable mention” in the language of a legislative action, but as an essential component of the democratic process itself, the vitality of our nation. Bold claims, indeed: *Music-making and community-building are one in the same.*

## **YEAR ONE: 2005-2006**

In 2005 Thornhill Elementary School not only became one of the seven MILE schools in the OUSD, but also became a part of the Music-in-Education National Consortium's Learning Laboratory Schools Network (LLSN), a group of schools nationwide committed to placing music at the center of school culture in order to enhance student learning, create dynamic professional development partnerships, and build school community. Throughout this first planning year of the MILE Program, Thornhill served as the hub for LLSN Project professional development, curriculum design, data collection, and documentation. The curriculum design process went through three stages: Development, Implementation, and Reflection.

### **MILE Curriculum Development**

Thornhill Elementary and five other MILE schools began designing and developing music integrated curriculum at a 2005 summer planning intensive held at Thornhill. Because Thornhill had just become a LLSN school, certain Music-in-Education National Consortium (MIENC) frameworks were cross-fertilizing the MILE program. For example, teachers at this first summer intensive utilized the MIENC's Listen, Question, Create, Perform, and Reflect (LQCPR) framework (see *JLTM*, vol.1) to design music lessons and units that would be integrated with Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science the following year. By the end of the three-day intensive, five units were created and shared with the other schools, including an *Order and Sequence* mathematics lesson and a science lesson that allowed students to investigate *When Sounds Becomes Music*.

### **MILE Curriculum Implementation**

During the 2005-2006 academic year, music specialists met bi-monthly to model integrated lessons developed from the summer intensive and throughout the year. Each lesson was evaluated by the other teachers using a protocol that helped the music specialists improve or change the unit. [See "MILE Curriculum Protocol" in portfolio.]

### **MILE Curriculum Reflection**

Because MILE teachers were developing lessons/units throughout the year, by year's end each teacher had an additional collection of units, lessons, and student work that was presented at the Second Annual LLSN Conference. They put these into the form of a Unit Planner, a plan for the music-integrated unit that includes a scope and sequence, lesson plans for the individual lessons within the unit, and any assessments. All teachers used the MILE Curriculum Rubric (created by Alyson Noel-Swihart, Larry Scripp, and Randy Wong), which prompted changes or improvements to lessons from the first year. As the lessons were in various stages of completion, the rubric was used to help MILE teachers discern what needed to be included or refined in the second year to improve upon their previous work. [See MILE Curriculum Rubric in portfolio.]

The MILE Curriculum Rubric is based on a four-point rating system applied to four evaluative categories of the Unit Planner: (1) the overall Unit Planner design, (2) the individual lesson

plans and assessment, (3) evidence of MILE Teaching and Learning Principles, and (4) action research integration. A rating of 4 in each section means the curriculum has qualities that are complete and seen throughout the plans; a 3 denotes these qualities are developed; a 2 means they are progressing; and a rating of 1 indicates the qualities are not present.

Evaluative questions for assessing the overall design of the Unit Planner include: Does the Unit Planner have a complete, comprehensive and clear project description that outlines primary goals for academic, musical, and social-emotional areas? Are key inquiry questions, activities/culminating events and fundamental learning processes shared across the disciplines addressed? Are key goals, skills, standards, documentation and assessment processes outlined? Finally, is there a clear and compelling lesson sequence summary?

Next, each individual lesson plan was examined using the following evaluation questions: Are there clear and completely stated goals, objectives, activities and documentation and assessment materials needed to fulfill the goals of the unit planner? Do lessons clearly show the LQCPR process and shared fundamental concepts between music and other disciplines? Will artifacts be systematically collected, presented, and annotated? Are teacher extensions consistently present? In each of these lesson plans, are assessment rubrics fully developed that are appropriate to the lesson plan and unit as a whole? Is there a wide range of pre- and post-documentation and interpretation of student work planned in terms of its connection to school performance and inquiry questions?

Lesson Plans were also examined for the presence of five key elements: (1) music learning standards in curriculum design and implementation; (2) focus on instruction in terms of the second discipline (e.g. Math, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Social-Personal Development); (3) articulation and presence of explicit connections or shared fundamental concepts between music and other disciplines; (4) explicit student engagement in processes and modalities such as LQCPR in music and other disciplines; and finally (5) the assessment for teaching and learning transfer across two or more disciplines.

Last but not least, rich student/teacher documentation, assessment, and reflections were examined for evidence of MILE action research methods and teaching integration connections between teaching and learning. Extensive pre- and post-documentation of student work was collected, scored, presented and interpreted in terms of school performance, inquiry questions, and evidence of teacher practice transformation through participation in the MILE professional development program.

### **Thornhill Curriculum Development**

In addition to acting as the MILE Program hub during the 2005-2006 school year, Thornhill also began related yet separate efforts to develop its own faculty capacity. Thornhill faculty and staff participated in professional development to learn about music integration and the LQCPR model. Even though the staff struggled with creating a school-wide inquiry question and a consensus of what a music-integrated program at Thornhill would look like, these questions remained an important part of the staff's conversation as the MILE program was implemented.

In order to break the music integration ice for all the school to see, Music Teacher on Special Assignment and MILE Teacher, Eric Swihart, teamed up with his wife, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher, Alyson Swihart, to design a fourth grade musical. The project was inspired by the Opera Program at the Ramsey School in Minneapolis, MN. (See *The New England Conservatory Journal for Music-in-Education*, 2007)

One of the biggest hurdles facing the Swiharts was that Alyson had little or no musical background. Therefore, how was integration into the core classroom curriculum going to happen? Eric and Alyson used a side-by-side model that allowed Alyson professional development while Eric taught the music class. Alyson sat alongside the students and learned about rhythm, pitch, and musical composition. Every month, the Swiharts would sit down together and find shared fundamental concepts and ways of linking Eric's lessons with other core subject areas. These shared fundamental concepts included science and writing conventions. As the year progressed and the conversations continued, units developed. Therefore, this project consisted of three 7-week units that had students investigate:

1. When Sounds Become Music (integrated with Science)
2. Rhythm and Pitch (integrated with Writing Conventions)
3. Music Composition (integrated with Writing Conventions)

### **Conversations about the Gold Rush**

The first conversation in creating our California Gold Rush Project was investigation into the question "When does sound become music?" This became our first unit. Following several lessons, and some very interesting debates, we came to an agreement that in order for sound to become music, there must be organization, structure, and purpose. Over the next six weeks, students *created* and *performed* rhythmic ostinati using found objects. The students connected the need for organization to make sound into music, and they transferred this observation into other disciplines, including writing and math. *Unit One: When Sounds Become Music* became an entry point into our creation of *The California Gold Rush Musical* because it established a baseline of knowledge and understanding of organizational structures.

In *Unit Two: Rhythm and Pitch*, students used musical notation to examine and explore sentence structure and phrasing, consequently gaining a deeper understanding of organizational structure and rules in both academic areas. To do this, students used post-it notes to *create* brainstorm about their weekend. They then *experimented* with organization by moving the post-it notes around. Finally, they chose their favorite arrangement and wrote a poem. In the following lessons, students musically *notated* their poems and *composed* melodies for them. By *Unit Three: Musical Composition*, students used the skills from Units One and Two to compose songs about the fourth grade musical. Along the way, the discrete skills were assessed using rubrics as shown below: [See "Gold Rush Rubric" and "Gold Rush Unit Plan Design" in portfolio.]

Mrs. Swihart reflects, "At the heart of each of these units was a collaborative learning process between the music specialist and classroom teacher. Each lesson in a unit specifically allowed the music specialist and classroom teacher to model lessons of their preferred discipline. The

goal was to give the other teacher an opportunity to experience, share, and aid with shared fundamental concepts they could use in their future lesson. This allowed me to integrate music with other disciplines on my own, something I was afraid to do before. Even more exciting, I began to teach music lessons the next year from the lessons I experienced the previous year!”

By the end of the year and the performance of the fourth grade musical, the staff had a clearer sense of what an integrated program looked like. As a result, Thornhill had a running start for the second year, going from one project in the first year to four in the second, and creating their Arts Team.

### **Story of Student Transformation: “Samantha: Finding the Right Answer through Music” by Eric Swihart**

Samantha had been struggling in all academic areas all year long, especially with Language Arts and Math. She was held back a grade level, so she was repeating 4<sup>th</sup> Grade. We were doing a composition unit for *The Gold Rush Musical* where Alyson [Swihart, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher] was assisting the students in writing a story line without specific song structure or rhythm, and I was working on the melody or song writing part. I introduced simple sixteenth note rhythms, and worked with the children on how their speech could be written down, and also how their speech could fit rhythmically into a song form or a rhythmic form that would then eventually become a verse of a song. Some kids got the rhythm part of it, so they were able to dissect their words, and then other kids got the story. To me it’s a combination of both—having a good story that also flows rhythmically. Essentially that’s rap, so we call it *Rap Write*. I do that with 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders now with simple rhythms that they should know. From those basic choices, they write their own story. All of a sudden they have a story that is “off the charts”; it’s not in the language arts curriculum because that’s scripted, it’s not in math because there is a right answer in math. In music and song writing the right answer is each kid’s answer! And that’s a beautiful process.

Anyway, that’s what Samantha found; she found her right answer. One day I did a lesson that I felt was a complete failure. It was one of those days where the class just didn’t seem to grasp what I wanted them to do, and no amount of repetition seemed to help. But then when I went back after Alyson led the next Language Arts lesson, she told me that Samantha had written this entire song and had played it on keyboard.

So we recorded her song for the LLSN template, and from that point on Samantha had arrived. It’s amazing how you think you know someone and their abilities, but then you see them perform music and it’s like a whole new person shows up. Samantha was a struggling student at this school, a kid with no idea of what her gift was; but then one day she was given an opportunity to express herself in her own terms, and it was like unlocking a door for her. I don’t think that she’d had any formal music training, and her songs were just simple chords that she was arpeggiating, but at the same time she was sitting there singing and playing at the same time. She had figured out how that was supposed to work and was actually doing it. Something had called her, and she finally had the tools to express herself. In violin class she would show up having figured out a melody on her own. I think maybe somewhere along the way she had sung a lot, so she could internalize melodies and figure them out on the violin.

All of a sudden this songwriting experience also transformed her academic experience, because now she understood the purpose of language. Alyson told me Samantha kept writing these songs over and over again, and that then she took that same technique and applied it to her writing in Language Arts class. She went from a 2—which is Below Basic—to a 3. She got totally hooked on writing music, and as a result her language arts writing improved a great deal. It really was like a light bulb had gone on. Nothing could stop her. All she was doing for the rest of the year was singing and composing and writing.

And her self-esteem just went through the roof. I remember how after that breakthrough day, I put Samantha on camera and told her that there were people all over the country who were interested in the work that we were doing at Thornhill and in the work that she'd done, and that we were all going to meet in Boston to talk about it. "I'm going to take you to Boston with us and show them how you made this song," I said. When she watched herself on film, she was just beaming. That experience alone brought her perception of herself up to a different level. She was able to see herself differently and also, I think, to expect more out of herself. Everybody else in the class was advancing in their academic subjects in a more or less constant way throughout the year. But Samantha had not been advancing; she had been at a standstill, 'at risk' for continued failure. That's why she was held back a grade. But when she had succeeded with her compositions and when she saw that I was putting so much emphasis on the work that she had done, she was like a flower blossoming. Composing that song wasn't just an assignment for her; she was *represented* in the song. It was a personal victory for her, and I knew that it was going to be the first of many.

## **YEAR TWO: 2006-2007**

Our inquiry question for the 2006-2007 school year sought to investigate if the integration of music into the general curriculum would have the effect of community building among students and staff. We utilized existing internal structures that were conducive to collaboration: the existing PD planning committee, Buddy classrooms (e.g., a fifth grade class is the older “buddy” of a Kindergarten class), monthly circuit planning time, and collaborative working grade levels which annually mapped ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies, field trips and assemblies.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Grade *Gold Rush Musical* had provided teachers with just the example they needed for them to attempt their own music integration projects. As a result, after just one year and the one major musical project, music integration scaled out within Thornhill. In addition to the new 4<sup>th</sup> Grade musical, *The Ever Changing Earth*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade put on the *Living History Project*, and there were *Buddy Projects* between two pairs of grade levels. Perhaps the most important addition pertaining to our inquiry question was the school-wide Sing-A-Longs, monthly events at which the entire school gathers in the auditorium to sing as one community for approximately thirty minutes. Songs were selected by 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher Kay Carter, Orff Specialist Annette Pirrone, and Music Teacher on Special Assignment and MILE Teacher, Eric Swihart.

### **Story of School Transformation: The Benefits of a Collaborative Approach “Kay Carter: Hidden Talents In Our Midst” by Eric Swihart**

One of the interesting things about working collaboratively is that you will inevitably find that there are many teachers in your school who have hidden talents and exciting ideas. In the case of the Sing-A-Long project at Thornhill, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher Kay Carter was a remarkable untapped resource. She’d always been a kind of quiet, behind-the-scenes sort of person; however, at the same time if you spoke with her one-on-one, she’d be very outspoken and had lots of great insights about most anything you could think to ask her. So I wondered how we could draw this person out of her classroom—isolated with all these great ideas—into the bigger picture of the entire school.

It also turned out she had excellent piano skills, so in 2004 Annette Pirrone [Thornhill’s Orff Specialist] and I invited Ms. Carter to play at the holiday concert. We really couldn’t have done it without her; we ran out of time to rehearse, but she picked up everything so quickly. Afterwards, I would go hang out in her classroom, and a ten-minute chat would become a three-hour conversation. She told me about her musical experiences, such as playing in a gospel choir in her church, and how whoever is up there just launches into song—they go, and you follow! It turned out we had a lot in common in terms of our approaches to music. She didn’t necessarily know the names of the chords she was playing, but she knew where the notes were supposed to go. I was the same way when I was studying music theory in college. I didn’t want to analyze it: “What kind of chord is it? . . . It’s a good one!”

Anyway, the Sing-A-Long idea came about because kids were having social issues out on the playground; they couldn’t talk to each other in a positive way about their conflicts and didn’t understand what it meant to be a friend. The staff, school Site Council, and our Parent Faculty Club all agreed that adults explicitly offering visual role modeling of collaboration and

cooperation would be a powerful teaching tool. We decided we wanted the kids to recognize that they were all part of a community that called for a wide variety of social interactions. What do you say to the people in your community? Do you say hello, do you hide, do you help them, or do you not say anything? When you see somebody who is feeling down, what do you do? If you have a talent and somebody else is struggling, what do you do? Or on the other hand, if you're the one who's struggling, how do you ask for help?

Our goal was to provide an opportunity for the kids to be in an environment where they could learn these social values even while they were actually experiencing them in a community. Then we hit upon the idea that by having the children sing together as an entire school body, we would instantly create such a community. Naturally we started wondering what songs we could choose to make the social values point, but then Kay pointed out that our songs didn't have to be explicitly about respect at all. We didn't have to—and probably shouldn't—drill into them that this was all about “character development.” The fact that we would be all together in a community singing would form the basis for cooperation. We would start to build community, and communication, through song.

In many ways Kay is the reason that the Sing-A-Long is what it is. If we didn't have Kay, the Sing-A-Long would consist of me hammering out some chords—and it would sound that way—or playing a CD while the kids sing—which is not a Sing-A-Long, it's karaoke! So in a matter of months Kay had gone from being on the sidelines to being a key player in our MILE project; her hidden talents and ideas really have brought life to Thornhill in a very unique way.

But the really nice thing for me is how much this interaction has changed our relationship. It just shows that you have to spend time with people to find out what they're all about. After all, the LLSN project is all about radically changing the way a school operates and the way people talk to each other. I remember that at our LLSN conference in 2005, Vincent Marron said that if you want to change people you first have to change the way they talk. I couldn't agree more; you can really hear where people are coming from in the language they use. At first Kay and I really didn't seem to have a whole lot to say to one another, simply because we had yet to establish a common language. Even though we were both musicians, how we operated in the school community had to be on the same page. Now, thanks to music and a plan to help build community at our school, we have that common language. It's impossible to imagine it any other way.

### **Story of Teacher Transformation: “Building Community Through the Joy of Song” by Kay Carter**

I enjoyed being a part of the planning process for our Sing-A-Longs with Eric Swihart, our instrumental music teacher and Annette Pirrone, our Orff Specialist. Each of us loves music, and we were all equally committed to bringing the students and staff together to sing.

However, we faced two major challenges. For one, scheduling the Sing-A-Longs was not easy; we had to try a number of scenarios and had to address all the different scheduling concerns that would come up as the school year progressed. Deciding what we would sing was just as

challenging. Just as every music lover has different tapes and CDs in their personal player, Eric, Annette and I had varying ideas about what songs would be good for the students to learn. We met several times to talk, sing, and brainstorm songs that reflected our individual disciplines, academic/musical goals, and cultural perspectives. We discussed how pedantic the Sing-A-Longs should be. I expressed very strongly that they not be singing lessons or music classes.

There was considerable staff input concerning musical content. We agreed that the students should sing songs that would help them internalize character values and build community. I suggested songs that were upbeat with positive messages.

Eric, Annette, and I had to decide on the arrangement and presentation of each song. We came to agreements on technical issues such as key signature, lyrics, song length, verse, and visual presentation of the lyrics on an overhead or PowerPoint projection. In order to increase participation during the Sing-A-Longs, we also produced a Sing-A-Long CD, which had versions of the chosen repertoire. Teachers were able to play the CD during transition times, or as a morning opening.

The extra hours of planning and practice proved worthwhile when the ‘big day’ arrived, our first all-school Sing-A-Long. As I played the piano in the auditorium, I listened to the students and staff singing and witnessed the inevitable joy that comes when our voices blend. I knew that Annette, Eric, and I were seeing a very positive outcome from our work.

The children began calling the Sing-A-Longs “The Assembly” and expressed anticipation and enthusiasm for each one. Many of them called out to me on the playground or in the hall to say how much they liked the music. Parents reported first and second graders bursting into song during play dates and sleepovers! “They’re in different classes so they must have learned the songs at Sing-A-Longs,” one mom told me. “I love hearing them chime in together.”

This was evidence that the Sing-A-Longs were building community. The children were internalizing knowledge and behaviors that were beyond the skills and content that they acquired at each grade level. “Just Say Hi” and “I Think You’re Wonderful” were melodies and phrases that I overheard as students played and worked together.

As this school year ends, teachers all over the school have stopped me to talk about songs that they like, and to suggest musical themes that we might use next year. It sounds like our Thornhill School Sing-A-Longs are here to stay, a permanent part of the school culture. I am looking forward to continuing being a part of this unique, creative endeavor.

## **Professional Development**

The Thornhill School Staff Development Committee plans the Professional Development for the coming year by administering an evaluation/needs assessment to teachers each spring. [See “Teacher Survey” in portfolio]. From those results, they plan activities that give classroom teachers initial exposure around integrated music instruction. Before the 2006-2007 school year, teachers also viewed digital portfolios from other LLSN schools to see how they integrated

music throughout the curriculum. From these ideas, teachers discussed what was feasible for them and what they were willing to take on.

In this second year, a new dimension of Professional Development was added. Thornhill Elementary and El Dorado Elementary School in San Francisco began collaborating and hosting site visits with one another (See Armienta, El Dorado School Report). The first site visit to Thornhill occurred in January of 2007. Classroom teachers, music specialists, and site administrators observed Thornhill's monthly Sing-A-Longs, Karen Gibson's third grade lesson on Metaphor and Poetry, and Alyson Swihart's lesson on *When Sounds Become Music*. Both Thornhill and El Dorado Staff met for lunch to de-brief the lessons.

Alyson Swihart recalls how the site visits showed how deeply she was now engaged in teaching for transfer: "I found it interesting when [MIENC coordinator] Larry Scripp told me his reflection on my lesson. He said he kept thinking, 'Why is she teaching a music lesson?' But then he realized, 'Wait, it's a classroom teacher teaching a music lesson!' I told him it wasn't just a music lesson, it was a science lesson, and that I had watched the music specialist a year ago give a similar lesson. All I did was incorporate it with my science lesson. It was great that we both noted that transfer had occurred in my teaching practice. What was even more powerful was the transfer that occurred with the students. When asked what that particular lesson was about, students were making even more connections, including music, tracking, mathematic intervals, patterns, and science."

The next month, Thornhill visited El Dorado, touring the school and discussing what a first year LLSN school looks like. As Alyson Swihart recalls, "We [Thornhill teachers] discussed our successes and challenges. We shared how we started out small with just one manageable project (or so we thought!). Reflecting on the year, I can see we kept the conversation going with our staff as to what music integration is and what it looks like. As a result, by Year Two the staff had more of a commitment and a deeper understanding of the project. But the day-to-day operation of the project during that year was quite different. We had big questions: what are we trying to do and where are we going with it? What is LQCPR *really*? Am I doing this right? How am I to assess when I'm still trying to figure out this process? But in order to understand the process, we had to spend a year 'in the fog!' As we are slowly coming out of it, different projects are emerging. But we have a long way to go before the fog completely clears."

### **Assessment as a Teaching Tool**

The Thornhill Arts Team aimed to better document and assess music integration activities during the 2006-2007 school year. Toward this end, we hired Dr. Wesley Watkins (a.k.a. "Dr. Wes") after the winter holiday. Dr. Wes was a creative resource for teachers needing any help with music-integrated activities and assisted in the assessment and documentation of Thornhill's music-related activities.

Dr. Wes observed Eric Swihart's 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade MILE classes. After weeks of observation, feedback, and conversation with Mr. Swihart, the two decided to utilize Dr. Wes' experience as a qualitative researcher in schools. They developed a student interview questionnaire to assess two key points: (1) the students' understanding of the music fundamentals being taught, and (2)

whether students saw a connection between music and Language Arts or Math.

Dr. Wes interviewed students one-on-one for approximately ten minutes during Mr. Swihart's MILE classes. Although the original aim was to assess the students, it quickly became clear that the interview data also provided useful insight into Mr. Swihart's teaching practices and curriculum. For example, when Dr. Wes reported to Mr. Swihart how students verbalized their (mis)conception of music notation, Mr. Swihart was able to reflect on his teaching, and to create lessons plans that would improve student comprehension of elusive concepts.

Student interviews with Dr. Wes revealed that they believed that eighth notes happen "faster" than quarter notes and that they did not grasp the concepts of tempo, meter, or duration; however, their responses showed that they did know the correct recorder fingerings. We also observed during class that students were unable to work through a new piece of music on their own. That is, students were learning new music by relying on their neighbors' playing, or on Mr. Swihart to walk them through all the pitches, fingerings, and rhythms.

Based on the interviews, Mr. Swihart and Dr. Wes continually re-conceptualized the MILE curriculum for both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. For example, since many of the students had difficulty defining note values, the 2007-2008 MILE curriculum focused on rhythm in the beginning weeks/months without even introducing the recorders to the students. After that had been firmly established, pitch was introduced through singing so that the children could better internalize the concept of high and low pitch. Then Mr. Swihart introduced the recorder and the process of sight reading. Because we found that students were too often playing by ear instead of reading music, Mr. Swihart emphasized the steps one should take when learning a new piece (e.g., noting the time signature, the rhythm of the melody, and the pitches, and also looking for patterns before considering recorder fingerings). This sequence of learning helped students disentangle the multiple activities involved in sight reading, while also making the students more comfortable when learning and playing music. We hoped that this would give students a stronger foundation in basic music skills, thus making their experience with instrumental music in the fourth grade more fulfilling.

### **YEAR THREE: 2007-2008**

One of our goals entering the 2007-2008 school year was to create a curriculum map that would show what activities or projects could be used at certain points during the year to integrate music into other curricular areas. During the summer of 2007, a portion of the Thornhill Arts Team, along with Phil Rydeen, OUSD Visual and Performing Arts Manager, MILE teacher Sarah Wellner, and Dr. Wes backwards-mapped state music standards to clarify what musical skills a fifth grade student should know prior to entering middle school, and then translated the state standards into language more accessible for classroom teachers. As a result, the team was able to articulate what skills would need to be learned at each grade level in order for a fifth grader to leave elementary school with the desired musical fluency. This information was then shared with the classroom teachers at a subsequent meeting before the school year began. With the help of Mr. Swihart, classroom teachers used their curriculum pacing guides along with the clearer music standards map to plan collaborative, music-integrated projects. [See "Music Curriculum Map" in portfolio.]

## **Innovative Curriculum: The Jazz & Democracy Project**

One of the 2007-2008 intra-school scale-out projects happened in the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade. Dr. Wes met with 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher Rob Wilkins in August of 2007 to find out what music-integrated projects he had done in years past, and what new projects he might want to try in the coming year. We began our meeting by discussing our respective conceptions of “quality music education” as well as “quality music integration.” One of our ideas about quality music integration—or quality arts integration generally—was that it should help enrich or deepen students’ understanding of the core curriculum. Along these lines, Mr. Wilkins began discussing those concepts which his students perennially had trouble grasping. According to Mr. Wilkins, the concept of democracy had been most elusive for many of his recent classes.

Dr. Wes is an avid music lover who particularly enjoys Jazz and Latin Jazz. Therefore, the earlier parts of our discussion included talk of both genres. So when Mr. Wilkins brought up the apparently troublesome concept of democracy, Dr. Wes offered, “Well, you know Wynton Marsalis often talks about Jazz as a metaphor for democracy. So how about we teach the kids about Jazz as a way for them to better understand democracy?” While not a jazz player himself, Mr. Wilkins plays trumpet and is therefore somewhat knowledgeable about Jazz and especially the jazz trumpeters (e.g. Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, and Wynton Marsalis). What is more, every year Mr. Wilkins does a *History of the Trumpet* lesson in his classroom. The conditions seemed perfect for a collaborative effort. Even if they hadn’t been, Dr. Wes and Mr. Wilkins were so excited about the idea of attempting a music integration project involving Jazz that there would be no turning back. Thornhill Principal Sallyann Tomlin was equally excited by the idea and immediately supported the project by ordering the Lincoln Center *Jazz Curriculum for Young People*. The “Jazz & Democracy Project” was off to an auspicious beginning!

While the bulk of work on the Jazz & Democracy Project was spearheaded by Dr. Wes, the project team included Mr. Wilkins, the other 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher, Jeannie Young, Eric Swihart, and Sallyann Tomlin. None of those involved had ever heard of an arts integration project quite like “J&D,” as we began to call it. We were attempting to somewhat covertly teach fifth graders about democracy by teaching them about Jazz over the course of an entire school year. We were setting up a musical lens for them to better understand a complex social studies concept that would not fully arise in their social studies curriculum until April or May. So this meant we were laying down two ideas—Jazz and Democracy—side by side, and hoping that the eventual understanding of one would be bolstered by having learned so much about the other.

Since the term ‘democracy’ would not appear in the students’ curriculum until the Spring, as far as they knew Dr. Wes came in for forty-five minutes a week simply to teach them about Jazz. Dr. Wes created four lessons to begin the project. There was a pre-assessment to find out what the students already knew about jazz, where it came from, and key elements. The Jazz pre-assessment also asked students to reflect on what skills they thought were necessary to be in a jazz band. The second lesson was a music vocabulary builder. Dr. Wes played two songs, one an extremely melancholy ballad with lyrics and the other an up-tempo Blues with scat singing throughout. Students were asked what they thought the singers were feeling, and more importantly, “What do you hear in the music that makes you think that?” This lesson helped establish the music vocabulary that we would rely on for the rest of the year: tempo, dynamics,

timbre, rhythm, syncopation, etc. For our third lesson we watched *Gumbo*, the first thirty-minute segment of the Ken Burns PBS series *JAZZ*. Lesson four demonstrated the roles of the various instruments in a jazz combo.

After those first four lessons, Dr. Wes began to use the Lincoln Center *Jazz Curriculum for Young People*. The boxed set includes CDs with twenty-eight lessons narrated by Wynton Marsalis, complete with musical examples of the concepts and styles discussed. There is also a video of the studio recording sessions where the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra recorded many of the songs on the CDs. The boxed set is designed so that any teacher could simply hit play on the CD, let Wynton do the talking, and the students follow along and complete activities in a companion workbook. Mr. Wilkins observed that these lessons worked much better when Dr. Wes would stop the CD, ask follow up questions, or provide further examples from his own CD and DVD collection. Although Dr. Wes showed DVDs whenever possible so the students could be given visual cues in addition to the aural input, ideally a jazz combo would have been in the classroom every week. Toward this end, Ms. Tomlin arranged for school assemblies with the Oakland Jazz Choir and “Just Say Jazz,” a jazz combo that has created a performance specifically for educational purposes in schools. These allowed students to experience up close the elements of jazz they had been studying for weeks

Throughout the project, Dr. Wes would check in with Mr. Wilkins and Ms. Young informally to reflect on lessons and the overall direction of the project. They also had larger meetings with Sallyann Tomlin and Eric Swihart to address any “mid-course corrections” that needed to be made. Over the course of these meetings, everyone involved began to think more deeply about the central metaphor of J&D. What is it about jazz that is a metaphor for democracy? Is jazz really a metaphor for democracy as we know it in the U.S., or is it a metaphor for a democratic process?

In January 2008, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra came to the Bay Area and Dr. Wes was able to get backstage and talk with Wynton Marsalis about J&D face-to-face. That led to a phone conversation during which Marsalis made two key points: First, Jazz is always in process, and second, one of the most fundamental concepts in Jazz is that of choice. Inspired by this conversation, Dr. Wes sought to take J&D deeper, creating lessons designed to demonstrate these two essential concepts, among others. For example, Dr. Wes solicited the help of Eric Swihart to lead “Boomwhacker Blues” lessons where the students played a standard 12-bar Blues on Boomwhackers (pitched plastic tubes that sound when you simply strike them on the palm of your hand). Students were allowed to solo, helping them understand that in Jazz there is freedom within a structure, in this case the 12-bar Blues form.

From the Boomwhacker Blues lesson, Dr. Wes led a “Trading Workshop” where students had musical conversations with each other using the Boomwhackers. This helped students understand the key concept about Jazz, the importance of individual expression within a group context. Students began to understand first hand that in Jazz you are constantly responding to the other people in the band, just as they are responding to you. This helped students understand the importance of listening, and laid the groundwork for them to understand choice. That is, jazz musicians must choose to listen, must choose to swing with the people in their band with each passing moment, or else the music won’t swing. This, in turn, helped them understand that Jazz

is always in process or under negotiation, because jazz musicians are constantly listening and responding to one another's individual expressions, making the music new every time it is played. [Please see the Thornhill 2008 Digital Portfolio for a more detailed explanation.]

By April and May of 2008, the students had studied the U.S. Constitution and therefore had a better understanding of the Social Studies side of this project. Dr. Wes then began to have conversations more directly addressing the metaphor. For example, one day Dr. Wes asked the series of questions below and received the responses that follow in parentheses:

- What is freedom? (*You can do anything you want.*)
- Where do you see freedom in Jazz? (*Improvisation.*)
- Can there be too much freedom? (*Yes. There are consequences for breaking laws in society.*)
- What would that sound like in a Jazz band? (*Cacophony.*)
- What word in Jazz is used to describe the opposite of that sound? (*Swing.*)
- How does swing happen? (*Listening and playing together.*)
- If you had a society that operated like a jazz band, what would that look like? (*Cooperation.*)
- If you had a society that operated like a jazz band, would that be easy or hard? (*Both!*)

You may notice from these questions and responses that it was possible for students to think and talk about Jazz and democracy at the same time. In the Spring, Dr. Wes could ask for a corresponding example of a concept in Jazz or in society, and it was customary to ask for *the other* no matter the topic of conversation. This eventually led to the final project. We first had students complete a Venn Diagram with Jazz in one circle and democracy in the other. Then Mr. Wilkins created a graphic organizer for a persuasive five paragraph essay on whether Jazz and democracy are, in fact, related. Mr. Wilkins reflects that he really felt the students "got it" in a way that was deeper than prior years: "I know this because it was the first time I heard the word 'process' as related to democracy (from the kids). That it's just not a 'form of government' but more of an adjective to describe an ongoing process. Also, that 'freedom within structure' became an important concept to the kids." Finally, because the essay seemed all too academically rigid after an exciting year exploring "America's Classical Music," we borrowed an art lesson from another Oakland Teacher, Carrie Oretsky. Students were put in groups of 3-5 and together made posters of jazz legends in the style of artist Morgan Monceaux, complete with biographical information and key concepts from J&D included in the artwork. [Again, please see the Thornhill 2008 digital portfolio for more detail.]

## **Assessment**

Over the years Thornhill has become more committed to implementing pre- and post-assessments for both long and short term music-integrated projects. For example, Eric Swihart has developed pitch assessments related to the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Musical project, and Dr. Wes created both student and teacher assessments for the Jazz & Democracy Project. [See "Sing-A-Long Post Assessment" and "Jazz and Democracy Pre and Post Assessments" in portfolio.]

While these more formal assessments took some planning time, reflections are another form of assessment that most any teacher can employ. For example, after the second 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Musical, Alyson Swihart had her students write her a letter about how they felt about the performance and

what they learned from the process. Similarly, we've created a post-Sing-A-Long assessment that teachers use to get their classes thinking critically about the community building goal of the Sing-A-Longs. While we aim to increase our assessment sophistication in order to gauge content learning, we feel that having both students and teachers reflect on the process is a useful strategy to uncover extracurricular learning.

## **SCALE-OUT GOALS**

The efforts of Thornhill Elementary are already having an impact in the Oakland Unified School District. As Eric Swihart notes, “[MILE Teacher] Alyson Streich is going to be doing a 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Musical this year because she saw ours. Her 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade collaborating teacher from last year got moved up to 4<sup>th</sup> Grade, and at the OUSD Summer Arts Learning Institute, Alyson and I showed the video of the *Gold Rush Musical*. This classroom teacher saw that and she wanted to do it, so now they're going to do implement it at Glenview Elementary in Oakland.”

Mr. Swihart further indicates that he has always been cognizant of taking the lessons learned at Thornhill and sharing them with other schools in Oakland: “[Thornhill] is probably one of about five to ten schools in Oakland where every child gets music every week in grades K-5. It's not ideal, but it's a comprehensive music program. That's rare, but to me that is ideal—especially when you see some of these schools that don't have K-2 programs at all and then in fourth and fifth grade music is optional. These are the places that need it most, and I think that's probably our biggest challenge now: how do we translate—not replicate or duplicate—but how do we translate this program and create comprehensive programs in all of Oakland?”

Thornhill Principal, Sallyann Tomlin, agrees: “This work always has to pass the test of replication.” The good news is that replication and one's own program improvement share a key ingredient: collaboration. Ms. Tomlin continues, “In order to grow the culture of music integration at Thornhill, we want to provide professional development, deliver integrated curriculum aligned with school data, use aligned assessments, and focus our opportunities for collaboration. We can utilize some of our in-house resources to accomplish these goals, but other LLSN schools continue to be invaluable partners as we find our way. We plan to take full advantage of MIENC models of guided internships and the Metropolitan Opera Guild model in order to expand our annual 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Musical and implement opera as a vehicle for integration in other grades. Our communication with El Dorado in San Francisco and Green Oaks in East Palo Alto will be important as we find commonality even as we develop our unique programs. By networking with other LLSN and Oakland Schools, we hope to develop and share sustainable models of music integration that will allow it to become a part of school cultures.”

## **IN CONCLUSION**

Committing to music integration can be a very exciting notion at the outset. Many teachers remember having music when they were of elementary age, and they see at least some vague benefit to exposing children to the arts. Since the arts are always the first subject to be cut in times of budget crisis (and we always seem to be in a time of budget crisis), when discussing bringing the arts back into the classroom teachers have a general sense that by doing so we 'putting things right.' However, having a music teacher at your school who teaches his or her

own music class is a different proposition from integrating music into the core curriculum. In the latter case, excitement can quickly give way to bewilderment. Classroom teachers who may agree with the concept of integrating music often have little idea how to do it. Many teachers are under-exposed to integrating the arts, and so one of the biggest issues facing the traditional classroom-teacher-suddenly-turned-arts-integrationist is simply, “What does it look like?” Luckily, the answer to this question can be the biggest aid to teachers. That is, watching a lesson or an arts-integrated performance like *The Gold Rush Musical* can be all that is needed to make that once exciting idea feasible as well.

The experience of Thornhill Elementary is no different. Like any school that commits to arts integration, there was some resistance to the notion, some excitement, and a whole load of questions. We are coming to the end of Year Three, and no one would dare boast that we fully know what we’re doing. However, we do have things in process, and it is encouraging just how much progress has been made in what seems a very short amount of time. We hope that by sharing our story of how we managed to navigate through the foggy idea of music integration, we will help guide other schools’ ships as well.