

Why Do I Do What I Do? and For What and For Whom?: An Autoethnography of a Music Educator-Adult Learner

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ABSTRACT. This autoethnography investigates my role as a music educator -adult learner within the context of choral pedagogy. To answer my questions, I drew from my childhood experiences and discovered that “modelling behavior” is an exemplary pedagogical tool for expedited but efficient choral rehearsal. This led to the development of the Guided Partnered Model (GPM), which has shaped the learners, choir members, and my music appreciation, developing self-esteem, self-worth, and musicianship. The ethnography method was used for data collection, and writing was assembled through hindsight. Furthermore, data analysis was gleaned from narrative inquiry, finding that the expressions of knowledge, skills, and values evidenced through stage performances have resulted in self-affirmation. This provided reflective opportunities to develop this autoethnography. This article could benefit choral conductors and music educators by enjoining them to refocus and reflect on their responsibilities and accountabilities that may enable them to discover innovative pedagogies in their classrooms.

1.0. Introduction

Music is a universal language (Ludden, 2015) that is spiritual and reflective of faith (Foley, 2015). It is a healing art that can be used for therapeutic interventions (American Music Therapy Association [AMTA], 2020). Moreover, music has been found to develop cognitive skills to sharpen memory (Bradley-Kramer, 2017) and positively affect an individual's self-esteem (Shayan et al., 2011). In the words of Rutter (2017), music is “like a great oak that rises from the center of the human race and spreads its branches. That is what music does for us.” To me, music nourishes and makes one whole.

In the Philippines, music education is applied in three different settings: in the community through intercultural tradition, in the school classroom as a curricular component of basic education, and in university as a prerequisite future professional music career (Borromeo, n.d.). Interestingly, choral singing, pedagogy, and performance existed before the 16th-century Spanish colonialization. Music making and singing together was an essential weaver of the social fabric of the indigenous communities. These music activities strengthened bonds among the villagers as they performed rituals and important events in sustaining community life (Tan, 2022). The dominant form of choral singing at this time was in a responsorial way in which a chorus in monophonic style answered a leader much of what we know now as a “call and response,” a music device applicable to all musical types.

In 1898, music fulfilled a role in the educational mission of “benevolent assimilation,” where school children were taught to sing Filipino and American folk songs arranged in simple harmony (Tan, 2022). Primary and secondary schools promoted the establishment of choral groups that provided entertainment for campus activities and public programs. During the early twentieth century, few Protestant church choirs began to emerge throughout the nations, Silliman University included.

With the emergence of choruses came the need for rehearsal. My choral rehearsal experiences around the mid-20th century still used similar choral procedures of the past, following the responsorial way where the choral teacher took the leadership role with the assistance of an instrument (piano), and the chorus responded to that call by imitation. Choral response, a pedagogical rehearsal strategy, is noted to be an effective way to increase the frequency of student responses, refocus student attention, and provide rehearsal of important information in the choral classroom (Archer & Hughes, 2010).



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Choral rehearsal, in my experience, is a microcosm of the world outside the classroom. It is a place where life's lessons are taught and learned, a place where whole person development can be nurtured, and a venue to create purposeful opportunities to support the transfer of learning (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). Its performance is an individual and collective triumph. Consequently, it prepares the learner to face life's challenges within changing circumstances.

The implicit and explicit circumstances of how music is learned and taught to others may be captured by autoethnography. As an approach to research and writing, autoethnography seeks to describe and systematically analyze and understand personal and cultural experiences (Ellis, 2004; Jones, 2005, cited in Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). Its goal is to explore how such lived experiences reflect "the social and cultural aspects of the personal" (Hamilton et al., 2008, p. 24).

This type of qualitative research intrigued me for two basic reasons. First, auto-ethnography invites writers to see themselves and everyone else as human beings and subjects constructed in a "tangle of cultural, social and historical situations and relations in particular contact zones" (Brodkey, 1996, cited in Denshire, 2014). Second, there is a shared commonality between music and auto-ethnography. At the heart of both is the desire to communicate engaging personal tales (Bresler, 2008, cited in Bartleet & Ellis, 2009) and detailed descriptive intimate expressions and evocations of life and professional practice (Tai Peseta, 2012, cited in Denshire, 2014).

In this autoethnographic account, I describe my experience as a choral music educator exploring "why I do what I do" and "for what and whom." I also examine how members of my chorus perceive the contribution of being in the group to their person. It substantiates that self-affirmation and self-esteem can be found in teaching music, specifically in choral training and performance.

2.0. Methodology

In this study, I went through the process of andragogy (Bouchrika, 2021), which aims to pursue expanded education learning opportunities in social responsibility disciplines (Harwood, 2007). By using my personal experience to explore the interplay of myself in relation to others, I reflected on how culture, economic status, and mindset play a part in music choral learning, all of which are interrelated in shaping humanity. This autoethnographic study was set in a university town in the Philippines with choral groups under my tutelage: two mixed college choruses, a church choir, and a marginalized high school choir in Zamboanguita town in 2019.

Using autoethnography as a research design, my experiences were assembled through hindsight (Bruner & Folkenflik, 1993; Denzin, 1989; Freeman, 2004), which I used to navigate my writing. This supported Winston Churchill's statement, "The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see" (Simon, 1998). Thus, the data generation exercise I used narrated the process of describing events and important circumstances in my life, which Chang (2008, cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022) said could show how these have contributed to my own cultural discovery. Like Humphreys (2005, cited in de Souza Vasconcelos, 2011), therefore, I claim that an autoethnographic approach enabled me as a researcher to look inward and study myself to create a reflexive dialogue with the readers of this piece in the hope that the meanings embedded in my life stories might have relevance to other teachers' and students' memories, experiences, and practices (de Souza Vasconcelos, 2011). Hence, I detailed my reflections of selfhood, which date back to my childhood, where music and cultural traditions surrounded my home, classroom, church, and community. Here I affirmed that good self-esteem finds its roots in family background and environment.

Since reflexivity recognizes the author's role as part of the research process, my prior experiences, assumptions, and beliefs influenced the research process (Watt, 2007; Hiller & Vears, 2016; Gillam & Guillemin, 2018), allowing me to articulate and give voice to my position on perspectives so that readers could better understand the point of reference of data gathering, analysis, and reported findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Consequently, within the context of remembering, the testimonies of my experiences supported that my choral education played a huge part in my becoming who I am now and illuminated my questions, "why do I do what I do and for what and whom?"

Data collection included qualitative devices using ethnographic and grounded theory methods such as writing down self-observation following Silverman's (2017, p. 199, cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022) techniques in his dissertation entitled *Uncertain Peace: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Intrapersonal Conflicts from Chabad-Lubavitch Origins* and an ethnographic device called participant observation (Charmaz, 2006) as well. Like Lai (2012, cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022), I developed self-reflective data on personal experiences and perceptions as I engaged in critical auto-interviewing,

a process method that presupposes spontaneous reflexivity and critical awareness which, from an anthropological perspective, recognizes that “all knowledge ultimately reflects a set of norms and values about what is worth examining...” (Thomas, 1993, p.21, cited in Boufoy-Bastick, 2004). By being the object of study, therefore, I did not only learn about myself but also about my own society (Strathern, 1987, p.17, cited in Boufoy-Bastick, 2004) and about its value system in which I had been enculturated (Boufoy-Bastick, 2004).

I accessed external data (Moynihan, 2018, cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022), going through photographs, reports, and other documents pertinent to the study. As I began to write, I listed in chronological order the major events in my life pertaining to the research topic (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). Inadvertently, I was reaching into my personal memory bank to source data, sieving through what holds meaning and significance to my specific experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). Additionally, I relied on auto- interviewing, a process method used for the construction of individual history, an approach used to discover the “basic set of assumptions that gives meaning to one’s thoughts ... the way things are, about what things are, about why things are” (Bush, 1991, p.16, cited in Boufoy-Bastick, 2004). Finally, I used both oral and written semi- or fully structured (pre-written questions) for interviews, and when given the opportunity, I used the “tell me more” kind of questions (Charmaz, 2006).

After data was collected and recorded interviews transcribed, I organized these into categories following the procedures of Knowles’ five assumptions on the characteristics of andragogy (Pappas, 2013). Then I drew on qualitative traditions such as ethnographic research and narrative inquiry for data analysis. Autoethnography can benefit from data analysis methods rooted in ethnography (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). Here, I focused on culture and context: the culture of teacher-self formation in the context of choral learning experiences. Like Gibbs (2008, cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022), who outlined a framework for thematic analysis, particularly events (what happened) and experiences (images, feelings, reactions, meanings), accounts (explanations, excuses), story summary (beginning, middle, end); highlighted emotive language, imagery, and feelings; took notes or memos about ideas, and coded thematic ideas to develop a broader thematic structure, I prepared a creative presentation of my story. Likening it to a musical suite, I danced through my narratives across movements of the allemande, courante, sarabande, minuet, and gigue. These dances exemplify “growing and becoming” amidst life’s contrasts: from defeat to triumph, always moving forward and beyond.

Two processes were adapted with regard to research ethics. Written informed consent from participants of the marginalized high school project was obtained. Verbal consent from the other participants were acquired as well.

3.0. Results and Discussion

My story: Who am I?

I am a professor of music and pedagogue, a choral director, a program developer, and an administrator. As the Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts at Silliman University, my responsibilities include teaching, decision making, and program innovation-development. I also train and direct different choirs of all ages whose performances contribute to bringing honor to the university and community.

In my self-reflection, I realize that I have done these activities since the beginning of my career: from a faculty member in 1985, as Director of the School of Music and Fine Arts (1990-2000), then as Dean of the College of Performing and Visual Arts (2010-2016) and 2018 to the present. Other related activities included chairing the cultural committee of the university and becoming its adviser (1990-2000 and 2008-2016), respectively.

I have since spearheaded and instituted advanced certificate programs and baccalaureate degrees. When I received the Gawad Nicanor Abelardo Most Outstanding Music Educator of the Philippines Award (2018) from the University of the Philippines and the KSSLAP Award (2021) for outstanding artist and cultural worker in the Visayas region from the Cultural Center of the Philippines, I felt that it was incumbent upon me to spread my music education beyond the confines of my personal workplace.

That is why I profess that the impact and power of music as a universal language can communicate the realities of personhood – of living the meaning of one’s own life (Boykin & Schoenhofer, 2001) – and of unselfishly declaring one’s humanness. Experiencing music teaching and learning from

colleagues and students has allowed me to encounter the meaning of being my unique self.

The 'hats' I wear contain responsibilities and accountabilities that have set the stage for an assortment of opportunities to appreciate the activities surrounding my work. These have followed a "musicality of" movement where continuous challenges in between cohort and time changes engage me to find myself fortunate to have music and the procedures of the chorus as the center of my commitment to live meaningfully. I endeavor to add to the literature on music pedagogy.

Self-reflection, self-recognition, and self-concept

"Don't sing; just play the piano!" I will never forget these words. In my fourth year in high school, rehearsing for a performance with my brothers, one of them said, "Don't sing; just play the piano!" As soon as these words were uttered, I felt worthless and insignificant. I know now that they were meant to tease, but the hurt and pain bore deep into my being so much so that until today I still believe that I should not sing in public. This honest critique of my singing ability de-formed me but set me on a path that has defined whom I have become and what I continue to be. Although I have sworn never to perform as a solo singer in public, I perform in public as a choir director instead.

Enculturation and participatory learning: home, school, church, and community

I was born into a marriage of a professional musician and a social scientist and have lived almost all my life at Silliman University and, to this day, inside its campus. I am a product of the rich music and performing arts culture brought by the Presbyterian missionaries in 1901.

Some history shows that Silliman University in Dumaguete City is known to be the Cultural Center of Southern Philippines and is known to have helped shape in definitive ways the literary, musical, and theatrical landscapes of the nation. It can boast of having produced two National Artists, Eddie Romero for film and Edith Lopez Tiempo for literature (Casocot, 2013). Dumaguete filmmaker Carmen Singson del Prado debuted her documentary *Dumaguete: An Artist's Haven*, which aptly describes the state of art and culture in Dumaguete (which includes people in the painting, photography and design, literature, and even a little bit of film, theater, and music) (Casocot, 2017).

Music played a significant and integral role in the development of the university, which can be traced back to Silliman's earliest history. In 1906, a band and orchestra already existed even without a School of Music (Casocot, 2013); however, in 1912, music groups like the Silliman Band, the Silliman Mandolin Club, and the Silliman Glee Club came into existence (Casocot, 2013). In 1915, alumnus Zacarias Laviña, the concertmaster of the Silliman Orchestra, started the first wave of music renaissance in the Visayas. In 1931, the region saw the building of the Conservatory through a music program featuring the Lopez and the Kabayao musical families. The Conservatory trained teachers to supervise music education in public schools and produced professional musicians among young Filipino talents.

Geraldine Kate, an American missionary, took over the leadership of the Conservatory of Music in 1934. At this time, choirs for church services, as well as vocal quartets, were organized and traveled to other town churches in Negros Oriental. It was in 1938 that Mercedes Magdamo headed the Conservatory with Flora Zarco, who later became a faculty member of the University of the Philippines. Ramon Tapales took over the leadership from 1940 until the arrival of the Japanese in Dumaguete during World War II. Under his watch, the Conservatory of Music acquired a grant from the government to offer a Music Teacher's Certificate for voice, violin, and piano in 1941. This year, the "small" center of culture in the southern Philippines no longer carried the Conservatory title; it simply became known as the Music School, which had, by then, entered a period of solid progress (Casocot, 2013).

Mary L. Reese, a choral conductor and organist expanded the choral program by adding a secular choir, the Silliman Singers, to the roster of established choirs: the Covenant Choir for Sunday services, the Pilgrim Choir for Friday convocations, and the High School Choir for their own early Sunday morning services in 1946. She introduced larger choral works for presentation by the combined choirs and singers from the community at large. She initiated a tradition of presenting George Frederick Handel's oratorio, *Messiah*, during the Christmas season in 1949. The tradition of presenting operettas in the amphitheater was renewed. The music school played a dominant role in Silliman Church, and music, in general, became even more prominent in the life of the campus.

The 1950s were considered the golden years of the School of Music. Presbyterian missionaries Prof. William Pfeiffer and Prof. Albert Louis Faurot strengthened the faculty line-up. One of its faculty

members, Priscilla Magdamo (now Abraham), received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to help her research the folk music of the Visayas. By and large, as Dr. Arthur Carson stated in his history of Silliman in the first fifty years, the greatest achievement of the music faculty in the 1950s was the “promotion of artistic appreciation, linked to an interest in folk music and community development” (Casocot, 2013).

Under Prof. Pfeiffer’s leadership, Silliman started to gain recognition in the country for its choral music program, Silliman’s forte since 1951. By 1952, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in music was possible. The orchestra was revived as the student population grew (Casocot, 2013).

Prof. Miriam G. Palmore replaced Prof. Pfeiffer and served as the director of the School of Music and founded the Cultural Affairs Committee in 1962. In 1969, under her watch, the Fine Arts program was added. As a result, the name of the school was changed to the School of Music and Fine Arts. Mr. Zoe Lopez took on the directorship, serving from 1972 to 1974. He was succeeded by Prof. Isabel Dimaya-Vista, born and raised at Silliman with a master’s degree in World Music from Wesleyan University, who served from 1974-1976.

Prof. Isabel Vista, known as “Bobbie,” was educated by pioneering American missionaries and early music graduates. She is my mother, and so, I belong to the third generation of music educators schooled with “knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values” and traditions unique to this university. For this reason, I continue these music education traditions and culture as a functioning member of society (Walker, 2007).

My childhood activities centered around the activities of my musician mother as a choral director, organist, and pianist who worked in the university. I literally woke up to choral rehearsals and performances of oratorios like Handel’s Messiah and Mendelssohn’s Elijah; church anthems like Alleluia by Randall Thompson. The Beatitudes by H.R. Evans, and Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring by Johann Sebastian Bach. Childhood musicales included Hammerstein’s Sound of Music, and Bart’s Oliver, to name a few. These musicales formed part of the entourage of my enculturation into the music and cultural arts. Our home, across the street from the gym where the performances were held, became like an annex - cum dressing room for these productions.

Without my knowing, I had inadvertently participated in making and performing these musical activities as an onlooker, and the formation of my behavior through the environment was taking place. This is called observational learning (McLeod, 2016), a process of becoming (Chaklin & Lave, 1995, cited in Odden & Rochat, 2004, p. 40). According to Cherry (2021), observational learning is shaping, modeling, and vicarious reinforcement, which tends to be the most common during childhood. Its role in the socialization process is important. Children learn how to behave and respond to others by observing how their parent(s) and/or caregivers interact with other people. In hindsight, this explains why after every production, I could sing almost all the songs by memory and have subsequently taught them to my children.

Self-esteem and confidence: home, school, church, and community

Self-esteem, Griffin (2006) explained, is essential for positive human behavior and further learning preparedness. He said self-esteem could be boosted within a climate of positive reinforcement. The musical environment I grew up in, and the activities I participated in were instrumental in building my self-esteem. They gave me the courage to try new things and decreased my fear of failure. My claim to fame happened in grade 6 when my mother let me play in the small ensemble, accompanying S. Harnick and J. Bock’s Fiddler on the Roof, at the Silliman University Claire Isabel McGill Luce Auditorium.

I was so proud of myself as I played one single note on the bell lyre to the song “Sunrise, Sunset.” The act of playing that single note during the chorus lifted my self-esteem, making me so proud that I was “a part of” a university production. I then became a member of the elementary choir that championed the national competitions in 1973, another self-esteem moment.

I now moved from onlooker to participant and was disciplined and shaped by the choral music activities that happened in my backyard. The musical techniques like tone, balance, and blend (Green, 2017), understanding of musical lines and shapes, and the non-musical aspects of choral training like discipline, responsibility, confidence, teamwork, and hard work (Griswold, 2017) were initially illustrated and enacted. These I assimilated without my having to go to school.

I saw firsthand the rehearsal discipline, enjoyment of camaraderie, the nerves before performances, and the ultimate joys after. I observed the post evaluations for improvements after every show and

learned from them. I was nurtured to hold close the motto of my alma mater, *Via, Veritas, Vita*, which is anchored in the Gospel of Christ whose education is built on competence, character, and faith; I was trained so to advocate for the development of the whole person (Silliman University, n.d.).

This began my first dance, the *Allemande*, where, upon reflection, was the period when I embraced my beginnings and perhaps my calling.

Andragogy and the experience as influenced by the power of chorus

Then, I took the challenge to train a choir for a national competition. Even if I was working on my piano degree, I honestly thought I could succeed. To my dismay, I underwent testing that taught me a thing or two. The choir members were my peers who had trained under another conductor for the same competition. My rehearsal procedures differed from what they were used to. One time, a member kicked the door of our rehearsal room because he did not like my procedures. Here I could hear that voice of the past: "Do not sing; just play the piano!" Again, my self-esteem suffered another blow. Suan and Magallanes (2020) explained that low self-esteem could lead to depression, and depression lowers self-esteem. Belongingness and self-esteem are closely related to each other. It is considered one of the fundamental needs of a person. This explained in part what I was going through as now I realize as I write, that this dance is akin to the slow *Sarabande*. Sad but not beaten, I trudged on.

Not only did we win the competition, but I also passed my first test in leadership. Here I learned patience, firmness, and humility. Truly, the impact of a conductor does not come from any single act, behavior, or skill in isolation but a whole person engaging in the music-making process (Hunt et al., 2004). At this point, I learned to be a directive leader, making important decisions. This style is normally present during crises requiring immediate decisions (Brody, 2005). This singular activity helped me gain a capability in choral leadership that I could not gain through theoretical explanation. This shaped my practice as a choral pedagogue (Jansson et al., 2021).

Upon continuous reflection, I have realized that my work ethic, self-formation, decision-making skill, and self-esteem have been shaped, guided, and driven by the tenets, aspects, and teaching strategies founded on my choral education. Here I began to dance to the rhythm of the *Courante* as I learned to become independent and a bit more self-assured.

Readiness to learn: The choir, the rehearsal, and the performance

Chorus is about learning to sing in a group (Debrot, 2016) and is a social event where social behaviors are developed. Social behavior is the manner of interaction between the choral conductor and ensemble affected by the learning environment. Its very nature is in 'being together', in 'singing together' (Pearce et al., 2016) and in 'shaping habits together' as one. Each rehearsal procedure and performance is a 'giving of' one's individual voice, attitude, and feeling, which builds on and becomes a synergy where the prowess of the director's leadership, control, musicianship, and creative skills are tested and honed.

The director unites each contribution, capturing and executing dynamic contrasts, articulations, and intonations for blending and balancing these so the song may be sung. In turn, this brings both listener and singer through captivated altered states of emotions, remembrances, and well-being. Then the song becomes shared ownership by the composer, the pianist, the singers, the choir director, and the listener. These procedures of constant rehearsal form habits which can be applied to different undertakings and arenas of life.

My leadership skills were tested in the 80s upon appointment as Director of the School of Music and Fine Arts. Armed only with choir director management skills, I had no idea how to sustain a dying school under threat of closure. My training was in performance.

Equipped with a master's degree in choral conducting, I decided to develop a chorus that could catch public attention and perhaps act as an advertising arm for the university. Even if I knew that the members would be "adolescents whose perspectives would primarily be a means of meeting new people and making new friends" (Campbell et al., 2007, p. 221), that, to me, was enough to get a group together.

I reorganized the Silliman University Campus Choristers, a mixed college choir that earned its first national recognition in the 1991 National Competitions for Young Artist (NAMCYA) Festival. Experts were impressed with their aural and sight singing skills but mostly their blend and balance.

We then continued to win competitions and gave concerts for university recruitment. Then we

toured the United States in 1999 and 2000 as goodwill ambassadors. We had no funding. All we had was the will to share goodwill and pride that we were designated by National Artist Lucrecia Kasilag and president of the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Our choral performances brought nostalgia to the alumni on the East and West coasts of North America, where the 'Silliman Spirit' continued to burn. Here I earned an affirmation that I was doing what I was intended to do.

Choral music is indeed powerful. Its procedures can transform the attitudes and habits of its members and can also be a vehicle to unite humanity divided across timelines and spaces. My learning at this time shifted from "subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness" (Pappas, 2013, p. 1), where my rehearsal space became a place where social participation took place and where social behaviors were [best] practiced (Green, 2018). Here, I refined my rhythm and danced my stately 1st Minuet, a validation that I can be stronger now to face criticism.

During this time, I learned that through hard work, the reward, and accomplishment were my sources of self-esteem. Gone was the feeling of not being good enough through the words, "Don't sing, just play the piano!"

Choral engagement declaration and member affirmations

I love the chorus. I love teaching choir. I love making voices blend in complete harmony with an understanding of music so deep that it makes both the singers' and the audiences' hair stand on end. Chorus has defined my life's ethics.

Choir, to me, is a microcosm of the bigger world. Here you meet all kinds of people with different personalities and musical capabilities. The choir is the instrument of the choral conductor, just as the piano is for pianists or the violin for the violinist. The choral conductor's instrument is made up of people who carry with them their own acquired knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which could sometimes come in the way of the song getting sung.

Choruses that I have worked with have won competitions and performed locally and internationally. My love to train choruses has given me a chance to create something out of nothing. Watching each member grow in confidence and knowledge of music and musicianship gives me a sense of purpose and meaning. By the very act of loving my work, I was able to transmit and instill in each choir member some intangible values that they hold until today. When asked, "What has been part of my chorus contributed to your person?" These were the responses of some members of my choirs: SU Campus Choristers (1999 and 2001,) the SU Gratitude and Goodwill Ambassadors (2003), and the SU Covenant Choir members from 2015 to the present.

"Being part of the choir has opened a lot of realizations for me - that the world is actually bigger than I thought it would be. Having been part of the US tour twice, the once-in-lifetime experience helped me to see things in a different angle - how I deal with other people, that small stuff need not be taken too seriously and that there is more to see than what is invisible to the naked eye. It also propelled me to work harder, dream higher, and be thankful. Life is short; we all deserve to be happy." (Dodong, personal communication, December 3, 2021)

"When I was racked with self- doubt, it gave me an opportunity to contribute to something greater than myself. Ma'am Sue was very patient in drawing out whatever little confidence was left in me. It's not about being better than the rest. What is more important is to give your best." (Manny, personal communication, December 4, 2021)

"Always do things from the heart. Discipline. Focus on what you are doing and always include the Lord in what you do." (Leomer, personal communication, December 3, 2021)

"1. Discipline 2. Working hard for what you want 3. Talent is great but grit gets you there. 4. Always look back to where you came from. You won't be where you are if not from where you come from. 5. Don't take life too seriously. Gratitude above all else." (Joy, personal communication, December 4, 2021)

"It has given me a home and a family where my musical journey took flight, making beautiful melodies that I will cherish forever." (Jing, personal communication, December 4, 2021)

"It taught me how to listen to everyone." (Allan, personal communication, December 4, 2021)

"Being part of the choir taught me to be responsible." (Jun, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

"To be in your choir was always a spiritual experience for the choir and the audience. It heals, inspires and transforms." (Roger, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

"One of the greatest blessings that I have enjoying especially this pandemic is joining Ma'am Sue's choir. I came to realize that singing in her choir is not just singing, it's about being in tune with the spirit of the Lord; a privilege to serve and to feel His presence during rehearsals/recordings, it helps me find happiness in this trying time of pandemic. Indeed, a blessing from on high." (Jase, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

"Being part of your choir and being under your guiding hand has taught me so many things and I truly can say that it has been such a blessing and significant part of my life. I have learned the need for discipline and focus, for one cannot pursue excellence without it. I have also come to realize that, although having great skills and talent may be plus points, a teachable heart, a good attitude, the ability to work with others, the art of listening and a willingness and passion to put in the work, are the driving forces that will bring you greater success and fulfillment. You have to love and enjoy what you do, because that is the fire that keeps you going. And above all things, acknowledge that everything comes from the Lord, so everything we do and the results/achievements of what we do goes back to Him, in Glory of His name." (Macky, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

"Being part of Dr. Suarez's choir affirmed that music is a gift from God. Although beautiful music can be expressed well by one person, how much more if a thousand voices can sound like one cohesive whole? Such beauty can only take place when each one has the heart to give and become part of that whole and if this is all done to glorify the Lord." (Pangshe, personal communication, December 5, 2021)

"Singing in your choir was never about standing out, but blending in." (Nellie, personal communication, December 8, 2021)

"Choral singing has made an impact in me and taught me three different aspects in life that helped me through my personal journey. First, it has taught me to be 'self-disciplined' – disciplined in the sense that we have to be on time at all times and be mindful of my actions that may affect the dynamics of the entire group. Second, it taught me to be 'hard working' because hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard. Lastly, I learned to "have faith" – in myself, in my fellow choir members, and most importantly in my conductor. These three things have helped me develop my character as I continued my path of being a musician and has solidified my true purpose in life which is to be able to serve God and His people." (Lang, personal communication, June 29, 2022)

An international award-winning piano student shares his Alaska experience:

"The Alaska tour was one of the most memorable and amazing experiences in my life. It was magical and surreal for a provincial boy from Pagadian, even so now recalling the experience. Who would have thought I could go to Alaska? Dr. Elizabeth Susan Vista-Suarez had a knack and intuitive gift of discernment. I felt fortunate to be one of the lucky few who have had meaningful conversations with her about music, her colorful personal stories, philosophy, relationships, insights into anything about life, and why we do what we do. Aside from the piano, I love being in a choir. It is such an amazing feeling to create beautiful harmonies and music together. However, I would never have had the confidence to audition. I am grateful that Ma'am Sue saw something in me and asked me to join. I secretly wished to be part of her choir, Ating Pamana (Our Heritage), which was by invitation only. This made more sense to me later when we were about to prepare for the Alaska tour. It definitely changed my outlook, which I carry with me until today—more than a decade later.

When Ma'am Sue was gathering the SU Gratitude and Goodwill Ambassadors for the Alaska trip, I asked her why she was including some of us who were not the best singers in the school. Her succinct answer to me was clearly an amalgamation of all the years of experience she had, plus her innate sense of intuition. She said something to this effect: "Sometimes it is not always the best singers that make up a good choir. Talent isn't the only criteria. You need to learn to choose people you can work with that will bring about harmony. At the end of the day, that's all you need. When you see the bigger picture, that's

how you arrive with the best." This thought has continued to influence me through the years as it has given me the needed assurance of being part of the touring group.

Ma'am Sue's magic included loving and caring for people, giving us the support, confidence, and assurance, we needed. Even when we feel like we are not good enough, she will try her hardest to lift everyone's spirits. Although this was so, it was in preparation for this tour that I saw how Ma'am Sue would transform into a Dr. Suarez during rehearsals. She was strict when the situation called for it, demanded discipline when necessary, and was steadfast when it came to breathing life into the music.

We love to recall the Alaska tour and how 'tuned-in' we were to her and each other. She had a brand of conducting that was intense and glorious as we automatically followed the slightest motion of her hand. What a privilege to have experienced that! We were literally and figuratively her instruments. When we performed, everything was purely always about the music—not us, not her, but the music. As a performer, these qualities I will always aspire to achieve and acquire. I will always be grateful to Ma'am Sue for all the lessons inside and outside the four corners of her studio — the lifelong gifts she imparted en route to Alaska." (Ricajj, personal communication, July 2, 2022)

These words encouraged me to repeat the processes of teaching-learning that led to the affirmation, and thus I danced my 2nd Minuet.

Self-affirmation: impressions from participants of music learning initiatives

An undertaking's success can only be gauged by the participants' evaluation. The following impressions from the participants of the MLI project are a source of affirmation for what I do. In answer to questions about their experience and what they learned; they had these to say:

Principal: The students learned confidence in themselves, and their love for music was enhanced.

Teacher 1: This program has been of great help to the students because their parents have difficulty sending them to school. Life here is very poor, but the children are very interested to learn music.

Teacher 2: I learned how to play the piano, read notes, place our fingers on the right piano keys, and develop our voices; we learned how to blend with other voices in the choir.

Senior High Student 1: (who was born with no legs) I really love music and everything about it. I always feel the excitement, happiness, enjoyment, inspiration, and, of course, the eagerness to learn something. They teach us very well. They teach us with a heart and are passionate about what they do. That is what enabled us to learn.

Senior High Student 2: I would never know how to play the piano or learn how to sing in the choir. Thank you.

Senior High Student 3: I wish this project could be applied in other schools, and I hope next school year there will be a project like this so that students who love music can be given a chance to learn it.

Student teacher, piano major, soprano: The MLI project was a fulfilling experience. It gave me an opportunity to teach music in high school for the first time. Despite the various challenges, it was a worthy project because I also got to experience how to deal with the different attitudes of the students I taught and saw to it that they enjoyed learning music.

Student teacher, choral conducting major, graduate student teacher, tenor: I am grateful for the opportunity to join the team. This project is a very good project not only for just learning music but also for Human Resources building. The experience of performing in public motivates the creative learning of music.

Student teacher, fresh BM graduate, bass: It gives me a sense of pride and fulfillment to be part of this program that allowed us to teach and share our knowledge and craft in music. It was rewarding to see the students and teachers perform in such a short time.

Lecturer and bandmaster: At first, we were really frustrated because there were no resources. No electricity and no instruments. But the team responded professionally. They tackled the problem in no time. In just less than a month, the students and teachers knew how to read notes already. They were very receptive, a clear message that they were very interested. It is a very satisfying feeling for an educator. The project for me, all in all, was a challenging but rewarding experience.

Student Teacher, senior choral major, student teacher, alto: As a guided partner model, I sang alto. Observing the procedure for GuPartMo, I saw it to be time efficient. For a large group with no proper choral training, they were quite fast in learning the songs. I saw it to be accurate. With choral people blended into the group, the learning process could reach the targeted performance result since the students could follow through well with the leaders in each section. All of the students and teachers who participated willingly gave their time which made the project succeed, both for the facilitators and the school.

These positive comments have proven that the mission was a success. They lend support to Petalla and Doromal's (2021) explanation of the findings of their study: that the participants' accounts revealed their insights on the challenges they encountered in terms of the quality of learning from the performance task. They believe that quality learning goes with teachers' proper direction to students to appreciate and understand the activity. Thus, learning will surely take place.

I have since been dancing my Gigue, a dance of life and vigor. I am ready to take on the continued challenges of my chosen profession.

4.0. Conclusion

In conclusion, "I do what I do" and "for what and whom" for several reasons. First, it is to prove to myself and all others that "I can do it!" despite what they think or say. Second, it is a response to my call of duty. As a catalyst for the promotion of music education on my side of the world, I stand at a portal where I can model, motivate, and empower those who feel incapable. Through consistent encouragement, they too can stand against limiting statements like, "Do not sing; just play!" or "Do you think you can do this with no funding?" or "Can you give piano lessons without a piano?" I hold a capacity to unlock skill performance potential so they too can say, "I can!". The transformation is incredible when they meet the challenge. Third, it is a proclamation and confirmation that a meaningful life can be gained through positive reinforcement in the learning environment where good self-esteem is promoted.

Finally, I do what I do because the tasks which my roles require allow me to enact the "musicality of" my ethos with a fulfillment so overflowing it must be shared, whether to the marginalized or others. Through this act of sharing, my selfhood is defined, confirming that I am a contributing part of humanity. Hence, the impact of doing an autoethnography has been satisfying and affirming, a validation that motivates me to continue doing what I do.

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