

Chapter 12: The Resonance Is the Composer: Students Soundwriting Together

By Trey Conner, Emma Hamilton, Amber Nicol, Chris Burton, Kathleen Olinger, Alyssa Harmon, & Ivan Jones, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

1. “Well This Is Different Than What I Expected . . .”

During the noisemaker workshop, we improvised feedback over read-alouds of each other’s drafts. In doing so, students were able to provide auditory feedback to written works. Some students created songs that were inspired by their peers’ works so that their peers could see what resonated with them and how the other students viewed their work. The experience is similar to standing up in front of a live audience, reading your piece aloud, and seeing how the reader reacts to which pieces. Through this other form of feedback, the author then has more insight on how to go back and revise their piece.

For example, at one point Alex Quinto’s rough draft was on the projector. Imagine a classroom lit by the glow of a monitor projecting our wiki writing process on a screen, as someone fumbles with an iPhone while turning on a “voice memo” application, pressing record, and then placing it on a desk near the center of the room. Listen as Amber Nicol introduces a two-chord keyboard vamp, over the din of noisemaker objects. After a few plaintive guitar chords from Emma Hamilton and Trey Conner, Kathleen Olinger raised her voice and sang Alex’s draft while the whole community played percussion, toys, and instruments (microkorg through a Lab Series L6 amplifier with 1 15” in the cabinet, 3 acoustic guitars, tambourines and various percussion “noise objects,” including, of course, incessant qwerty-board tapping as we typed on the wiki). They sang call and response.

As you listen to what follows, we especially want you to notice these things that you could adapt to your own classes:

- That the desire for such authentic feedback trumped self-consciousness
- How the spirit of play provided a platform for students to experiment, emboldening one student—Kathleen—to reinterpret another student’s draft through song
- How the results were not expected, but perhaps impossible to achieve without that spirit of play

Transcript

[Peaceful, slow arpeggios play in a major key, sounding perhaps like a keyboard and perhaps like an acoustic guitar, or both; it's hard to tell.]

Trey: I'm gonna just . . .

Amber: If I could explain my intentions in a constructive way! *[group laughter]*

[music continues repeating]

Amber: I think we need some percussion, guys. You're putting me to sleep! *[group laughter, group chatter]*

Trey: Also, we've got a little band here too, so I almost feel like it's time for Alex to choose who's going to be the NPR voice that comes in with it.

Amber: *[overlapping with previous dialogue]* Use like a pen or a pencil or an object.

Trey: I hope I find myself wondering that.

[loud laughter from someone sitting near the mic]

Amber: Okay!

Trey: *[layered with other voices]* Percussion would be nice, though.

Amber: Are you gonna read the—'kay. Wait, can we record this? Can somebody . . .

Alex: He's already recording it!

Trey: I just started rolling on my phone, yeah.

Amber: Okay, sweet. *[laughs]*

Kathleen: *[singing the words on the screen in a made-up melody in the key of the background music that continues]* I often find myself wandering. Not physically, but mentally. Some trips into mentality are good while some are bad. Think of these trips as a new world that only I know the map through. I continue to discover new places in this world of mine, but always know where home is.

Amber: I like it! We should make a chorus out of that, uh, passage there. *[singing]* I often find myself wandering. Find myself wandering.

Kathleen: *[layered with other conversations, singing]* I often find myself wandering.

Amber: *[singing]* Some trips into mentality are good while some are . . . bad. *[group laughter at her comedic timing]*

Kathleen: *[singing]* Think of these trips as a new world that only I know the map through.

Amber: *[singing]* I continue to discover new places. They're all mine, just fine.

[Music continues: the Microkorg continues to bubble and drone, the two guitars pluck jauntily in a call and response manner.]

Kathleen: *[singing]* The route to the end is a long one, yet I never know when it's going to come.

[maracas rattle]

Kathleen: *[singing]* I meet many characters on the way. I find family, friends, and forces that join me in my quest for purity of heart. They make the good trips of wandering. But there are enemies. The evils that I cross, some physical while none some don't exist.

Amber: *[singing]* Where, what, when, what, how? *[Everyone laughs a lot; she continues by speaking]* Cause it's just "what if" and "when," and it made me think of that!

Alex: *[loud, close to mic]* Well this is different than what I expected! *[group laughter]*