THE MEANING AND VALUE OF ELEMENTARY MUSIC IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

By

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ABSTRACT

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In education policy, research, and reform, rural education spaces are often an afterthought, if included at all (Azano et al., 2021; McShane & Smarick, 2018; Tieken, 2014). Music education research has followed a similar trend, with scholarly efforts directed toward school districts with greater resources or addressing racial equity while excluding rural music programs (Bates, 2011). To bring rural music education into discussions of music education for all, there is a need to understand what rural spaces are and how rural communities and music programs interact. The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning and value of elementary music in rural communities. Specific research questions were: 1) How do students, music teachers, administrators, and caregivers in rural communities view their elementary music programs, and what meanings do these stakeholders construct? 2) In what ways do elementary music teachers connect with and respond to their communities?

I designed and completed an instrumental multiple case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) that included elementary school music programs. Primary participants were rural three elementary music teachers representing different geographic areas of the United States. Additional participants included students in third through fifth grade, elementary administrators, secondary music teachers (where available) and caregivers. I conducted three interviews with each elementary music teacher as well as a week-long residence at each site. I interviewed administrators and secondary music teachers. I conducted focus group sessions with caregivers and students. I generated field notes, thick descriptions, and researcher memos. Throughout

design, data collection and analysis, I utilized social constructivism with a focus on meaning making (Charmaz, 2014; Hayes, 2020) as my theoretical framework. I analyzed the data and generated case descriptions, then conducted a cross-case analysis.

My cross-case analysis revealed shared and unique values of the elementary music program. Participants highlighted music enjoyment, music as a social connection, and the music teacher and important. I observed several hierarchies being enacted within the school and community impacting the music program, including suburbanormative biases and the subordinate status of elementary music. Music teachers worked to navigate community perceptions of music benefits, such as academic support, emotional regulation, and preparation for secondary ensembles. Participants described the connections their elementary music program created and engaged with place as a locale and a physical location. Based on the findings from each case and my cross-case analysis, I presented several implications for practice and policy, including a closer examination of the definition of musical success, further investigation into the wants and needs of rural elementary music educators, and the importance of soliciting essential voices in music education research.

To Viv:
Know that you can be more than one thing, and always be yourself. Work hard, chase your dreams, and do what is right, even when it is hard.
I believe in you always, just like you believed in me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Rural education spaces are often an afterthought in education policy, research, and reform, if included at all (McShane & Smarick, 2018). Resources and support flood suburban schools, while philanthropic efforts and education advocates are more prevalent for urban schools than rural ones (Lavalley, 2018; Smarick, 2017). Research relating to rural schools often lacks specificity, as rural spaces vary, like any geographic grouping (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019; Azano et al., 2021; Tieken, 2014). Policymakers and scholars often characterize rural schools as deficient or failing compared to schools in other locales (Corbett, 2013; Schafft, 2016). Such deficit assumptions devalue rural communities, marginalize students and educators, and ignore rural students, educators, and communities that are flourishing (Lavalley, 2018; Showalter et al., 2019; Tieken, 2014).

Music education researchers have followed similar trends, directing their scholarly efforts toward school districts with greater resources or addressing equity for people marginalized based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender while ignoring social class and locale, thus excluding rural music programs (Bates, 2011a). Some music education scholars have sought to explore or describe rural music education (e.g., Bates, 2011b; Brook, 2016; Isbell, 2005; Prest, 2013; VanDeusen, 2016). However, voices for rural music education are largely absent amidst a larger discussion of music education *for all* (Benedict, 2021; Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015; Talbot, 2018). There is a need to understand what scholars mean when they say *rural* and how rural communities and music programs interact to fully include rural in discussions of an equitable music experience for all students.

Schools often serve as focal points for rural communities (Schafft, 2016), acting as "conduits of ideas and practices within which cultural knowledge, norms, values, attitudes, and skills are passed from one generation to the next" (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 9). Similarly, communities influence schools, supporting or enforcing norms overtly through policy and funding and subtly through shared values and interpersonal interactions (Wuthnow, 2013). Residents may value music programs within rural areas as part of the shared community legacy or as a commitment to a well-rounded education (VanDeusen, 2016). Underlying school and community interactions can influence all aspects of the student experience at school.

Despite the active role both schools and communities play in student lived educational experience, students' voices and input are often excluded or ignored. Adults often overlook children's experiences and perceptions, treating students as "passive objects" who experience education and community rather than as "active players" who exercise agency (Rudduck, 2007, p. 587). Because of this disregard, scholars and educators can only speculate about rural students' experiences within school and the community.

Some scholars have sought to describe music education in rural communities (Brook, 2016) and rural community interaction with school music (Seiger, 2020; Smith, 2014; VanDeusen, 2016). Bannerman (2019) suggested rural communities and school music programs may experience a synergistic relationship. In this study, I explored the meaning and value of elementary music programs in three rural communities. Specifically, I sought teachers, administrators, students, and caregivers to discover their perceptions of the elementary music program, including what it meant to them and how they viewed its role in their school and community.

Understanding Rural

Rural research is often hampered by poor definition (Thier et al., 2021). Halfacree (1993) provided a historical overview dating back to the early 20th century regarding the ongoing scholarly debate on the term *rural.* McShare and Smarick (2018) identified at least 72 unique definitions of the term *rural* being utilized by various U.S. federal and state government agencies and programs. Each definition is created for a purpose, as outlined by Flora, Flora, and Gasteyer (2016):

> When governments establish labels for places, they are generally for
> administrative purposes to determine which places are eligible for specific
> government programs. When scholars establish labels, it is generally for
> analytical purposes, but since governments collect data, scholars often fall back to
> government labels. Media and advertisers use place labels such as "rural" to
> evoke particular images (p. 8).

Understanding the criteria for a locale's definition can be challenging, and *rural* remains ambiguous. Many United States government agency definitions are descriptive, focusing on population density, land use, housing, and distance to urban centers (e.g., Kozoil et al., 2015). Researchers frequently define locales within educational research using the Urban-Centric Locale Codes published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (n.d.). Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's (2013) designations, these Locale Codes focus on population density and distance from an urban cluster. The code *rural* is divided into *fringe, distant,* and *remote* as the distance from an urban cluster increases (see Table 1 for criteria). As the name implies, urban-centric locale codes position rural spaces as outside or distant (Fulkerson & Thomas,

2013). Such definitions do not accurately describe what rural spaces are; rather, they outline what they are not or what they may lack.

Rural spaces are often assumed to be homogenous (Thier et al., 2021), and the abundance of definitions increases the lack of clarity in rural education discourses, contributing to misinformation and inaccurate generalizations (e.g., Azano et al., 2021; Cloke & Little, 1997; Pendola & Fuller, 2018; Philo, 1997). This lack of clarity can lead to the reliance on stereotypes or assumptions about all rural spaces, including their local cultures, needs, and wants. For example, policy decisions based on one regional account of rural education may be maladaptive to a rural school system in a different region (Schafft, 2016). Overgeneralization can also suppress individual histories and identities, relegating already marginalized groups further into the shadows.

Socio-cultural definitions of rural spaces can encompass rural ecology, economics, and social characteristics (Gilbert, 1982). Like urbanormative or population-based descriptors, these definitions remain problematic, often presenting urban/rural dichotomies (Halfacree, 1993). Such dualistic depictions portray *rural* as a deficit, as the antithesis of modernity or progress, with cities often represented as progressive, educated, and sophisticated, ignoring the nuance within individual communities in any locale (Pateman, 2011). Local industry tends to feature land and community-based employment, including service-based jobs, such as banks, post offices, and gas stations. School districts can function as a primary source of employment in many rural spaces (Schafft, 2016; Wuthnow, 2013). Factory farms and extraction-based industries, such as agriculture, logging, or mining, can be common in rural areas (Wuthnow, 2013). It is important to note that the variety of employment opportunities can contribute to social stratification in rural communities, particularly in terms of income and levels of education (Wuthnow, 2013).

Media outlets often characterize rural residents by social stereotypes (Fulkerson & Thomas, 2016). This characterization may include a perceived stigma from outsiders that rural individuals are *hicks, rednecks, bumpkins,* etc., and a negative self-image based on media portrayals (Fulkerson & Thomas, 2016; Tieken, 2014; Wuthnow, 2013). As a descriptor, *rural* is often assumed to mean conservative worldviews, Republican political affiliation, strong religious ties to Christianity, strong patriarchal norms, and white supremacy (Abbas, 2020; Dahill-Brown & Jochim, 2018; Farmer, 2009; hooks, 2009; Niskanen Center, 2019; Theobald, 1997). Tieken (2014) argued,

> These myths serve to ensure the status of rural communities as either relics or wretches in the public imagination, and they obscure rural complexities and realities - inaccuracies that lead to marginalizing entire communities of people and forgetting entire schools of children (p. 7).

The myths Teiken referred to may be the result of averaging or large-scale metrics, as Salvador and Allegood (2014) concluded. They argued that high-level averages, while providing an overview, can mask large disparities that would emerge from different samples, and could result in policy that does not recognize local variation. The homogenizing nature of these depictions removes individual differences and is used to perpetuate deficit perspectives of rural areas. Upon closer investigation, rural communities may find unity because of (or in spite of) similarities and differences. For example, residents may disagree about how an experience looks or feels, or even what a name or distinction means (Herzfeld, 2005; hooks, 2009), but may still come together to present a unified force. Rural communities often have a strong sense of community spirit, where neighborliness and connection are central (Azano et al., 2021; Wuthnow, 2013). Rural residents, despite historical stereotypes, represent a broad array of individuals and communities.

Rural areas, as with any locale, are diverse, featuring numerous geographic, economic, and social influences (Azano et al., 2021; Philo, 1997; Wuthnow, 2013). As such, they require a nuanced understanding and careful, specific definition. Rural education scholars typically rely on government codes for descriptions and large-scale data relating to rural students and frequently present their findings in constant comparison to urban and suburban counterparts (e.g., Glover et al., 2016; Malkus, 2018; Player & Husain, 2018). While descriptive information regarding rural areas is becoming more available (Wuthnow, 2013), government and data reporting agencies have not yet incorporated non-population density metrics (race, class, community values, family structures, town legacy, etc.) into their definitions of *rural*. Recently, Malkus (2018) defined rural utilizing the NCES locale codes and clarified that a description of rural includes, at a minimum, "low population density and an economy grounded - at least to some extent - in living off the land, through industries such as farming, mining, or timber" (p. 9). Notably, this definition does not specify race, financial status, or social class, important distinctions as *rural* is not synonymous with *white, poor,* or *lower class* (Azano et al., 2021; Wuthrow, 2013). Given the diversity buried in the term *rural,* there is a need for a clear and detailed definition that considers the nuance within each rural locale.

Rural Identity

Rural can also function as an identity. In this sense, rural is a social construction and, therefore, relative. Not all people who would identify as *rural* may be from a locale that would be classified as rural using government codes (Azano et al., 2021; Tieken, 2014), and not everyone who lives in a rural place adopts rural as salient to how they identify (hooks, 2009; Merz & Furman, 1997). A resident from a *rural fringe* area may not identify themselves as *rural*, given their proximity to an urban center, and yet another resident of the same area may view

themselves as *rural* given their proximity to cornfields or the perceived presence of a quintessential small-town feeling (Mayo, 2021; Wuthnow, 2013). Similarly, a rural individual may have a different view on their connection to the community and may alter how they identify or interact as part of that community (hooks, 2009; Merz & Furman, 1997). *Rural identity* can be self-selected, and individuals may situationally choose to promote or suppress that identity (hooks, 2009; Merz & Furman, 1997).

Rural identity can contribute to a geographically dependent sense of belonging and a foundation for prior experiences and values. Corbett (2016) suggested that rurality functions as a set of sociocultural, historical, and spatial practices. Rural can be a feeling, "constitut[ing] one's identity...shap[ing] one's perspectives and understandings...and it gives meaning to one's daily experiences" (Tieken, 2014, p. 5). Rural identity may emerge more strongly for individuals when they are away from their home, such as bell hooks' (2009) stronger identification as Kentuckian or rural when she was away from home that waned when she returned. A rural identity can come into conflict with education norms, where students are encouraged to be placeless and mobile (hooks, 2009; Theobald, 1997), abandoning local idioms and traditions to "get out" and join "the real world" (Tieken, 2014, p. 20). This push toward cosmopolitanism, or the rejection of local ideals for an urban, more communal approach (Cheah, 2006), encourages rural individuals to look back negatively on their upbringing, perpetuating the idea that to be rural is to be deficient (Bates, 2014). Alternatively, a locale-based identity can be a source of camaraderie, as sharing an identity can foster connection and a sense of shared understanding (Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015). This identity may promote rootedness in one's upbringing given the emphasis in rural areas of ideals and values are often passed from one generation to the next and across communities (Dewey, 1902; Longo, 2007; Turino, 2008).

Operational Definition of Rural

I use the word *rural* not only to identify a geographic location in relation to an urban place (NCES) but also to describe rural identities. It is essential to highlight that *rural,* as an identity, may hold different meanings to individuals, at times encompassing worldview, religion, political affiliation, and geography. For example, a person who identifies as *rural* may not ascribe to a conservative worldview or to Christianity, as identity is multifaceted and complex. Nevertheless, *rural* is as much identity or a feeling as it is a physical location, and to ignore this conception of identity would be an oversimplification. Therefore, when using the term *rural*, I include physical geography and rural identity.

The term *rural* also holds additional meaning. As *urban* is often coded language for Black (Bradley, 2006; Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015; Hess, 2017; Ladson- Billings, 1996), *rural* as a social designator is coded language for white and poor (Bates, 2011a, 2019; hooks, 2000). Because 80% of rural American residents are white, scholars writing about rural people often presume whiteness (Showalter et al., 2019). However, this assumption does not account for the diversity within individual communities (Azano et al., 2021; hooks, 2000, 2009; Tieken, 2014; Wuthnow, 2013) and serves to further exclude and erase historically minoritized populations. Similarly, *rural* as a class distinction ignores the diverse background of rural inhabitants, negating the employment and social stratification, experiences, and status markers unique to rural spaces (Bates, 2019; hooks, 2000, 2009; Wuthnow, 2013). As mentioned previously, the term *rural* holds assumptions about rural resident identities. In contrast, I use the term rural to refer to a geographic location and will seek diverse locales and identity characteristics, actively challenging the perception of rural as monolithic.

It is important for scholars and policymakers alike to have some shared language in terms of defining the rurality or urbanicity of a place. As such, the NCES codes are appropriate as a geographic indicator, given that most educational research utilizes them. Table 1 shows criteria for *rural fringe, distant,* and *remote*. Using these criteria, NCES assigns each school campus a locale code based on physical location. Multiple schools within the same district can be coded differently, with the distinction based on "enrollment-weighted locale assignments of the schools operated by the district" (Geverdt, 2018, p. 6). Elementary schools selected for this study will have both a campus and district designation of *rural*.

Table 1.

NCES Locale Codes and Criteria – Rural

Urban-Centric Classification System	Distance from an urbanized area with less than 50,000 people	Distance from an urban cluster with 2,500-50,000 people
Rural Fringe	Less than 5 miles from an urbanized area	Less than 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
Rural Distant	5-25 miles from an urbanized area	2.5-10 miles from an urban cluster
Rural Remote	More than 25 miles from an urbanized area	More than 10 miles from an urban cluster

Note: Descriptors retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/definitions.asp

Rural and Urban in Conversation

In focusing on rural spaces, it was not my intent to say that urban or suburban spaces are of less value or that they cannot also be described similarly to rural areas. In addition to the coded nature of their labels, rural and urban spaces share many common factors. For example, both rural and urban schools tend to struggle with teacher retention issues (Baker, 2012; Lindeman, 2004; Player & Husain, 2018; Ulferts, 2018) and limited school funding (Abril, 2006;

Baker, 2012; Kena, 2016). Both areas may face challenges in addressing poverty among families and racial discrimination (Dahill-Brown & Jochim, 2018; Kena, 2016) and may struggle with population decline (Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017). Federal funding is often evenly distributed between areas of high and low poverty (Chingos & Blagg, 2017), with some minor changes in funding amounts for isolated or small schools (Fischer et al., 2021). Community support organizations, such as booster clubs, and a higher local tax base generate significantly increased funding for schools in wealthier areas (Elpus & Grisé, 2019), exacerbating issues imposed by property tax-based funding systems.

Both urban and rural areas are subjected to stereotypical media portrayals and implicit biases perpetuated by the media. Rural communities are portrayed as uneducated or backward, while urban communities are painted as either dangerous or progressive (Fulkerson & Thomas, 2016; Ingraham, 2020; Love & Loh, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2018). Within education literature, suburban schools are portrayed as the ideal or the norm, often in unspoken ways. At the same time, scholars explicitly identify rural and urban schools and therefore implicate them as deficient or other. Rural and urban spaces are often depicted as monolithic, wherein all residents of such spaces are assumed to share characteristics including race, class, and religious and political affiliations (Ingraham, 2020; Love & Loh, 2020). Frameworks such as Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth may prove beneficial when understanding the unique strengths of both urban and rural communities.[1] Community cultural wealth could be used to

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[1] Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) framework emerged as a response to Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997), looking for sources of strength within Communities of Color. Such a framework is useful in examining strengths of communities that are historically marginalized or misunderstood. While not all facets of CCW can be applied to all rural communities, it could be a beneficial tool in looking for the strengths within a rural community and providing a space and voice to individuals that have been historically erased (see Hesbol & Bartee, 2020 for an example of CCW application within rural education literature).

highlight deep funds of community knowledge and familial and social capital that may go unnoticed in disadvantaged communities.

When policymakers and media outlets discuss rural spaces, they often do so compared to urban spaces (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019; Fulkerson and Thomas, 2016)). If cities are progressive and modern, rural areas reject progress and are more traditional. Indeed, in describing rural locations, conversational phrases like *out of town* or *out there* point to the notion that one would have to leave a city to travel to a rural area. Media portrayals highlight ideals of community and tight-knit connection in opposition to individualistic, competitive mindsets often characterized with urban centers (Ajilore & Willingham, 2019).

Urban and rural spaces, while sharing similarities, face different challenges. For example, residents in rural areas must often travel greater distances to access services and amenities, including cultural and sporting events and venues, specialized medical services, and human services support offices (e.g., social security administration offices, county buildings, etc.) (Azano et al., 2021; Wuthnow, 2013). Music education within urban areas tends to receive increased attention from scholarly and philanthropic efforts (Smarick, 2017). Research about rural music education spaces needs further understanding and support, and philanthropic attention continues to focus on national policy debates, supporting charter schools, and metropolitan locales (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014).

Theoretical Frame

Social Constructivism

In this investigation, I seek to explore the meaning and value of elementary music in rural schools. I, therefore, selected social constructivism as the theoretical frame. Originating from Vygotsky's (1978) work on knowledge development, social constructivism holds that knowledge

is co-constructed through social interactions. In this view, members of a society together invent the properties of the world around them, creating socially and culturally constructed knowledge (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Kim, 2006). This knowledge can take the form of created meanings that inform judgments, decisions, and future actions (Kim, 2006). Social interaction and meaning construction rely upon intersubjectivity, or a shared understanding among individuals where interactions are based on common interests and assumptions (Kim, 2006; Rogoff, 1990). That is, the connections between individuals contribute to the meanings they develop and ascribe to events, objects, or locations. Given the individual and social meanings of music-making (Small, 1998), using a social constructivist frame allowed me to explore the previously formed meanings that participants hold regarding their elementary music program and to co-construct meaning with them.

Positionality

A social constructivist approach allows for and values the lived experiences of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). That is, while I must be mindful of my biases, my background and experiences are valuable to the research. I am a white, heterosexual, cisgender woman, a first-generation college graduate, and the product of a *rural-remote* school experience. My family was working-class and strongly connected to the land we owned in central Michigan (see Figure 1). My family moved from a small city to a rural-remote area when I was in elementary school. I experienced being a new student in a rural community and watched as my parents adapted to a new social group. The area was familiar to my family, as we had many connections before moving, yet there were new social dynamics to navigate. This background provided me with an intersubjective connection to my participants (Kim, 2006), including shared understandings and a common ground to approach meaning-making.

Figure 1.

My Rural-Remote

Note. Photograph taken by W. Mayo in October 2019.

Within this rural research, my upbringing meant I functioned as both an insider and an outsider. My lived experience as a rural resident and student provided me with a similar background to my participants. I have a shared education background with music educator participants and understand many common aspects of teaching elementary music. My current connection to my hometown meant that I understood how a rural community could function, including nuances between social groups, community initiatives, and conflicts (Wuthnow, 2013). However, as a person who has never lived in the communities I researched, I was an outsider to participants in this research study. My shared rural history did not include the history of other towns. Some scholars discussed insider/outsider status in terms of participation within a study or a group, viewing an insider understanding as a benefit and allowing the researcher to understand

nuances within situations (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015). Outsiders new to a locale can view events with less "baggage" (Knowles, 2006), but participants may not fully trust or open up to them (Charmaz, 2014). My lived experiences as a rural individual assured me that there is no monolithic rural experience and encouraged me to watch for counterstories. In this study, my positionality supported my ability to co-construct knowledge with-participants, engaging with my background to draw on the nuances of their lived experiences, meanings, and values.

Meaning-Making

The construct of meaning-making draws from the work of several notable theorists, including Piaget (1960), Vygotsky (1978), Werner (1973), Mead (1934), and Blumer (1969). Blumer (1969) presented meaning-making as symbolic interaction, highlighting three premises:

1. Human beings act toward things [and individuals] based on the meanings that things have for them.

2. The meanings of such things arise out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.

3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 3)

Charmaz (1980) clarified and extended these ideas to include:

1. Meanings are interpreted through shared language and communication.

2. The mediation of meaning in social interaction is distinguished by a continually emerging processual nature.

3. The interpretive process becomes explicit when people's meanings and/or actions become problematic, or their situations change. (p. 25)

An individual attaches meaning to or draws meaning from an object or experience, and that

meaning develops through interaction, conversation, and in some cases, conflict (Charmaz, 2014;

Hayes, 2020; Krauss, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). Like places and identities, meanings are fluid and

can be adapted over time based on interaction with new ideas, experiences, and actors

(Richerme, 2020; Seidman, 2019; Snow, 2001). Adler (1931, as cited in Hayes, 2020) argued

that "meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we

give to situations" (p. 14). That is, the act of bringing attention to an experience or drawing it

into one's intentional gaze is the foundation of meaning-making where an event without

conscious thought is otherwise just an experience (Schutz, 1967; Seidman, 2019). Furthermore,

people act and respond to situations, objects, and ideas based on developed meanings and

interactional contexts, generating tangible consequences of meaning (Small, 1998; Snow, 2001).

Given the transitory nature of the human experience (Richerme, 2020; Seidman, 2019), a

person's past, present, and future meanings are perpetually in flux. Hayes (2020) visualized this

individual meaning-making as a socially informed spiral process, drawing from past (prior

foundation for development) to present (current level of functioning) to future (potential as yet

realized). Hayes also differentiated between meaning-making as a process and the meaning

made, or the product or outcome of the process.

Meaning-making is contextual and fluid, occurring with the people, places, ideas,

experiences, and systems one encounters. Drawing on Charmaz's (2014) expansion and Hayes'

(2020) spiral visualization, for this study I conceptualized meaning-making as comprised of four

iterative components:

1. Eliciting: eliciting participants' previously developed meanings and listening, setting

   aside my prior biases as much as possible.

2. Relational Co-constructing: co-construction of new meaning through group conversation and task completion (i.e., drawing, hypothetical prompting), developed in relationship between participants and the researcher

3. Interpreting: researcher interpretation of the prior and developed meanings through analysis, including self-reflection and continued conversation with participants

4. Contextualizing: centering the prior and developed meanings within the larger context of each research site and across sites.

Through this process, I listened for participants' prior meanings. I drew out new meanings with participants through conversational exchanges and listened for what was present (Seidman 2019). I then moved to a more interpretive, reflective approach, checking back with participants about my interpretations. Finally, I situated the prior and developed meanings within individual research sites and across research sites. Situating meaning within its appropriate context is essential in development and meaning-making (Hayes, 2020; Krauss, 2005; Seidman, 2019). Enacting social constructivism through this analytical process of meaning-making allowed me to include participants' voices, my background, and our intersubjectivity to illuminate the meaning and value of music education in each community.

De-Centering Place

Some scholars have framed research on rural education through a philosophy of place (Hutchinson, 2004) or utilized place-based education as a pedagogical lens (Azano et al., 2021; Gruenewald, 2003). Cresswell (2014) described the complexities of *place*, including outlining the meanings individuals associated with place names. For example, he listed a set of coordinates and then identified them as "the location of New York City - somewhere south of Central Park in Manhattan. Immediately many images come into our heads. New York or Manhattan are place

names rich with meaning" (p. 7-8). He continued, drawing upon Agnew's (1987) fundamental aspects of *place* as a "meaningful location," citing location, locale, and sense of place. *Location* represents the physical sense of place, referring to the fixed objective coordinates of a place. *Locale* addresses the "shape of a place within which people conduct their lives as individuals" (Cresswell, 2014, p. 14). Terms like *rural* and *urban* are frequently associated with locale. Finally, *sense of place* describes the "subjective and emotional attachment people have to place" (Cresswell, 2014, p. 14). As such, individuals ascribe meanings to any given place, including the physical location and their experiences, preconceptions, and memories.

While place would likely inform many aspects of interactions among music, schools, and communities and can be an important component in rural identity development, I intentionally focused on meaning-making through a social constructivist framing in this study. Education researchers frequently apply place-based philosophies to rural investigations, as a local or ecological focus on place is often assumed to map onto the rural experience (Budge, 2006; Zuckerman, 2019). Because of this perceived alignment, a place-conscious focus may be considered the solution to policy reforms created and imposed by "distant experts" (Jennings, 1999) in an attempt to reform rural schools (Merz & Furman, 1997). As noted above, *rural* is not only a physical location but also a source of identity. In imposing an external lens, such as a philosophy of place, I would have prioritized the locale over participants' self-selected identities. I selected a more phenomenological approach for this investigation, working toward "seeing afresh" (Finlay, 2012) at each site. This approach supports the iterative nature of meaning-making and may allow counterstories to emerge more clearly. However, I recognized that place might be an important factor.

Terminology

In this dissertation, I frequently use terms that lack agreed-upon definitions or can describe multiple entities. As such, readers may not define the terms as I do. For this document, I defined such terminology as follows.

- Campus: The physical location of a school, including the building, denoted by a unique school name.

- Caregiver: An adult responsible for and engaged in a child's life. This term can include parents, grandparents, extended family members, caseworkers, guardians, babysitters/nannies, etc.

- Community: The people and locale associated with a particular entity, such as a town, school, or program. It is composed of people with a combination of geographic, economic, and social characteristics (Azano et al., 2021) and shared history. It is also naturally bounded by some inclusion/exclusion criteria (Merz & Furman, 1997).

- Conservative: A worldview emphasizing traditional values and social institutions of the culture or civilization in which it appears. A conservative worldview within the United States can include a centrality on traditional/nuclear family and moral focus (namely morals found within Christianity), individualism, and limited government (Lakoff, 2016).

- Liberal: A worldview that emphasizes individual freedoms and global civil rights. Within the United States, a liberal worldview can include environmentalism, support for social programs, universal access to education, social equity, and expanded government (Lakoff, 2016).

- Meaning: The evolving cognitive categories comprising a person's view of reality and definition of actions. Meanings can be life-encompassing, such as ideologies or

worldviews, or discreet, attached to more defined aspects of a person's life (Krauss, 2005).

- Music program: The curriculum, teacher, students, and legacy of the music offerings at a school campus or district. This term includes community outreach activities, performances, instruction, and reputation. A campus designation of a music program may also function as a budgetary demarcation, meaning funds are allocated and distributed on the basis and limitation of music activities at a specific campus.

- Rural: A composite term encompassing both a locale fitting the NCES criteria for rural (including fringe, distant, and remote) (See Table 1) and the self-selected identity of rural, devoid of assumptions regarding race, class, gender, sexual orientation, worldview, political affiliation, or religion.

- Stakeholder: A person with an invested interest, including caregivers, teachers, administrators, students, and community members.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the purpose and rationale for this study. I discussed rural as a term and identity, followed by my operational definition of rural for this investigation. I briefly discussed the intersection of rural and music education, leading to a brief overview of rural music education research. I then discussed social constructivism as a theoretical framework, focused on meaning making. I presented my positionality as a rural individual and explored connections between my identity and my research. Finally, I addressed place as a theoretical framework and defined terminology used within this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

Given my curiosity about rural elementary music education, I decided to study the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. In this chapter, I review research literature related to rural schools, rural communities, and music, focusing on connections to elementary general music programs. Specifically, I examine music as a content, community as a construct, school as a construct, and the various intersections of each. I then discuss music programs and the importance of constructed meaning. I conclude the chapter with a rationale for my dissertation study, including the purpose and specific research questions.

Locating Music Programs within Music, School, and Community

In discussing the elementary music program in rural communities, it is essential to understand the program's connection to the school, the community, and the music. I organized this literature review to address each construct[2] individually and then the relationships between them. Specifically, school, community, and music function in a triadic relationship, as shown in Figure 2. Finally, I will locate the rural elementary music program at the intersection of music, school, and community.

Music as Content

Music as content brings inherent meaning, as well as individually and socially constructed (delineated) meanings (DeNora, 2000; Green, 1994). Music can be a means of healing, self-expression, bonding, community building, networking, raising awareness, and celebrating cultural heritages (Hallam, 2010; Ilari, 2016; Veblen & Waldron, 2012). Music experiences can create memories, and the legacy of those events, whether as a performer,

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[2] By *construct*, I am referring to the idea or thought process that surrounds the physical existence of a school and/or community.

listener, or participant, can shape future perceptions and actions (Turino, 2008). Individuals view music styles and expressions through differing lenses, such as prior experience, implicit bias, preference, and purpose (what music is intended to do in a situation).

Figure 2.

Music-School-Community Triad
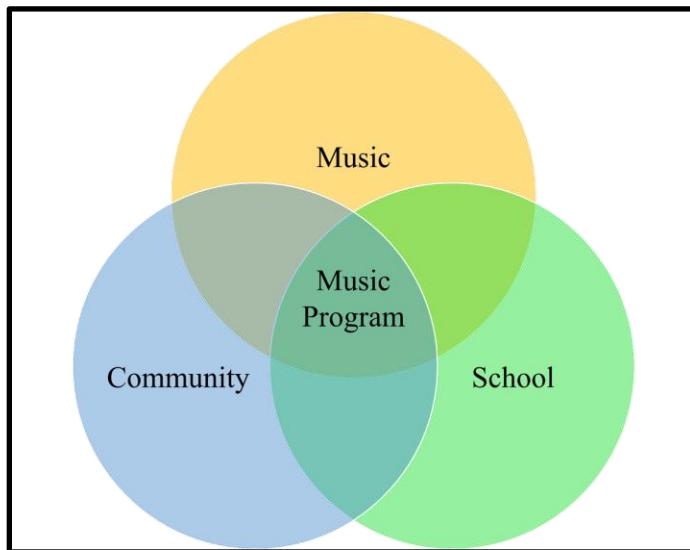
Music can play a role in personal and group identity development. Turino (2008) proposed that "the performing arts are frequently fulcrums of identity, allowing people to intimately feel themselves part of the community through the realization of shared cultural knowledge and style and through the very act of participating together" (p. 2). Similarly, the authenticity of the music and the way performers or audience members experience it can influence meaning-making (Green, 2006; Koops, 2010; Kruse, 2018). In group settings, music-making and listening can allow individuals to experience a sense of collective consciousness or empathy, creating the potential for shared feelings and recognition of shared humanity (DeNora, 2000; Ilari, 2016; Laurence, 2011). Group musicking may foster a sense of belonging (Green, 2012; Small, 1998), and family and peer connections are often external motivators for music participation (Demorest et al., 2017; Pitts, 2017; Vasil, 2013). Individuals may use music styles

and abilities as markers of identity (Hallam, 2010; Pitts, 2014; Turino, 2008). Children can socialize with and through music while also deciding which music to bring into their identity in private times (Barrett, 2011; Laurence, 2011; Sole, 2017).

Social groups exert power in determining what music styles are considered beautiful or valued, with cultural norms and expectations often being maintained from earlier generations (Small, 1998; Trevarthen et al., 2014; Turino, 2008). Through experiences with school music, children may develop ideas of what music is acceptable or who qualifies as a *real* musician (Kastner, 2009; Shouldice, 2019, 2020; Temmerman, 2005). Societal norms also dictate audience or participation procedures as unwritten expectations and protocols (Trevarthen et al., 2014; Turino, 2008). How an individual chooses to participate, or not, in music-making may influence how others perceive that person in the setting (Turino, 2008). For example, the group may perceive an individual negatively for choosing not to engage in participatory music-making. An individual may wish to be seen attending a concert as a public display of support for the performers or group, while a conspicuous absence may imply a lack of support.

The personal and social meanings attributed to music as a content area can influence how individuals (e.g., teachers, administrators, students, caregivers, community members) approach school music programs. Each stakeholder will likely approach and interpret a musical encounter differently. Music advocacy, and often school music program success, depend on community and school support. Therefore, it is important to consider how stakeholders view music as content.

Community as a Construct

The notion of *community* can convey multiple meanings. A community may be defined by a geographic border, such as a town or county. It can also be designated by a school district

border, which may span town lines or dissect them (Merz & Furman, 1997). Group or organizational affiliation may create a sense of community, wherein group members experience a sense of connection or belonging with one another (Puddifoot, 1995). McMillan and Chavis (1986) proposed four criteria for a definition of a sense of community, including membership, influence (or sense of mattering), integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Puddifoot (1995) expanded this definition into a multi-dimensional model of community identity, including territorial and social/cultural boundaries, an evaluation of the quality of community life (cooperativeness, extent of social interaction, friendliness, etc.), and an evaluation of community functioning (e.g., opportunities, services, ability to influence decisions). In all definitions, a defining border creates both inclusion and exclusion criteria (Giroux, 1992/2005; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Puddifoot, 1995). It is important to note that simply meeting inclusion criteria does not make one part of a community, as one must also self-identify and feel belonging to experience an intrinsic sense of community (Hyde & Chavis, 2007; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Tieken, 2014).

In rural education scholarship, community is often discussed as either geographic, as a sense of connection (a *tight-knit* community), or as a school district affiliation (Nitta et al., 2010; Wright, 2007). Given the connectedness, there is a danger in the notion of community being viewed as homogenous, that is, without diversity or individuality (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). Such homogenization negates diverse perspectives and experiences. For example, Nitta and colleagues (2010) found that students who experienced school consolidation became part of a "blended" community and benefited from more diverse social experiences. However, students and teachers reported struggling to fit in at times, and those who were moved from their prior

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campus described a feeling of loss of both identity and history. Understanding community as a construct requires individuals to pay attention to nuance and preserve variation in interpretations.

Scholars frequently report social capital as a defining strength of rural communities (Bauch, 2001; Ferris et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2020; Prest, 2016). The concept of social capital comes from Bourdieu's (1986) conception of forms of capital, including economic, cultural, and social, which take time to accumulate and have the potential to produce profits and to reproduce themselves. Social capital refers to relational networking that serves to help a person achieve their goals in life (Coleman, 1987; Volker, 2020). Social capital can be acquired on an individual basis, focused on a person's network and reputation, or an institutional basis, relying on group membership, solidarity, and affiliation (Bourdieu, 1986). Putnam (2001) expanded Bourdieu's conception of social capital to include bridging and bonding social capitals. He suggested bridging social capital was the relationships between members of diverse social networks, and bonding social capital was that which held peer groups together (Murray et al., 2020; Putnam, 2001). Education scholars often point to social capital in discussions of rural school strength (Bryant et al., 2013; Dika & Singh, 2002; Israel et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2000). For example, Bryant and colleagues (2013) highlighted the importance of mentors and caring adults in the schools to help students create connections that might help them later in life. Scholars have also argued for the importance of students finding and demonstrating their voices in their community as a means of expressing agency and developing connections (Ferris et al., 2013; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003; Van Ryzin et al, 2007).

School as a Construct

Schools hold multiple roles within their community, with the most visible being that of a physical location. In addition to providing a space for education and childcare, schools act as

central meeting places for community members in both a social and civic context (Ludden, 2011; Lyson, 2002; Tieken, 2014; Wright, 2007; Wuthnow, 2013). School buildings may be used for events, including hosting elections and fundraising efforts for local entities (e.g., fire department) or community projects (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Tieken, 2014; Wuthnow, 2013). They can also be a source of entertainment for the community through athletic and artistic events (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Ludden, 2011; Wright, 2007; Wuthnow, 2013). In rural areas, schools can often be one of the primary employers and the presence of a school can significantly raise property values (Lyson, 2002; Oncescu & Giles, 2014).

Considering school as a construct illustrates ways that the value of a school goes beyond the physical building. Societies construct meanings surrounding schools (Bryant et al., 2013; Trevarthen et al., 2014), including the view of schools as responsible for transmitting norms, values, and attitudes to students (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 9). Community members may place their hopes for future generations within the school (Budge, 2006; Farmer, 2009; Hutchinson, 2004), as they imagine how a well-rounded education will provide their students with opportunities for the future (Education Commission of the States, 2019; VanDeusen, 2016; Wright, 2007). In rural areas, a school's meaning may be interwoven with community identity, with administrators, teachers, and community members reporting, "the school is the community" (Barley & Beesley, 2007, p. 9). John Dewey (1902) argued that schools should be a source of life, rather than a preparation for future life. However, United States policymakers and administrators for public schooling tend to approach education through a capitalist orientation, predominantly treating schools as preparation for future careers (Budge, 2006; Preston et al., 2013; Theobald, 1997). While future preparation is not inherently bad, it does shift the focus of schooling from the

present and assumes an industrial outcome as ideal, reinscribing capitalist goals as a justification for dehumanizing actions (hooks, 2009; Longo, 2007).

School-Community Connections

Through group association and identity, schools can serve as a source of community spirit. Community traditions can be linked to the school or events, such as the homecoming parade or local festival (Tieken, 2014; Wuthnow, 2013). Community identity is often tied to school symbols, such as the mascot (Tieken, 2014). Symbolic display, including wearing or displaying the mascot, school logo, or school colors, can be a conscious sign of allegiance or unity within the community (Tieken, 2014). However, school symbols, mascots, and mottos may also divide or exclude individuals, particularly when they are tied to insensitive depictions (May, 2008; Tourdot, 2007), single out historically marginalized populations (Ortiz, 2016), or erase community legacies lost to consolidations (Nitta et al., 2010; Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). School connections can also be a point of unity during turmoil and tragedy, such as a natural disaster, racial and political tensions, or the death of a community member (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Sieger, 2020; Wuthnow, 2013).

Schools can create meaningful internal communities, generating multiple potential identity affiliations for students. School district boundaries may create a stronger sense of community than town borders, particularly in areas where one school district serves multiple communities (Budge, 2006; Merz & Furman, 1997; Tieken, 2014). Group affiliation within schools, such as athletics or arts, can serve as community subgroups (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Budge, 2006; Farmer, 2009; Wright, 2007). It is important to note the difference between community and proximity (hooks, 2009), as residing in an area or being present in a space does not guarantee inclusion or a sense of belonging.

Communities also influence their local schools. The hopes and aspirations of the community are often invested in the schools, and local history and legacy can become school traditions (Tieken, 2014). An individual might describe their personal involvement and service (Tieken, 2014) or generational connections (Hutchinson, 2004) in the schools as part of their community legacy. The school can function as a source of social capital for the students (Coleman, 1987). Community connections and school partnerships can help students build relationships with previous generations and community business partners (Hutchinson, 2004; Masumoto & Brown-Wetly, 2009).

Community members often view schools as institutions that cultivates futures for their children, with local values being taught or transformed in the classroom (Hutchinson, 2005). Student behavior and conduct in rural areas are often understood to be the same between home and school settings (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Tieken, 2014; Wright, 2007). As such, teachers and community members are expected to impress community norms of *right* upon students, including local socially-accepted behaviors and ethics (Tieken, 2014). Each community will have its own values and political beliefs, and as teaching is not value-free or apolitical (Farmer, 2009; Friere, 1970; Otriz, 2016; Preston et al., 2013; Richerme, 2020, 2021a), ideological differences can be a source of conflict between schools and communities, as well as within community and school groups. These conflicts may become barriers to student achievement, such as when contentious issues including evolution, race, or abortion arise within the curriculum (Farmer, 2009; Harmon & Schafft, 2009; Hutchinson, 2004; Merz & Furman, 1997; Preseton et al., 2013).

Rural advocates often market community connection and a strong sense of belonging as a critical benefit for rural education. These benefits are often presented as school strengths and as

counternarratives in discourses of school accountability measures and standardization. This connection is not wholly unique to rural locales (Bauch, 2001) and overgeneralizes rural schools. The notion of "taking care of our own" (Budge, 2006, p. 4) permeates rural education literature (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Johnson et al., 2000; O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Wright, 2007). School reform initiatives, including standardization and increased national and state accountability, are often imposed by distant, external agencies and can disrupt community legacies and school traditions (Merz & Furman, 1997; Ortiz, 2016; Theobald, 1997; Tieken, 2014). Historically, these initiatives to improve schools have often led to the closure of rural schools and neighborhood schools across locales (Giroux & McLaren, 1992; Theobald, 1997; Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). Theobald (1997) suggested that rural schools may be the ideal sites for community renewal and reconnection as they are often smaller and more manageable. Communities that are tightly connected, particularly to their schools, may demonstrate resilience when faced with reform efforts (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Bauch, 2001; Johnson et al., 2000). Teachers can benefit from community connections, gaining resources and relationships that provide support in the classroom (Ulferts, 2018). Students may feel more rooted in their locale, combating the push toward mobility that American public schools have historically promoted as beneficial (hooks, 2009; Merz & Fulman, 1997; Tieken, 2014).

The school's importance can go beyond impacting families with children enrolled (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Oncescu & Giles, 2014). Schools can feature prominently in the promotion or dissolution of a community (Theobald, 1997; Wright, 2007), and school closures and consolidations can merge or break apart communities (Tieken, 2014; Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). Just as schools can increase housing values, property tax cuts can detrimentally affect school budgets, particularly for rural schools (Brooke, 2003).

While schools can be unifying, they can also be sources of tension and conflict. Differences in values can spark conflict between community members, and these divisions frequently fall along racial and political party lines (hooks, 2009; Ortiz, 2016; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Tieken, 2014). For example, Ortiz (2016) reported cultural differences in parenting and viewpoints of education as a challenge in one rural community, in that the school was expecting white middle-class ways of engagement from a predominantly Latino working-class community. Segregation and separation, both from historical policy and personal choice, can cause conflict (hooks, 2009). Media reports and portrayals of failing schools can incite families to depart from a school district, causing community rifts and potential feelings of betrayal (hooks, 2009; Tieken, 2014; Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). Following consolidations and closures, communities may rally around schools to create new identities and work through prior tensions (Nitta et al., 2010; Theobald, 1997).

Working relationships between schools and local communities are essential to the success of the school. Longo (2007) declared:

> Schools cannot educate in isolation: equating education with schooling relieves the rest of society from the responsibility of taking part in the education of young people. It also misses the central issue because what happens in schools reflects what happens outside of the classroom. Educational successes or failures are mostly the products of communities and families (p. 2)

School-community connections provide an avenue for student involvement, positioning students as active participants and decision-makers in the process (Brooke, 2003; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Schools can serve as "mandated community involvement in child socialization" (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 17), acting as a bridge between generations. However, generational

divisions regarding social movements, politics, and technological and scientific changes can pose challenges for school leaders working to build connections (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). Geographic challenges due to distance in rural spaces and caregiver work requirements can also make community involvement difficult for families (Budge, 2006; Nitta et al., 2010; Semke & Sheridan, 2012).

School and community groups may exert influence and pressure on one another. Ortiz (2016) described rural residents referring to The School as a singularity, recognizing the economic and social influence of district initiatives and policies. Caregiver and community member involvement in rural schools is an unspoken expectation, and residents who are not visibly invested may be judged as not caring about education or the community despite individual barriers to participation (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Bryant et al., 2013; Ortiz, 2016; Preston et al., 2013; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Wright, 2007). Conversely, special interest groups within the community, such as athletics boosters, band boosters, and parent/teacher associations, can pressure school districts and influence school policy (Farmer, 2009; Preston et al., 2013; Semke & Sheridan, 2012).

Scholars have documented the importance of school-community relationships in rural areas (Bryant et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2000; Ortiz, 2016; Tieken, 2014; Wright, 2007; Wuthnow, 2013). In a multiple case study about high-performing high-needs rural schools, Barley and Beesley (2007) reported community involvement and investment in the schools were frequently cited by administrators, teachers, and community members as a source of success. They also suggested that rural communities may be less transient, fostering a legacy-based connection to the school and community, thus motivating family involvement and student success (Barley & Beesley, 2007). These informal connections can include family attitudes,

behaviors, and actions toward student learning and the importance of a sense of shared

ownership for student success (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). Students can also exercise agency

through informal connections with mentors and community authority figures and participate in

democratic processes within the school (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Bryant et al., 2012; Johnson et

al., 2000; O'Farrell & Morrison, 2003; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Van Ryzin et al., 2007). Family

and community legacies may influence how people interact with their school and school

programs (Johnson et al., 2000; Preston et al., 2013; Van Ryzin et al., 2007; Wright, 2007)

Another source of connection between rural schools and communities can be formal

partnerships. School-community partnerships may center around community projects, athletics,

academic initiatives, and arts programs (Bartleet et al., 2016; Forrester, 2019; Jones, 2020;

Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). Such collaborations can inspire a feeling of shared ownership

or agency within a school or community group, bridging divides between school, home, and

community activities (Bartleet, 2012; Bartleet et al., 2016). However, maintaining mutually

beneficial formal partnerships can be challenging for administrators and teachers who are often

over-burdened and under-resourced (Casto, 2016; Jones, 2020). Further, stakeholders involved in

such partnerships must be mindful of honoring cultures and traditions rather than repeating

privileged, racist, colonialist injuries (Bartleet et al., 2016). For example, Bauch (2001)

suggested a set of important principles for developing authentic school-community partnerships,

including parental involvement, church ties, and fostering social capital. These principles

reinforce assumptions regarding who is involved in a child's life, privileging a nuclear family

composition (married female mother and male father), and hold Christianity as the religious

foundation of rural communities, creating the risk of further marginalizing students and families

who are already often ignored or excluded within rural communities (Howley, Howley, &

Dudek, 2016; Ortiz, 2016). Further, there is a danger of formal partnerships not achieving any depth or true connection, operating in a more transactional nature, and potentially damaging the relationship between the school and community. In cultivating formal and informal school-community relationships, stakeholders must be mindful that connections remain mutually beneficial and honoring to the needs of the community and students.

Music-Community Connections

Just as schools are not ideologically neutral, neither are music programs. Music programs may operate as an invisible boundary (Hutchinson, 2004), where students and program alumni may view participation as an unofficial in-group/out-group designation. Jorgensen (1995) suggested the border created by a music program gives students something to identify with and belong to and may encourage students to value experiences lived in the moment, while also recognizing the heritage of the community and beyond. She also suggested it may provide a space for students and teachers to engage in dialogue and to work together to set and achieve goals (Jorgensen, 1995). Music program traditions, such as an annual trip, fundraiser, or performance piece, may serve to unite members across generations and could function as recruitment incentives for future participants (Harwood, 2017; VanDeusen, 2016).

Music events often function as community traditions. Scholars have documented that music-making can be a form of community building for children and adults (see Veblen & Waldron, 2012). Music events, such as concerts, are valued as links to the community and for generating energy and confidence among the students (Lamont et al., 2003; Wilson, 2003). Additionally, community attendance and involvement are essential for the success and longevity of school music programs (Haning, 2021). For example, holiday programs (Christmas, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, etc.) at the elementary level (Harwood, 2017; Regelski, 2014; Wilson,

2003) or marching band and choral events at the secondary level (Parker, 2016; VanDeusen, 2016) may be highly anticipated and meaningful community events. Changes to these events, such as reframing a Christmas program to feature multiple religious holidays or presenting a winter or holiday program, can create community tensions (Haning, 2021; Perrine, 2016). Angelo (2015) identified community cultural life, including upcoming events like a school musical, festival or parade, marching season, or school sing-along, as an influential consideration informing music classroom practice and curricular planning. School-community music partnerships, focused on a relational approach, could be a means to becoming more culturally sustaining (Prest, 2020). Prest (2020) argued that partnerships and connection through music has the potential to foster bridging social capital for civic engagement and intercultural understanding.

Scholars have investigated community-music connections, but many aspects of this relationship remain unexamined. Much of the research investigating school music and community connections has centered around secondary students, university students, and community music perspectives (Bannerman, 2019; Bartleet, 2012; Bartleet et al., 2016; Jones, 2020; Parker, 2016, 2018; VanDeusen, 2016), neglecting the voices of elementary students. VanDeusen (2016) reported residents in one rural community viewed their district music program traditions and history as important. Participants in her investigation highlighted the secondary band and choir with family ties and student opportunities as additional supporting considerations. At times, community leaders and school administrators may expect music performances at community events (Hunt, 2009). Through case studies and narrative inquiries, music education scholars in Canada have begun examining rural music education through a place-based lens (Brook, 2016; Spring, 2013, 2016; Prest, 2020), promoting the notion of a

connection between communities and music programs. However, this lens assumes place as an important factor, rather than allowing stakeholders to present that feeling themselves. Recently, Haning (2021) proposed a grounded theory regarding the role of performances in school music programs from the teachers' perspective, suggesting powerful connections to the community. However, the voices of rural community members and children, as well as a discussion of elementary music programs specifically, remain largely absent from research literature.

Music-School Connection

The elementary music program is one facet of a school community. As such, it can hold many nested meanings and identity connections. Lamont et al. (2003) suggested music may serve as an important part of elementary school culture, as it is something the whole school often participates in. Further, administrators (Abril & Gault, 2006; Lamont et al., 2003) and in-service and preservice teachers (Abril & Gault, 2005; Lamont et al., 2003) reported viewing music as beneficial to their students and valuable within the curriculum. Experiences within a place, such as the elementary music room (Shouldice, 2019) can create a legacy and influence how individuals will engage with ideas tied to that place moving forward (Merz & Furman, 1997). The lived experiences of children in music classes have meaning for their lives in and out of school, and such meanings are shaped by the ways teachers cultivate those experiences. Angelo (2015) and Temmerman (2008) suggested the importance of allowing for and supporting multiple forms of music and musical expression within the classroom. Similarly, Shouldice (2020) and Kastner (2009) described the importance of transparency regarding the roots of musical ability, the myth of talent, and the importance of access to musical role models and guided goal setting.

Music programs can be spaces where the community values and historical perceptions of music collide and are either challenged or reinscribed (Alekna & Kang, 2020). For example, Green (1997) argued, "the music classroom is a place in which the present-day operation of gendered musical practices and meanings surfaces, both in the raw common-sense and in the considered perspectives of [children] and of their teachers" (p. 17). Additionally, school music in the US generally centers Western classical music and has a historical connection to Christianity (Green, 1997), a connection that is often highlighted during the winter holiday season (Perrine, 2016). Distinctions based on gender, race, class, locale, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and religion conjure predisposed judgments of who should listen to, learn, or perform selected music styles, like classical, country, rock, or hip hop (Bates et al., 2020; Green, 1997; Kruse, 2020; Turino, 2008). The music included within a music curriculum can contribute to judgments and notions of separation that create exclusion (Bates, 2018a; Regelski, 2014). Classical music curricula may be viewed as detached or separate from popular music practices developed outside of school, creating a divide (Green, 1997). This perception solidifies an unspoken understanding of what music might be appropriate for specific settings, like the music program (Alekna & Kang, 2020; Temmerman, 2005).

Rural Music Educators

Rural music educators are essential to the success of the music program in their schools. VanDeusen (2016) described a synergy between a music program's history, administrative and community support, and the interest and involvement of the music educator that directly contributed to the success of one district's music program. However, rural school administrators often experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled teachers (Hunt, 2009; Maranto, 2013; VanDeusen, 2016), and a rotation of teachers can have a negative impact on program

enrollment (VanDeusen, 2016). This trend may be further exacerbated by the challenge of the *rural teacher stereotype*, in that rural music teachers are often perceived by the larger music education profession as less skilled or working in a *starter job* with the intention of *moving up* to a suburban secondary music ensemble (Bates, 2018a; Sieger, 2020).

Rural music educators face unique challenges. Scholars have reported rural music teachers may feel isolated from the community in which they work, while also advocating that a successful rural educator needs to be invested and knowledgeable about their school and their students (Sieger, 2020; VanDeusen, 2016). One music educator reported feeling like an outsider because she was not from the area she was teaching in and held a different worldview and political affiliation from her community (Sieger, 2020). Rural music teachers also present mixed pictures of autonomy, including simultaneous freedom and unspoken restriction (Haning, 2021; Hunt, 2009; Sieger, 2020). Music teachers may feel pressured by administrator and community leader expectations, particularly regarding community performances, while also feeling the need to constantly justify the benefits of the music program (Hunt, 2009; Sieger, 2020). Despite pressures and challenges, rural music educators may find fulfillment in the sustained contact with students, working with them for many years and at times across school campuses (Hunt, 2009; Mayo, 2021; Sieger, 2020).

Music Programs

As defined in chapter 1, music programs include the curriculum, teacher, students, and legacy of the music offerings at a school campus or district. The music program also includes community outreach activities, performances, instruction, and reputation. Music programs exist within the intersection of music as a content area, schools as a construct, and communities as a construct. Within this milieu, most of the research that examines music programs focuses on the

experiences of adolescent students (Angelo, 2015; Bartleet et al., 2016; Forrester, 2019). While there has been some research into the self-concept and ability beliefs of fourth-grade students (Kastner, 2009; Shouldice, 2020), belonging and meaning are often discussed more in secondary ensemble settings (Graves, 2019; Parker, 2016; VanDeusen, 2016). Additionally, community and caregiver voices regarding the meaning of music in the school and community are notably absent from research literature. It is unclear how formal or informal school-community interactions contribute to the meaning and value of elementary music programs.

The Importance of Meaning

Stakeholder interpretations of school and community connections vary (hooks, 2009; Hutchinson, 2004; Oncescu & Giles, 2014; Van Ryzin et al., 2007). The ways in which individuals make sense of an experience--both individually and collectively--contribute to how they interact with that experience in the future (Hutchinson, 2004), and various stakeholders may have different perspectives on the same entity (hooks, 2009). For example, some caregivers may feel intimidated entering the school building, while others feel welcomed and confident (Ortiz, 2016; Semke & Sheridan, 2012). Similarly, students may have differing vantage points based on their prior experiences and position in time with an experience (Hutchinson, 2004). Furthermore, who is included within the bounds of community is dependent on the individual and the context (Nitta et al., 2010; Tieken, 2014). School district boundaries, group affiliations (e.g., athletics and arts), and identity points (including race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) can function as defining borders for and within communities. Rural spaces may face the challenging history of ours-versus-theirs boundaries, particularly where minoritized racial groups are concerned (hooks, 2009; Ortiz, 2016). Given the importance of meaning, it is essential to

consider the ways stakeholders perceive and value their school music program, particularly in rural spaces where this consideration has been largely absent from research literature.

Music programs cannot exist in a school or community without caregiver and administrator support. Music programs often face challenges, including budget cuts, scheduling conflicts, and responses to legislative efforts like No Child Left Behind (Abril & Gault, 2006; Pitts, 2017) and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (Kos, 2017), that require administrative support to overcome. VanDeusen (2016) described necessary support in one community, including assistance with scheduling conflicts, funding, and a commitment to providing a comprehensive education for students, and Seiger (2020) highlighted the challenges of *passive support* from administrators and community members. Administrators have also reported the challenge of recruiting specialized teachers, particularly within the context of persistent teacher shortages (Lamont et al, 2003; Abril & Gault, 2006).[3] Caregiver support can also be important to program success. For example, students may be more likely to continue participation in secondary music programs based on parental support and experience, as well as the support of peer groups (McPherson et al., 2012; Vasil, 2013).

Rationale and Purpose

Music programs operate within the triadic relationship of music, school, and community, and are dependent upon the work and support of all stakeholders, including teachers, students, administrators, and caregivers. As discussed previously, individually and socially constructed meanings guide future actions. Given the influence of stakeholders within the school and community, it is essential to understand the meanings they construct relating to the elementary music program. Further, if music education professionals intend to strive for music *for all*, then it

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[3] Notably, teacher shortages have worsened in recent years. See Duncan (2022) and Will (2022).

is important to understand what and who is included in conversations about a school music program. Rural elementary music education remains an under-researched area, and the voices of caregivers and elementary-aged students are absent from this scholarship. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation is to explore the meaning and value of elementary music education within rural communities across stakeholders.

Chapter Summary

Music programs exist at the intersection of music, schools, and communities. Music as a content holds inherent meaning as an individual and social activity and identity point. Schools and communities as constructs influence one another and exert influence on music programs. While some researchers have examined secondary music programs in rural schools or described a school-community-music connection, no known research has investigated the meaning and value of the elementary music program in rural communities. With this study, I seek to address this absence in the research literature.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the design and method of this investigation, as well as the literature that informed the design. I outline participant recruitment and site selection criteria, data collection procedures, and analysis procedures. I conclude with my role in the research, reflexivity, and means of achieving trustworthiness.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this instrumental multiple case study was to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. Specific research questions included:

1. How do students, music teachers, administrators, and caregivers in rural communities view their elementary music programs, and what meanings do these stakeholders construct?

2. In what ways do elementary music teachers connect with and respond to their communities?

Overview of Case Study Design

The general purpose of a case study is to understand how or why a phenomenon occurs, whether the case centers on a person, event, social experience, or other unique situation. Scholars often employ case studies to explore real-world situations where "boundaries between phenomenon and content may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Stake (1995) outlined three case study designs: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Researchers use intrinsic case studies to focus their investigations on understanding a particular situation, such as a single event or interaction. Scholars may select an instrumental case study design to understand something

other than an individual situation or event, such as an idea or ongoing connection. Finally, a collective case study may be used to understand the distinctions and similarities among cases.

Researchers can construct case studies that feature single-case or multiple-case designs. Yin (2018) made no clear methodological distinction between single- or multiple-case study approaches but suggested the "evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall multiple-case study is therefore regarded as robust" (p. 54). Each case is a bounded system--"a specific, complex, functioning thing" (Stake, 1995, p. 2). Researchers should select cases that maximize the potential for knowledge generation, acknowledging that case study sampling should not be considered representative of other potentially similar cases (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) suggested the "real business of case study is particularization, not generalization" and placed emphasis on taking a case and "com[ing] to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is and what it does" (p. 8). Within case study analysis, the researcher is ultimately responsible for preserving and presenting multiple realities within the case(s) (Stake, 1995). Through constant comparison, data triangulation, and researcher reflexivity, researchers must engage with potential different or contradictory views of a situation or phenomenon (Stake, 1995).

Selecting a Case Study Approach

I designed this investigation as an instrumental multiple case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). An instrumental design was appropriate for providing insight into a particular issue or phenomenon (Stake, 1995), which in this investigation was the meaning and value of the music program. Electing an instrumental design enabled me to explore the connections between groups, including the elementary music teacher and other key community stakeholders (Stake, 1995). Utilizing a multiple case design allowed for constant comparison within sites and illuminated

disagreements and similarities across sites (Yin, 2005). Because rural communities are not monolithic (Thier et al., 2021; Wuthnow, 2013), it was important to seek a variety of possible viewpoints, requiring that I include multiple locations of varying backgrounds and making a multiple case design appropriate for this research (Yin, 2005). Though I completed cross-case comparisons, I sought to understand rural locales for what they are, not in comparison to other locales (e.g., city, suburb), acknowledging that similarities and differences exist across contexts.

Social Constructivism in Instrumental Case Study

As described in chapter 1, I employed social constructivism as my theoretical framework. I also used social constructivism to guide my interactions with participants, co-constructing knowledge with them (Charmaz, 2014). During data collection, I engaged in conversation and facilitation with participants, and I was thus inextricably part of their experience (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, in focus groups, I provided space for caregivers and students to interact and construct socially informed meanings (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Using a social constructivist research approach allowed me to explore and preserve multiple viewpoints throughout the study, and the connection with participants to ensure their voices remained centered.

<div align="center">

Defining the Cases

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I sought elementary music education programs located within rural communities. As defined in chapter 1, a music program includes the curriculum, teacher, students, and legacy at a school campus, encompassing community outreach activities, performances, instruction, and reputation. I considered elementary music programs with a certified, full-time music specialist assigned as the primary music instructor and a dedicated music classroom as eligible for selection. While rural spaces may share commonalities, I sought locations in different regions across the United States, where the residents had diverse demographic characteristics,

particularly with regard to race and class. Using my operational definition, I defined rural

communities first by their NCES locale code, limited to *rural fringe, distant,* or *remote,* and then

by the elementary music teacher's identification of the community as *rural*. I selected three

communities as research sites, allowing me to look for agreement and divergence among as well

as within the cases.

Recruitment

I sought three elementary music teachers as the primary participants in this study. Using a

separate procedure, I also sought child participants enrolled in the music programs and

caregivers, as well as campus administrators and secondary music teachers within the district

where available. Below, I described the recruitment procedures and selection criteria for each

participant population.

Primary Participants - Elementary Music Teachers

I recruited three elementary music teachers as the primary participants in this

investigation. Specifically, I sought experienced music teachers who worked at schools

designated as *rural* according to NCES and who had been at their current campus for at least

three years. Music education scholars have used varying definitions and terminology when

describing experienced teachers, including terms like *second-stage, mid-career,* and *veteran*

(Conway, 2008; Koner & Eros, 2019; Svec, 2017). Recently, Koner and Eros (2019) suggested

using the number of years taught to describe experience level; however, at the time of this

investigation, there was no agreed-upon definition. Based on previous definitions and for the

purpose of this investigation, I defined *experienced* as having five or more years of music

teaching experience. Given my interest in community connection, I also sought music educators

who had taught at their current school for a minimum of three years and were recommended by

music education scholars as having demonstrated success in their rural community and music program. I limited my investigation to elementary music programs based on my area of expertise and interest as an elementary music specialist and because there is so little research focused on elementary music programs.

To identify potential participants, I used purposeful sampling based on recommendations from music teacher educators. I contacted music education scholars to ask for recommendations of potential candidates who met the above criteria. After generating a list of potential contacts, I investigated the background of the school and community to ensure they met my operational definition of rural and purposefully selected candidates, prioritizing regional diversity. After receiving an IRB exemption, I used network sampling (Patton, 2015), asking my colleagues to make introductions between myself and potential rural elementary music educator participants. I then confirmed the elementary music teacher participants. I employed maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling (Patton, 2015) to select diverse communities that fit within the bounds of this study.

Child Participants

I recruited students in third- through fifth-grades as participants in this investigation. I coordinated with the elementary music teacher to distribute surveys through caregivers to solicit initial student responses and invite participation in focus group sessions. Any third- through fifth-grade child enrolled at the schools was eligible to participate. Following issues with survey distribution,[4] asked the elementary music teachers to recommend students for participation. I sent physical copies of consent/assent forms home with students, and any third- through fifth-grade student who returned the form was eligible to participate in a focus group session.

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[4] I discuss these survey failures in depth in the data collection section on page 52.

Conducting Research with Children

There are limited examples of student voices in music and education scholarship (Cook-Sather, 2006; Culp & Robison, 2020; Platt, 2016; Rudduck, 2007). Scholars and educators should consider children's points of view, as "children and young people have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions and have their opinions taken into account" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005). As such, intentionally including children's voices in research can provide scholars, educators, and policymakers with a critical understanding of students' perceptions and needs. When researchers work with children, they must ensure equal access and opportunities for student agency, the developmental appropriateness of questions and expectations, and consider child maturity (Platt, 2016). It is valuable to pursue such inclusion as children who participate in research may feel an increased feeling of ownership and belonging within a space, and teachers stand to improve instruction by understanding more about students' perceptions (Cook-Sather, 2006; Rudduck, 2007; Wiggins, 2016). For this dissertation, I invited children in third- through fifth-grade (aged eight and older) to share their perceptions and constructed meanings of their elementary music experience via surveys and focus groups.

I chose to limit the student focus group participation to children aged eight and above, as students in this age group are more likely to be capable of articulating their perceptions and may feel more comfortable interacting with an unfamiliar adult than their younger peers (Platt, 2016). In focus groups, peer-to-peer discussion may elicit more descriptive conversation than individual interviews (Platt, 2016), meaning that they may share more in conversation with their peers than with me alone. Children play active roles in shaping their school experiences (Rudduck, 2007),

and as such, it was important to include their perspectives in understanding the meaning and value of their elementary music programs.

Additional Adult Informants

I recruited additional adult informants to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the music program's meaning and value. Using key informants sampling (Patton, 2015), I identified the campus administrator and secondary music teachers (where applicable) in each community. The elementary music teacher participants facilitated connections with these participants. I also sought to recruit caregiver participants through an initial survey, distributed by the music teacher or campus administrator. Caregivers who had students currently or previously enrolled in the school's elementary music program were eligible to participate. After receiving survey responses, I had intended to use maximum variation sampling to select caregivers (and students) for participation in focus groups. When survey distribution failed, I asked the elementary music teacher for recommendations, utilizing snowball and network sampling (Patton, 2015) for caregiver participants.

Participants

Given my criteria, I selected three primary participants. Chris Mattson taught PreK-12 general and vocal music at Fairmills Schools. Fairmills was a rural-distant community in the Midwest (population 450). Mattson was in his sixth year of teaching and his third year in his current position. Additional participants from Fairmills are listed in Table 2.

Table 2.

Fairmills Participants

Primary Participant
Chris Mattson, PreK-12 Elementary and Vocal Music Educator, Fairmills Schools
Child Participants (Grade level)

Table 2 (cont'd)

Kala (3), Caiden (3), Juice (3)*, Russo (3)* Amelia (4), Scott (4), Jarrly (4), Halo (4), Everly (4) Michael (5), Ryan (5), Alyssa (5), Elisie (5), Jake (5)
Additional Adult Participants
Kayla Smith, Principal, Fairmills Schools ---- Jo Bricker [i], elementary custodian and mother of a child in eleventh grade and two adult children Mary Keys [i], junior high school English teacher, accompanist, and mother of an adult child who attended Fairmills Fern Smith [i], fifth grade teacher and mother of children in first and third grades

*Juice and Russo were siblings.

[i] Participated in individual caregiver interviews

Table 3.

Sweetwater Participants

Primary Participant
Theo Parker, K-5 General Music Teacher, Sweetwater Elementary
Child Participants (Grade level)
Ivan (1)** Rennoc (3), Nova (3), Aliva (3), Avery (3), Amy (3), Bristol (4), Crystal (4), Tuen (4), Crane (4), Hope (4), Katie (4), Skylee (4), Everly (4), Zane (4), Harry (4) Cherri (5), Anna (5), Vivian (5), Kevin (5), Bob (5), Sheryl (5) Finn (7)**
Additional Adult Participants
Shakira Martin, Principal, Sweetwater Primary School Joni Deppen, 6-12 Choir Director **----** Margot Brown [i], speech language pathologist at the school and mother of children in first and seventh grades Soncho Burr [i], second grade teacher and father of children in prekindergarten, second, and fifth grades Maria Fenton [i], paraprofessional and mother of children in kindergarten, second, and third grades Ellison Hammel, mother of child in fourth grade Lindsey Swaney, mother of children in kindergarten and third grade Raeleigh Tatum, mother of children in prekindergarten, fifth, and seventh grades

**Ivan and Finn participated with their mother, Margot Brown, during her individual interview.

Landon Medley taught PreK-8 general music and band at Roseville Elementary in Duplin County Schools. Roseville was a rural-distant community in the Upper South (population 480). Medley had been teaching music for 21 years, with the past three years in Roseville. Additional participants from Roseville are listed in Table 4.

Table 4.

Roseville Participants

Primary Participant
Landon Medley, Music Specialist and Director of Bands, Roseville Elementary School (K-8)
Child Participants (Grade level)
Emily (3), Bob (3), Lexi (3), Piper (3), Craig (3) Thomas (4), Jack (4), Jimmy (4), Coffey (4), Jamie (4) April (5), Catherine (5), Liz (5), Frank (5), Becky (5), Patricia (5), Christina (5), Ivy (5),   Lisa (5), Nicholas (5)
Additional Adult Participants
Jimmie Dale, Principal, Roseville Elementary School Bernard Lunsford, Director of Bands, Duplin County High School Carly Moore, Choir Director, Duplin County High School ----- Jessica Bowen, mother of child in fifth grade Brenda Johnson, mother of children in kindergarten, second, fourth, and sixth grades Clovis Brown, grandmother of child in fourth grade Dexter Connors***, school cafeteria worker and mother of children in fifth and seventh grades Jhon Conners***, father of children in fifth and seventh grades Jane Smith, mother of children in second and seventh grades Maria Castillo, mother of children in kindergarten, fourth, and seventh grades Lexxy Krugle, mother of child in fifth grade Marie Underwood[i], mother of child in fifth grade and three adult children Penelope Lindstrom[i], grandmother of child in fourth grade

***D. Connors and J. Connors shared they had been previously married.

[i] Participated in individual caregiver interviews

All three music teachers identified their school communities as *rural*. The communities all matched my operational definition of rural and the teachers matched the primary participant

criteria. The three sites represented different geographic regions of the United States. While I was unable to recruit a participant from a *rural-fringe* or *rural-remote* community, these three sites demonstrated variety within the *rural-distant* designation.

I collected information on demographic characteristics and occupations. Participants ranged in age from 8-80 years, including children in school to grandparents. Child participants included 34 girls and 24 boys. Caregiver participants included 17 females (15 mothers and two grandmothers) and two males (both fathers). Many caregiver participants held jobs associated with the school, likely a product of my sampling method and the reality of the school as a main employer in many rural areas (Wuthnow, 2013). Other caregiver occupations included stay-at-home caregiver, retiree, information technician, poulterer, and small business owner. Regarding race/ethnicity, one caregiver [Castillo] identified as Hispanic (immigrated from Honduras) and the rest identified as white or Caucasian. I did not ask students to disclose race/ethnicity.[5] Participants selected their own pseudonyms, which generally aligned with their gender, and sometimes with their ethnicity.

Procedure

After receiving an IRB exemption, I located and confirmed elementary music educators and communities as sites for the study in fall 2021. With the help of the music educator, I contacted the campus administrator(s) and secondary ensemble teacher(s) (where applicable) to request their participation. I coordinated with the elementary music teacher to distribute the caregiver and student surveys[6] prior to my in-person visit. After two interviews and a remote observation using Zoom with each principal participant, I spent one week in residence at each location, observing instruction, interviewing additional participants, and holding child and

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[5] I had intended to collect this information during the student survey to allow for caregiver assistance.
[6] I discuss survey failure on page 52.

caregiver focus groups. After my residence, I contacted each principal participant for a final interview.

Interviews

Using Seidman's (2019) method of in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing, I conducted a series of three formal interviews with each elementary music educator. This interview approach was appropriate due to its focus on meaning-making, as Seidman (2019) argued, "the root of in-depth interviewing is understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). This series included an initial interview, focusing on the participant's personal background, a second interview, targeting the details of their daily lived experience, and a third interview, reflecting on the meanings of their experiences (Seidman, 2019). (See Appendix B for elementary music teacher interview protocol). I conducted initial interviews with the elementary music educators prior to my observations. The second interview occurred after a Zoom® observation, providing context for the in-person visit. The final interview took place after the in-person site visit. After completing initial analyses for interviews and conducting observations, I followed up with participants to member check my findings (Charmaz, 2014).

I conducted individual conversational interviews (Patton, 2015) with the elementary campus administrator and a secondary ensemble teacher within each school district.[7] These interviews took place either in-person or via Zoom® at the participant's convenience. I intended these semi-structured interviews to identify and triangulate perceptions about the elementary music program and its role in the school and local community, as well as the perceived value to the community (See Appendix C for elementary school administrator interview protocol and

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[7] Fairmills did not have an additional secondary music teacher. Mattson was responsible for general music and both secondary choirs.

Appendix D for secondary music educator interview protocol). Throughout interviews with the additional informants, I utilized reflective interviewing (Roulston, 2010), as this interview approach aligned with this study's social constructivist theoretical frame, built my relationships with participants, and enabled me to review the interview interaction to further reform the design of interviews (Patton, 2015; Roulston, 2010).

Caregiver and Student Surveys

I designed a survey to collect initial responses from caregivers and students and to solicit participants for focus groups (see Appendix A). I worked with the primary participants to distribute the survey to the complete target population of eligible caregivers and students to increase the potential for responses (Patton, 2015). This electronic survey included open-ended questions allowing for a variety of perspectives (Roulston, 2010). Caregiver survey questions focused on individual community perception, the importance and value of music, and the elementary music program, as well as demographic questions. I asked respondents to indicate if they would be willing to participate in focus groups. The survey included an option for additional caregivers to complete the survey in an effort to solicit responses from multiple caregivers and to increase the likelihood of non-maternal caregiver responses (e.g., Young, 2019). I then recruited child participants via piggyback sampling (Burton, 2000), where caregivers were asked to hand the device to their child after completing their own survey response(s). The student survey featured similar background and demographic questions to the caregiver survey, with open-ended questions focused more on the students' school and individual music experiences. Finally, I asked students to indicate their willingness to participate in focus groups with caregiver permission (Platt, 2016).

I had intended to use the open-ended responses and demographic information to purposefully select participants for the caregiver and student focus groups. However, two of the sites did not distribute the survey (one administrator was unable to send it out before my visit, and the other opted for a recruitment letter for focus groups) and one site received only one complete response that was inappropriate and did not answer the questions asked. Therefore, there was no survey data to include in the analysis.

Focus Groups

I sought to facilitate focus groups with caregivers and students in each community. Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) recommended focus groups as appropriate for exploratory or explanatory studies. Krueger and Casey (2015) stated the intent of focus groups is to promote self-disclosure among participants, increasing the likelihood of hearing their true thoughts and feelings. Unlike group interviews, focus groups rely on participant interactions as the primary source of data generation (Hatch, 2002). This approach encourages participants to openly discuss, ask questions, exchange stories, and comment on one another's experiences and viewpoints (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). However, focus groups also present challenges, as participants may not feel comfortable sharing their perspectives in a group setting (Hatch, 2002) or may not be available to meet in a group setting. As the researcher, my primary role within the focus groups was to moderate discussion while seeking to balance focus and flexibility in the conversation (Hatch, 2002; Krueger & Casey, 2015). I used two video sources (a digital recorder and an iPad) and an audio recorder to document the focus group sessions from multiple positions, ensuring quality recordings for transcription.

Given the lack of survey data as a sampling source, I used snowball sampling and target population sampling to recruit caregivers and students as focus group participants while I was

on-site in each location. The music teacher sent home paper versions of the consent forms for each group, and in one case provided an emailed reminder of the focus group opportunity. Any caregiver or student aged 8 or above who returned the consent form was eligible to participate in the groups.

Caregiver Focus Groups

Caregiver focus groups met for approximately 60 minutes on the elementary school campuses. I used a task-oriented focus group approach to encourage conversation (See Appendix E) (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). If caregivers were interested in participating but could not attend a focus group, I conducted individual interviews (in person or remotely) using the same question prompts as the focus groups. In Fairmills, I interviewed three caregivers individually but did not run any caregiver focus groups. In Sweetwater, I interviewed three caregivers individually and conducted one focus group meeting with three other caregivers. In Roseville, I conducted two caregiver focus groups (one with five caregivers, the other with three) and interviewed two caregivers individually.

Student Focus Groups

In collaboration with the elementary music teachers, I conducted three student focus group sessions per site, based on student availability during their *specials*[8] time. Because of the scheduling, grade level groups were often intact, meaning that students were talking with their immediate peers. I conducted multiple meetings to solicit diverse student responses and to increase opportunities to engage with students. I used a task-oriented focus group approach to encourage conversation, asking students to reflect on questions and then write/draw to organize their thoughts prior to sharing out. (See Appendix F) (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). Each focus group

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[8] The term *specials* was a campus designation referring to art, music, and physical education, and other classes that occur outside of the general classroom with a specialist teacher.

session was scheduled later in the visit, ensuring the students had met me during music class prior to our conversation. I coordinated with the elementary music teachers to determine an appropriate meeting location within their school building.

Observations

Conducting observations of elementary music instruction enabled me to develop contextual sensitivity within each site and provided a view beyond participants self-reporting regarding their instruction (Patton, 2015). I generated observation field notes to triangulate and further investigate what participants had already described in interviews and what I had observed on zoom. I also sought to challenge my own preconceptions of each site based on my prior lived experiences and biases (Charmaz, 2014; Patton, 2015). Because of travel logistics, I conducted an online observation in addition to an in-person residency for each of the three elementary music programs.

Online

Prior to my in-person visits, I conducted one-hour Zoom® observations at each site, followed by an interview with each elementary music educator. I did not record these observations. The virtual observation provided me with a first glimpse into the elementary music classrooms. These observations also provided additional context for my in-person visits, allowed me to see a variety of instruction examples and helped to build rapport between myself and the elementary music educators.

In-Person

Between October 2021 and February 2022, I visited each site for one week, observing the elementary music classes. During my observations, I generated thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and field notes regarding classroom atmosphere, student and teacher interactions, curriculum,

and classroom and community context (Patton, 2015). I video-recorded segments of these observations for the purpose of reflective conversations with the elementary music educator (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). I also used the observations for triangulation with interview data. During my residencies, I worked to immerse myself in the local community, including driving around town, sharing evening meals with locals, and visiting local landmarks when possible.

Researcher Field Notes and Memos

During observations and after interview and focus group experiences, I documented my observations through field notes and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973; Mills et al., 2010). Hatch (2002) described field notes as two generative components: raw field notes and the process of "filling in." Researchers generate raw field notes in the field during observation and then fill them in upon leaving the setting, making a more complete description based upon the raw notes and additional recollections from the setting. My field notes consisted of "descriptions of the contexts, actions, and conversations written in as much detail as possible given the constraints of watching and writing in a rapidly changing social environment" (Hatch, 2002, p. 77).

I also generated researcher memos throughout the design, collection, and analysis processes to critically engage with my biases and previous experiences as part of my reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014). Memoing "serves to assist the researcher in making conceptual leaps from raw data to abstractions that explain research phenomena in the context of what is being examined" (Birks et al., 2008, p. 68), providing a "space and place for exploration and discovery" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 81-82). Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008) outlined the mnemonic MEMO to conceptualize the functions of memoing: mapping research activities, extracting meaning from data, maintaining momentum, and opening communication. Through my researcher memos, I

critically engaged my understanding and observations, as well as increased my sensitivity to the meanings within the data (Birks et al., 2008; Charmaz, 2014).

Data Collection, Storage, and Analysis

I utilized a variety of methods to record interviews and observations. I video- and audio-recorded focus group sessions from multiple angles to ensure I accurately captured participant dialogue and facial expressions. I used a small portable camera to record in-person classroom observations. I stored all interview recordings, field notes, transcripts, and correspondences in a password-protected Google Drive® account and backed them up to an external hard drive. I used Kaltura Mediaspace®, a password-protected media processor provided by Michigan State University, to transcribe the audio recordings from interviews. I de-identified all interviews and transcripts using participant-selected pseudonyms. During my analysis, I used printed transcripts to code and identify themes.

Within each research site, I grouped data sources by participant type. I treated caregiver responses, including focus group sessions and individual interviews, as a single unit. I also grouped student focus group responses. I grouped interviews with the elementary music teachers, secondary music teachers, and campus administrators by participant role. I conducted an inductive analysis during data collection, engaging in within-case constant comparison (Saldaña, 2016) to generate an overall picture of each participant group.

I then engaged in inductive analysis to determine codes and themes among participant groups within each case. Patton (2015) described inductive analysis as "searching the qualitative data for patterns and themes without entering the analysis with preconceived analytical categories" (p. 551). Within this analysis, I employed initial and open process coding as first-round procedures, followed by axial coding (Saldaña, 2016). These exploratory methods of

coding were appropriate for this investigation, as I co-constructed meaning with my participants and did not apply a predetermined theory to the sites for comparison. I coded all transcribed interviews, focus groups, open-ended survey responses, field notes, and researcher memos. After both rounds of coding, I organized the individual codes into categories to derive overall themes within the data (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout data collection and analysis, I generated analytic memos, both as a reflexive measure and to keep track of emerging insights throughout the process (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). I analyzed each case separately, as I deliberately sought different voices within the communities and across sites. Following the coding process, I constructed case descriptions for each research site incorporating all data collected from each location. I highlighted the relationships and influences in participants' created meanings of the music programs. Finally, I conducted a cross-case analysis to identify similarities and differences among sites (Yin, 2018) and present an overall synthesis (Patton, 2015), including any common relationships and counternarratives.

My Role in the Research

In this investigation, it would have been disingenuous for me to feign objectivity. Chiseri-Strater (1996) stated:

> all researchers are positioned…by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical-personal circumstances, and intellectual predisposition. The extent to which influences are revealed or concealed when reporting data is circumscribed by the paradigms and disciplines under which we train, work, and publish. (p. 115)

I outlined my positionality in Chapter 1. Here, I outlined my potential biases based on my identity and expectations in light of my role in co-constructing knowledge with participants and the social constructivist frame I selected.

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I expected to find strong community connections and overall support for the schools. The *rural-remote* schools I attended as a child had a strong elementary music program, with grade-level concerts as community highlights, and thriving secondary band and choir programs. The three music teachers in the district had all worked there for extended periods of time, and as of the start of this project, the elementary music teacher and band director were both still there (the band director has since left to take another position in the area). The community supported the music programs financially and through attendance. Fundraising events, including jazz band concerts and madrigal dinner performances, were well attended. Local businesses provided sponsorships for trips and athletic programs. The community was locally known for its willingness to support others, including providing aid during emergency situations. Although the music program I participated in was well-supported, I wondered if this would be true at other rural schools. My experiences and observations since leaving my childhood home made me wonder if other music programs would be seen as subservient to extra-curricular activities including athletics.

As a rural individual, I have witnessed and personally experienced many of the stereotypes associated with rural spaces, including the assumption that rural inhabitants are poor, uneducated, unrefined, and deficient (e.g., Corbett, 2013). These stereotypes influence perceptions of rural people and areas and often do not acknowledge the viewer's vantage point or the strengths found within rural communities. I remained actively conscious of these stereotypes during my residencies and analysis, working to be aware of how participants might view me— now coming from a PhD program at a Big 10 University-- and my perceptions of their communities. Through this work, I sought to present a more accurate and nuanced picture of

complex rural spaces, acknowledging the challenges and strengths of the schools and communities.

My professional areas of expertise and interest center primarily on early childhood and elementary music-making, influencing the elementary music program focus within this investigation. I taught PK-3 elementary general music for 6 years and I have visited numerous elementary music classrooms across locales as part of my work as a scholar and music teacher educator. I wondered if the instruction at the three sites would look different than what I had already seen. I expected to see singing, instrument playing, and movement. I also expected enjoyment to be a prominent value, particularly to students. I believe that children shape the world around them, and I value their voices in decision-making and scholarship. This guided me to center children's voices within my own work, providing a space for their experiences to be recognized.

Insider/Outsider in Rural Settings

I had the benefit and challenge of navigating multiple roles as an insider and an outsider within this research. My lived experiences growing up in a rural community and returning throughout my life allowed me to understand some of the social nuances that can occur within rural spaces. It also allowed me to challenge monolithic perceptions of rural spaces, as common rural tropes (e.g., poor, white, farmer) did not fully fit my experience, nor the experiences of many rural residents I have encountered. My insider knowledge enabled me to look for social connections based on my lived experience, which may go unnoticed by an unfamiliar observer.

I was also an outsider to the communities I visited. My rural background did not change the fact that I was new in town, visiting for a short period, and was a university-affiliated researcher. Some respondents may have been hesitant to talk with me because of my lack of

familiarity with their specific community or situation. However, my outsider status allowed me to step back from the responses and observe macro-level interactions in conjunction with the micro-level connections reported by respondents.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves giving special attention to how one thinks about thinking and constantly assessing the relationship between knowledge and the ways of knowing (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). This self-reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process lent credibility to the research and the results of the investigation (Patton, 2015). It also forces the researcher to confront potential biases and to report them plainly to the audience. As the data collection and analysis instrument in this study, I had to be reflexive. I engaged in reflexive memoing (Birks et al., 2008; Charmaz, 2014) throughout this investigation to critically examine my own contributions, questioning, and biases (e.g., Chaudhry, 1997). While filling in field notes, I used bracketing to support reflexivity, highlighting personal connections and cognitive dissonances to my observations and interviews, and to track and address my initial conceptions and potential biases (Hatch, 2002). I identified places where I saw myself in the research and interrogated the cognitive dissonance created by encountering ideas that were contradictory to my own (Roulston, 2010).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is an essential component of a social constructivist approach to research. Lincoln and Guba (2000) stated that constructivism allows for and values to values and experiences of the researcher, and functions by sharing control between the researcher and participants. Within this study, I used memoing to track my own experiences and interpretations while communicating openly with participants to construct meaning within the data. I engaged in

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member checking (Charmaz, 2014) throughout collection and analysis and triangulated my findings through multiple data sources, including the interviews, observations, and memos. I investigated disconfirming ideas to constantly engage with the complexity and nuance of each rural community, resisting the reinforcement of rural as a monolith.

Organization of Findings

The following chapters represent three individual case findings followed by a cross-case analysis. I examined Fairmills in Chapter 4, Sweetwater in Chapter 5, and Roseville in Chapter 6. Within each case, I chose to organize my findings based on my research questions. Following the triadic nature of music programs as outlined in Chapter 2, I first describe the meaning and value of the elementary music program in each rural community. I then address the music teacher's connection with the music program and provide an interpretation of the results. Chapter 7 features a cross-case analysis, highlighting emergent themes across sites and contextualizing them within extant scholarship. I then summarize the study and discuss its implications in Chapter 8.

Chapter Summary

Using an instrumental multiple case study design informed by social constructivism, I investigated the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities from the perspectives of music educators, administrators, students, and caregivers. I conducted interviews with music educators and administrators, observations in elementary music classrooms, and interview/focus group sessions with caregivers and elementary students. I generated field notes, thick descriptions, and researcher memos. Using inductive analysis, I coded all data to create case descriptions and then conducted within-case and cross-case analyses.

CHAPTER 4: FAIRMILLS (LOWER MIDWEST)

The morning announcements float into the music classroom, a large space with no windows and a removable wall. From the other side of the wall, I can hear the exuberant sounds of fifth-graders playing in the gymnasium. Mr. Mattson adjusts the metal chairs surrounding a small, rectangular alphabet carpet with faded colors, and warns that when the next class comes in, they will likely try to find the squeaky chair. He heads to the door to greet his class and, as promised, when the 13 fourth-grade students enter, they rush to identify and claim the squeaky chair. Over the sounds of the ongoing physical education class next door, Mr. Mattson asks the students to settle down and then he brings out his guitar to sing hello. The students echo back their familiar hello song.

Mr. Mattson invites students to join him and sit around the carpet. He reviews the terms tempo *and* dynamics, *then presents a single pair of rhythm sticks. Each student takes a turn creating a rhythmic fragment using varying tempi and dynamics, followed by the class identifying the changes they heard, saying, "louder and faster" and "quieter and slower." After each student has a turn, Mr. Mattson announces that everyone will have a chance to explore these concepts in a new way: by taking the rhythm sticks outside. The class excitedly rushes to the door and he leads them down the hallway to a door leading behind the school. Mr. Mattson hands each student a pair of sticks and encourages them to find something outside to tap them on, creating a new rhythm and exploring tempo and dynamics. "Mr. Mattson, Mr. Mattson! Come hear mine!" He circulates outside as students call him over to share their new creations. After he listens to their pattern, students deposit their rhythm sticks into a plastic milk crate before sprinting to the playground for additional recess minutes. At the end of their 40-minute period, Mr. Mattson calls the students over to the school to line up and brings them back inside where their teacher is waiting. He walks past the next class, a group of second-grade students, to*

get to his room, where he quickly resets the rhythm sticks in the classroom and prepares to

repeat the lesson.

Case Description

Visiting Fairmills

Categorized as rural-distant, North Branch is in the lower Midwest, with a population of

approximately 450. Most people did not refer to it as North Branch, but rather called it Fairmills

or more frequently just Mills. This name Fairmills included four surrounding towns whose

schools had been consolidated in the early 1970s to form one school district: the Fairmills

Trojans. Mills was surrounded by miles of sprawling cornfields (Figure 3), with an occasional

patch of trees or local marsh reserve. Most introductory conversations included "this is as rural

as it gets," which rolled as naturally as "how are you, I'm fine," reflecting a strong sense of rural

self-identification. Getting to Mills required the use of two-lane state roads, as there were no

expressways within the county. Residents often had to travel long distances to find work, and

according to one resident, "if you don't have a car, you *will* be unemployed." Regarding access

to amenities, such as grocery stores, medical care, and any special events, another resident said

"it's just a process for everything…it's just longer." During my visit, I stayed in a nearby town,

approximately 20 miles away, as there were no lodging accommodations within Fairmills. Local

businesses in Mills were mostly community-service based (e.g., post office, bank, church) and

generational, meaning that business ownership was passed from parent to child within one

family. These generational connections created long-standing ties throughout the community, but

also made it difficult for new families to find housing and employment in the area.

Figure 3.

Fairmills

Note. Photo taken by W. Mayo in October 2021.

The generational and community connections found within business and land ownership trickled into the schools as well. A majority of the district's staff had connections to the local area, with many of them having attended Fairmills schools or having an immediate family member who was an alumnus. Similarly, conversations with students revealed that many of their caregivers had attended Fairmills schools during their youth. One staff member at the school described the community saying, "it's all kind of close-knit." Students were also actively connected to their school community, including knowledge of school history, who had moved and why, and even expressing concern for a school bus driver who had been hospitalized and wondering who would cover their bus route.

Fairmills Schools

Fairmills School District consisted of an elementary school (approximately 150 prekindergarten-fifth grade students) and a combined junior/senior high school (approximately

50 sixth-eighth grade students and 90 ninth-twelfth grade students). These three schools shared

property and were connected by a covered walkway. Students across campuses arrived at school

together, with all grade levels riding buses together, or less commonly, being dropped off by a

caregiver. Each grade level had one class section with approximately 18 students per grade. In

recent years, the student population in Fairmills had been decreasing dramatically. One

administrator shared, "we consist of four little towns, all of which are very small and losing

people." Given the small population, the school did not have enough students for many athletic

or academic team events, leading to a co-op partnership with Johnson, another small town

located approximately 20 miles away. The co-op team became the West River Rebels,

representing both schools. Events, such as athletics, were held in Johnson, meaning that students

and families had to travel for practices and games. Fairmills no longer had a football field or

regulation track, as both were severely damaged during a storm about five years ago. The

gymnasium was under renovation after a recent storm caused water damage. The roof in the gym

and the hallway outside of the band/choir room still leaked when it rained and would stay wet for

days. The declining student population had sparked conversations about another potential

consolidation, and the decision of how to paint the gymnasium created conflict between

remaining the Fairmills Trojans or preemptively painting in the West River Rebels. Several staff

members described an identity crisis taking place within the community, saying "a lot of

Fairmills is losing its identity."

There were two music rooms within the school buildings, one for the elementary and one

for the junior/senior high school. In the elementary school, the music room shared a removable

wall with the gymnasium and resembled an oversized backstage space, with doors and stairs on

either side of the room and no windows. Older metal chairs circled a small carpet, facing the

chalkboard at the front of the room. White walls stretched up to the high ceilings, where a large metal fan circulated the air in the room. There were a few posters showing music terminology with animals and bright colors decorating the walls, but they were otherwise empty. At the junior/senior high school, the music room was also a study hall classroom and storage space. There were chairs arranged at the front of the room facing an older upright piano, with round tables behind them. Cabinets lined the back walls, holding theater supplies and band and choir performance uniforms that had not been used in some time. A collection of music performance trophies decorated the tops of the cabinets. On the far wall of the room, a painted mural of various music symbols and the names of several seniors who had participated in the choir program between 2016 and 2019 decorated the wall.

Fairmills Music

The music program at Fairmills had a strong legacy, with many community members sharing about the past strength of the elementary music classes and the prestige of the band and choir programs in the high school. Prior to 2000, when the schools had more students, there had been an elementary music specialist, a band director, and a choir director, all with successful and locally renowned programs. One administrator described the music program at that time as the "strongest in the area by far." In the early 2000s, all three teachers retired, and the district struggled to find replacements that would stay for more than a year or two. As the "revolving door" of teachers continued, student enrollment in the junior/senior high programs plummeted and both the choir and band positions were cut. The three music teacher positions became one PreK-12 general and vocal music position after the district had cut the band program. This position had seven different teachers in the seven-year span prior to the arrival of Chris Mattson, the current music teacher, who was in his third year of teaching at this campus and sixth year of

teaching overall. All elementary students (prekindergarten through fifth grade) attended music class twice a week for 40 minutes. The junior high choir met three times a week for 60 minutes, and the high school choir[9] met daily for 60 minutes. Within the last year, enrollment in the choir program was increasing. The school principal and music teacher shared anecdotally they believed the elementary students were beginning to become more invested in their music classes. However, many adults within the school and community shared a strong sense of loss over the band program and a desire to see the band returned and the elementary and choir programs revitalized and thriving. Reflecting on the past legacy of the program, Mattson shared, "there *was* a good program…I'm standing almost in the ruins of a good program."

Findings

Meaning of Music as Content

Several stakeholders believed that an elementary music program was important as part of a well-rounded education or as a way to work with the "whole child." K. Smith,[10] principal of the elementary and junior/senior high schools, described the school's responsibility to the community as helping to produce well-rounded students. She shared, "academics are not our only purpose…the social, emotional, the art, the music, the technical, all that goes together to produce the product that we want to put out into the community to make [our students] successful." Students also valued music as new learning throughout their day, saying "I like to learn what I can do in music" (Ryan, fifth grade). The students viewed music as an additional area to explore outside of what they were learning in their general classrooms, contributing to what adults described as a well-rounded education. Stakeholders viewed music as an important

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[9] Both the junior high and high school choirs were elective courses.

[10] I used last names to refer to adult participants and first names for student participants. All pseudonyms, including place and mascot names, were selected by participants.

part of the curriculum as it offered learning opportunities beyond what respondents considered *core* courses (e.g., math, reading/writing, science, social studies). They saw music as presenting a broad range of possibilities for students, creating the potential that everyone could find something within music that speaks to them. In his interview, Mattson shared his intentional focus on providing opportunities to explore a wide array of music knowledge. He described his curriculum dividing by quarters, included inclusion of elements of music (tempo, dynamics, rhythm, melody, etc) in the first quarter, music technology second, world music history and cultures, third, and singing in the fourth quarter. He shared, "music comes in so many different things that to teach it just one way, that's just one perspective," and valued the fact that there are numerous ways to engage with music. These varied learning opportunities, he continued, contained the potential to extend beyond the classroom; there is "no final boss"[11] in music learning, in music learning, according to Mattson. Students and adults appreciated the potential avenues of music engagement (such as future listening, popular music performance, and instrumental or choral participation), and music's contribution to a student's overall education.

Caregivers described music as beneficial for brain development and emotional regulation for their children and themselves. Keys, a caregiver (mother of an adult child who had attended Fairmills) and educator at the junior/senior high school, said "I know that part of it…there's the developing part of their brain that needs that music, that needs that flow. It activates different parts of the brain…and I know that my music helped me with math, it helped me with fractions…with proportions." Her personal engagement with music throughout her life, including her current role as the accompanist for the music program, carried over into the importance she placed on music for her students. Bricker, a caregiver (mother of a child in eleventh grade and

[11] Mattson was making a video game reference, describing the lack of a formal conclusion or endpoint to a music learning journey.

two adult children) and a custodian at the elementary campus, shared during her interview that music helped her through her workday and was a source of stress relief. Music provided the background ambiance and sense of peace for educator and caregiver F. Smith (mother of children in first and third grades) in her fifth-grade classroom. Although music participation was not something she enjoyed as a child, she recognized it could have value to her children and students. She said, "it just wasn't my thing…but I play [recorded] music, so I guess I'm still involved." These connections to personal music enjoyment and involvement seemed to form a foundation for the meanings the caregivers assigned to the music program.

Some stakeholders considered music to be an educational right for students. If a district chose not to include music, Bricker felt, the students would be denied a fundamental component of their educational experience. She advocated, "give them a chance to choose if they want to go on in music or if they don't. Don't pull it away from them at an early age and not give them that chance." Mattson acknowledged his role in that foundational experience: "My role as an elementary music teacher is to show a whole bunch of stuff and then teach them the tools to really get into what they want to learn…to show them as much as possible and to get them to do as much as possible." Music's inclusion in the school day empowered students "to create those lifelong decisions" (Mattson) about their own musical identities, pursuits, and futures.

For many children, music functioned as a source of enjoyment outside of school. Some students shared that music listening and playing was important in their home lives. Several mentioned having an instrument at home and finding joy in practicing their skills, and a few described taking lessons and enjoying sharing their progress with Mr. Mattson. Most students identified listening to music in the car as a way they spent time with family. Two siblings shared about music's role in their family celebrations, recalling a recent trip to visit family in Mexico

and the band that performed for a Day of the Dead celebration. Adults also included music listening as something they enjoyed, whether as a pastime at home or work (Bricker and F. Smith) or as a personal passion (Keys and Mattson). Throughout all interviews and focus group conversations, I saw participants' faces light up when they discussed music.

Elementary Music's Value to and in the School

Participants viewed the elementary music program as an important exposure to the arts and valued its universal availability to all students through the school. Many adults highlighted this importance, given their perception that exposure to music was not something students were receiving at home. Principal K. Smith acknowledged, "in rural areas, we have limited access to [music learning opportunities] ... they can't just live in our bubble.[12] And some of [the students] don't leave our town." Mattson and caregiver F. Smith also described the lack of musical opportunities and argued the importance of music exposure in school. A few students shared about music learning at home, and most who did described having access to a piano or guitar. Those who had access to an instrument often indicated that they were the only ones in their family who played it, so they took lessons with a teacher in a nearby town or were self-taught. Many students described listening to music in the car with family or music's inclusion at family events, such as birthday parties and backyard barbeques.

All adult stakeholders agreed that music exposure was important for younger students, though the reasons varied. Some valued elementary music education's role in building future music participation and appreciation. Mattson shared, "if it wasn't for an elementary music program, you wouldn't have those performers, you wouldn't have those composers…a song would come on the radio, and you just wouldn't know what's going on." For others, it meant

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[12] Smith was referring to the sense of global isolation associated with rural communities, wanting students to have experiences beyond those the town could otherwise provide.

exposure to future career opportunities or the foundation for a lifelong pursuit of music-making. K. Smith remarked, "If they're going to want to play an instrument later…they need to know how to read music. Well, that's a hard thing to start in your freshman year of high school." In one focus group, two siblings chatted briefly about music as a future, saying "we've got a guitar to make a twin band (wanting to form a sibling musical duo)" (Russo, third grade). The elementary music program provided arts experiences to students and presented a sampling of potential avenues to continue music involvement.

Adults and students valued that elementary music classes provided students with a variety of teachers and activities throughout the school day. Mattson perceived this need for his students, saying, "for the elementary kids, it's getting out of the classroom and having a different experience with a different teacher…it's a different content, it's a different approach." Bricker, who saw the kids throughout each day during her work as the custodian, said that music class gave the kids space to "unwind and let their minds think freely…just have something else to think about other than numbers and letters all the time. Music is a different form." Mattson and the caregiver participants stated music class provided the students a space to interact with their peers. According to Mattson, collaboration was not a focal point within many of the classrooms, so he worked to incorporate a cooperative and collaborative model of music exploration within his classroom. He believed this social component could give students a sense of belonging or feeling like a part of something. K. Smith believed that the music program helped kids to plug into the school, and Bricker supported this idea, saying that the alumni from the former band program had remained in contact and were looking for ways to support the current music program. This variety and social connection within music may provide a draw for students to come back to the school when they have graduated.

Students described their music class as a space where they could reset their emotions, and caregivers agreed music class could function as an emotional regulator. Students shared they felt they could calm down in music class, and that it did not cause them any stress. Caiden (third grade) explained, "When you're doing hard work, especially close to the year, like with the state testing, [music] can give us a break and help to calm our minds down a little bit." I asked students if they felt stress throughout the school day, and every child responded affirmatively. Students also mentioned their disappointment at having to miss music for pull-out services, such as RtI[13], or behavioral consequences including detention, and so their music class was a reason to work hard or to behave in class. Many students viewed their music class as a source of joy within the school day. In focus groups, students appeared joyful and animated when sharing that music was fun and something they enjoyed doing, and that they looked forward to attending music class. For some, it was a motivator to attend school. Jarrly (fourth grade), shared, "whenever we have a music day, I always make sure to get up. I always get up early cause I'm really excited…I just really enjoy music outside of school and in school."

Adults reported valuing the elementary music program as an incubator for the secondary music programs. Many adult stakeholders viewed the elementary program as a feeder for secondary music programs, including the choir. Given the music program's legacy, several adults highlighted the possibility of restarting the band program if there was enough interest cultivated at the elementary level. Caregiver Bricker remarked, "I think [Mattson] has to start now. I think he definitely needs to start with these kids at a younger age to get them more interested in [band]...you need [them] to get the program back to a junior high band or a high school band."

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[13] Response to Intervention, or RtI, is a multi-tiered approach to identifying and supporting students with behavioral or educational needs beyond that of their general classroom. It is targeted toward students who are at risk for underperforming in the classroom as compared to their grade-level peers.

Program growth was central for K. Smith, who said, "I'm hoping that we're in a building process again…I'm hoping that [the teacher] getting in these younger grades, that the enthusiasm is going to carry over…hopefully those kids will [continue] when they get up into high school." Mattson recognized the elementary music program's impact on junior/senior high school music opportunities, adding, "when you've got a good elementary music program, you will have an AWESOME secondary ensemble, and I think I'm getting there these days." They saw the elementary music program as direct preparation for future secondary music programs.

Adults also valued the music program as a source of positive public relations for the school. Caregivers and administrators described the strength of the music program through a lens of renown or local status, established by performances and concerts. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the elementary music program hosted four concerts annually: Veteran's Day, Christmas, Grandparent's Day (early spring), and a Spring concert. These events would draw the community to the school, providing caregivers an opportunity to "get in to see the good things we are doing" (K. Smith). As the pandemic continued into the 2021-22 school year, concerts had not yet resumed when I visited in October. The performances were also a marker of success and status for the programs to some stakeholders. Caregivers in particular felt it was more difficult for them to judge or value the music program because they did not know much about what was happening in the classroom. Caregivers shared those performances were the primary source of information about the music program, and it appeared the performance cancellations due to COVID-19 distanced the community from the music program.

During the school day, elementary music seemed to fill a different role than that of the general classroom. Many adult respondents mentioned the specials[14] classes as a time for grade

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[14] Specials classes, including art, music, and physical education, occur outside of the general classroom with a specialist teacher. I discuss this term further in chapter 7.

level teachers to have their prep time, "and the teachers need that time." Mattson acknowledged, "it's practical, even if it's harsh…I mean, I'm the prep period." During my visit, Mattson was out due to an illness, and given the shortage of substitute teachers in the area (a common trend nationwide at the time, Morton, 2020), no one was available to cover music class and the grade level teachers had to keep their kids, losing their prep period for the day. A recent legislative initiative to increase unstructured recess time during the school day meant that instruction time from the specials classes was cut nearly in half. Mattson sometimes had as little as 15 minutes of instruction followed by recess supervision during music class. K. Smith, the school principal, recognized music's potential as a behavior incentive for students in the classroom, saying, "maybe the kids got to see the other ones had fun on the computer [during a music tech lesson] and they won't mess around in class." Mattson recognized that there was "more to life than music" but lamented that he often felt that he "play[ed] second fiddle to the general classroom teacher." In terms of support for the music program, it was difficult to see that support in action. Mattson shared, "there is a running theme here of people's words and their actions not lining up." Elementary music appeared to hold a different value within the school culture than other content areas.

Elementary Music's Value to and in the Community

Limited communication between the school and families made understanding the community's perceptions about Fairmills's music program challenging. Mattson explained:

> I haven't heard a lot from parents in general, but then again, I also think the school hasn't heard a lot from parents…just cause I think parents are also getting stressed out with the pandemic. We already had little involvement, and now whenever a school district calls,

especially involving discipline issues, we have parents that recognize the school phone
numbers and so they just don't pick up.

Mattson distributed the caregiver survey for this study via email and I received three responses, none of which were complete or usable (two answered only the consent questions and the third featured crude, off-topic responses). The caregivers who agreed to be interviewed were all school employees who were also parents. The findings within this section reflect community perceptions as shared by those caregivers, the music teacher, and the school principal.

Community perceptions appeared to be shaped in part by the students' experiences, with children functioning as conduits for connection between the music program and home. This was particularly true for caregiver F. Smith, who based her valuing of the music program on what her children and students shared about their time in class. She shared "I think they enjoy it…I don't know exactly what's happening…but when they come back, they're not negative about it…my own personal kids, they don't really say much about it, so I don't know." Mattson recognized this connection, saying "the kids are definitely the conduit…they're the ones that spread the word…they'll tell the parents, and the parents will likely be receptive of it." Alternatively, the students served as the messengers in many instances for bringing community perceptions back to the music room. Mattson lamented the lack of caregiver feedback he received and based self-evaluations of his classes on the students. He reflected,

I try to just take care of the kid first, and if the kids are having fun and music is involved, and they're learning music while they're having fun, that's the goal for me…I've heard good things at the elementary. They like coming to music class.

Limited communication between adults resulted in students serving as the primary conduits of information between their families and the school music program.

The music teacher's reputation seemed to influence how community members viewed the music program. As the face of the program, the music teacher was a central topic in discussions about the program and its legacy. All adult participants discussed the former music teachers who had been foundational in the program in the late 1990s. More recently, Mattson had been the face of the music program, and students and adults equated him with the program itself. If caregivers and students viewed the teacher positively, then the program was also viewed as such. For example, caregiver Keys shared, "I think he's enthusiastic…he brings a different perspective…I know the kids enjoy him. I know the kids have a good relationship with him. I think that they like to go to music." Mattson's willingness to stay and be part of the school spoke volumes for administrator K. Smith and caregiver Bricker, who shared "I think him being willing to stay and promote music with the kids is going to be huge" and "I think Mr. Mattson can do that (rebuilding) for this program. He actually wants to stick it out." Students unanimously viewed the music program as important to them because of their music teacher. When I asked students to consider what they might say if the school cut the music program (part of the focus group protocol), their first concern was for their music teacher. They advocated the school should keep music in their school because they enjoyed their teacher, with one student sharing, "Mr. Mattson is fun, and I get a lot of my character traits from him…Plus he helps us learn things" (Alyssa, fifth grade).

The legacy of the music program played an important role in how adult respondents viewed the current program. Many adults were able to recall their own elementary music experiences vividly. During my visit, local residents would share stories about their former music teachers or experiences with learning instruments. While I was getting dinner in town during my visit, one gentleman asked why I was visiting and when I responded, he started

singing a song he learned to play on the recorder as a fourth-grade student. Caregiver Keys shared that her music teachers and mentors as a child shaped her love of music and inspired her to continue practicing.

> I just remember that cart coming down the hall 'cause we didn't have a music room…you could hear it clank, clank, clank…and think yay, he's here, we get to do music today…it was just fun to know that was coming and it was time for music

Prior experiences and the history of Fairmills music were foundational for all adult participants.

The legacy at Fairmills included a strong past and a present desire to see the music program rebuilt into what it was or grown into something new. In the past, this legacy included strong performances, including musicals and ensemble competitions. Mattson highlighted the trophies in the junior/senior high school music room. He spoke about the *Mills Glory Days* or the idealized past of how things were at one time in the school and community. This history influenced how many adults viewed the elementary music program. As an alumnus and parent of students who had gone through Fairmills Schools, Bricker shared, "it does mean a lot to me…we had an amazing program when I was growing up there…we can build it back up." Mattson grappled with this legacy and his role, saying, "I don't want to create a legacy that was how it was back in the day…I do want to create good performers…but there's no longevity to it…what are you learning besides how to sing well?"

Community members viewed the music program as something worth supporting, despite challenges with enrollment decline and teacher retention. For example, caregiver Keys, who had been a pianist for most of her life, was asked to teach the elementary music classes during a school year when the district was unable to find a music teacher. She stepped in to teach music in

addition to her role as a Title I reading specialist that year. She recalled one example of community support from that year:

> At the time the music program did not have a piano that was worth anything. I mean, we couldn't tune it, it was so old. A lot of the keys were not working. So, on Parent Night, I put out a box and asked for donations for a keyboard…I got a few [donations]…then one parent paid for the whole keyboard...she wanted the kids to have music so she called in and told the principal, "I'd like to pay for a keyboard for the music program."

Alumni of the school, including Bricker, remained interested in supporting the music program, with resulting in ongoing conversations about how to bring back the band program. Community members had demonstrated ideological and financial support for music within Fairmills Schools.

Performances and concerts played an important role as tradition or expectation within Fairmills, as well as a source of joy for caregivers and community members. These performances were events that drew adults into the school. Administrators and caregivers named the concerts as their primary interaction with the music program. Keys shared that maintaining the performances was important when she was teaching: "I'd still really like to do the things that bring the community in [and during the performances], then the teachers sang along too." Mattson reflected that the performances and concerts felt like an expectation, saying "there's almost like a quota you have to hit." He described the community expectations of the performances:

> I usually have a piece that I consider for the classroom or for the kids to learn, and then there's a piece for the parents…you have to find that balance point between entertaining your audience…and having the kids actually learn stuff"

This expectation seemed to translate into curricular pressures. Mattson described pushing back against his perception of a stigma in elementary music, that "all you do in music class is just sing and that's it." Given the public nature of performances and concerts, these events were staples of the community calendar and focal points representing the music program as a whole. At performances, Keys shared, "there were always a few community members…that would come up and say thank you for doing that for [the students] and thank you for giving us your service." Community members generally valued the elementary music program for providing opportunities to see their children perform and reconnect to the school community.

Connecting Through Enjoyment and Well-Being

As a teacher new to a place, part of connecting to a new school or community includes understanding existing traditions and history. The music program legacy may be something that was strong and positive or something that was struggling or lost. In Fairmills, the music legacy included a formerly thriving program that had become shrunken and neglected. It may have been tempting for a new music teacher to reject the past music program, seeking to build something brand new. Mattson, however, approached his teaching position with sensitivity to the scars attached to the program and navigating how to honor the previous successes while working to build "a new legacy." The physical materials that were left behind in both the elementary and junior/senior high music classrooms were tangible remnants of the past. Outdated, broken materials lingered in the rooms, and the previous teachers had not worked to upgrade or clear them out. Another example was the mural painted in the junior/senior high music room, representing some of the names of choir alumni from the past five years. A recent music director had allowed students to start the tradition of painting their names on the wall as seniors, but the tradition was not well-defined or equitably executed. Mattson struggled with these challenges,

saying "I'm going to have to be the one that's going to be heartless" in clearing out materials or defining the criteria and procedure for adding one's name to the wall.

Mattson also described some burnt bridges and broken relationships that were a result of the high turnover rate in the music position. Administrators, colleagues, and caregivers were hesitant to trust that someone was going to remain in the position for longer than a year, and Mattson said the students showed "emotional trauma" or "sense of abandonment" regarding the elementary music program. He shared that the students had been visibly surprised when he returned for last year and shocked to see him at the beginning of this year, his third with the campus. Program growth was a recurring struggle, both in terms of student enrollment and administrative support. Mattson commented, "it seemed like a lot of previous teachers…wanted to do just enough to pump up their resume so they can go on to another school district." Since there were no other music teachers within the district, it fell to a single teacher to be the face of the program. Every time a new teacher left, there was no one to maintain momentum while the next teacher found their footing. Mattson and other adult stakeholders recognized this need for consistency and stability within the program. Mattson worked hard to create an environment that was predictable for students and to assure them he was not going to leave them unexpectedly. He worked to rebuild relationships with students, and by extension the caregivers, by creating a space where students felt welcomed and valued.

As a newcomer to the community three years ago, Mattson first had to navigate building relationships as an outsider. Although he had some family connections to the school (his mother was an alumna), he was still unknown to many community members, leading to initial distrust. At the beginning of his time there, he shared "I forgot my place, I'm a new guy" and had to work to demonstrate his commitment to the school. He summarized his experience of this distrust:

In this job, there's a lot of me wanting to do something and their first thoughts are, well

why are you doing that? Why are you making it better? You're only making it better so

you can quit. And I'm thinking, no, I want it to get better because the kids deserve that.

Mattson shared that he had struggled to connect at first, both as a new teacher at the school and

with the adjustment from his two previous teaching positions in an urban area. After my

residence, administrator K. Smith remarked that she believed Mattson had started to settle into

being at the school, having decorated his classroom more than he previously had. Mattson was

also proud to show off the new decorations during our final interview, panning the camera

around the room. He reflected that he had been working through resistance from colleagues and

administrators, building more intentional connections with the kids and on a personal level, he

was working to allow himself to feel settled in the school. He reflected, "I'm starting to build a

foothold in the school…the kids are what keeps me coming back to school, and they keep me

hanging on." This visible investment appeared to have a strong impact on how stakeholders

interacted with the elementary music program.

Mattson admitted struggling to connect the community's expectations of the music

program with his own curricular expectations. Concerts were a primary source of community

engagement with the school and the music program. Preparing for those performances, however,

had left little room for other elements of Mattson's music curriculum. Regarding concert

preparation and program growth, he shared, "they don't know the means of getting there." He

described his approach to music engagement as focused more on musical exploration, opening

students to the possibilities of music, rather than focusing solely on performances. He shared this

was a shift from previous music teachers, who had emphasized not only the performances but

focused primarily on singing songs accompanied by a prerecorded track and without conceptual

understanding. Students valued Mattson's music classes in part for the variety they encountered, and administrators and caregivers valued the purposeful nature of the curriculum. Mattson also valued student enjoyment within his classroom. He wanted the students to look forward to class and to have fun while they were there, while also learning Western classical music fundamentals, technology, and history. Mattson acknowledged that he was working to find a balance between the performance expectations of the community and the exploration that reflected his philosophy of music teaching of exposing students to broad musical possibilities.

Overall student well-being was a focal point for Mattson in his teaching. The community of Fairmills struggled with the ongoing challenge of poverty and their location made it difficult to access any support services. "There are times where the rural poverty [mindset][15] is so prevalent," Mattson shared, and combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, the students and families were understandably stressed. While Mattson believed in the value of music, he acknowledged, "there's so much more to life than figuring out the difference between a rallentando and ritardando…we have much bigger fish to fry right now." He shared that he focused on supporting the whole child. For him, this meant responding flexibly to their emotional and academic needs by taking additional class time to listen and providing space for them to share and being willing to adjust or pause musical goals for the day.

Interpretation

The music program in Fairmills seemed to be in constant tension, working to navigate the expectations based on program legacy (including teacher turnover), curriculum, and performance

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[15] By *rural poverty mindset*, Mattson was referring to ideas of teaching children in poverty, including those made popular by author Eric Jensen in his book, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About it*, published by ASCD in 2009. These factors, combined with the ongoing challenges of poverty in a rural locale (see Tickamyer et al., 2017) combined to form his understanding of a *rural poverty mindset.*

expectations. This negotiation between the teacher and the community influenced the program's meaning to each participant. Students valued their teacher and playing instruments, having missed the relationship and opportunities prior to Mattson's arrival. Adults also valued Mattson but focused more on desired curricular outcomes, including the reestablishment of the band program and a return to performances. Much of the research relating to music's meaningfulness has centered on music as a content (Davis, 2009; Silverman, 2020). However, music's value to the community may be visible in local traditions or annual events (Bates, 2013; Spring; 2013) or as part of an area's identity (La Menstrel & Henry, 2010). Students may look back on their school experience and see themselves as part of the history of the music program (Parker, 2014). VanDeusen (2016) reported one rural community's history and school music legacy impact on current program perceptions. Respondents described comparisons between the current music program and an idealized (and possibly apocryphal) past like the *Mills Glory Days* from Fairmills. I wondered if this negotiation of expectation may be a more common phenomenon in rural schools as opposed to suburban or urban schools.

I observed that people in Fairmills valued music classes differently in comparison to other school subjects and issues. Mattson lost instruction time because of a state mandate for increased recess minutes, effectively reducing his weekly instruction time for some grade levels from 80 minutes to 30 minutes. Students were pulled from music class for behavior consequences or for academic intervention services. Adult respondents stated that music was important; however, when administrators needed to make decisions, music was often relegated to a lower status. This is a familiar phenomenon in music education within the United States. While inclusive policy language may, on its face, suggest that all school subjects are equally important, Kos (2017) argued that the implementation of those statements highlighted discrepancies. Such

discrepancies included the math and reading focus required for Title I funding, and mandatory testing and reporting for math, reading, and science. Elpus (2013a) outlined a brief history of music's status in education policy and showed that even with mandates regarding the arts, there was little change for music. He noted that the Goals 2000 mandate "likely raised the status of the four arts disciplines[16] as a whole but may have reduced the status of music education's primacy *within* the arts disciplines" (p. 20). Kos (2017) provided an update account, including music as part of a "well-rounded education" and removing the "core" label from policy language; however, there has not been a significant change in practice. Elementary music suffered as a result of educational policies and administrator decisions allocating the students' time.

Music teacher consistency was important to Mattson and many adult respondents. They shared that without music educator longevity, the program suffered. Mattson felt older students, caregivers, and some teachers resisted him initially because of the high music teacher turnover, similar to experiences reported by Kloss (2013) and VanDeusen (2016). They noted that the program struggled with the lack of consistent vision, leadership, and relationship building. Mattson shared that he felt a looming sense of distrust from adults because of the previous lack of consistency. While I was writing this dissertation, I learned that Mattson had decided to leave Fairmills at the end of the year to pursue academic goals. In a follow-up conversation, he shared that he was uncertain what his departure would mean for the program. After he handed in his resignation, he said multiple colleagues remarked that the job had been a revolving door for more than 30 years, and he felt they started to view him as just another teacher leaving. The position was listed, with what he described as minimal circulation, as PreK-12 general and vocal music, and as of the end of the school year, no one had applied. Now, there is no smooth transition

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[16] The four "arts disciplines" here are music, visual art, dance, and theater.

between Mattson and the next teacher, as a teacher had not been hired as of his departure. The emphasis on the music educator suggested that program success might be inextricably tied to the teacher's longevity with the school and the relationships they cultivate.

The three caregiver respondents from Fairmills were all employed by the school but felt they did not know much about the music program and its curriculum. F. Smith, who taught fifth grade and had young children who attended Mattson's class, felt she could not say much about what was happening in music class. I wondered about the need for elementary music teachers to be purposeful with students in explaining what they are learning and why. This intentional articulation might serve to bridge some of the communication gaps that Mattson described and connect caregivers with what many participants considered to be an essential component of a child's education.

Upon reflection, I noticed a tendency toward elitist attitudes relating to who does music and the idea of music *exposure*. Examples of these beliefs included statements such as "they wouldn't have any music without my being here" (Mattson) or "they need to be exposed to music" (K. Smith). Mattson believed that without music training, students would not "know what is going on" when listening to music, referring to the theoretical foundations of a song. However, students may discuss when a beat drops or a hook, bridge, or chorus in a popular song, describing the form of a piece without theory instruction. While having a music specialist is indeed important (Dwyer, 2020; Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008), there is a danger in overselling the specialization to the point where it creates a division between the perceived *amateur* and *professional* musician. Music education in schools is not only about students who play to pursue careers as musicians, but rather includes the facilitation of life-long music making and enjoyment for all individuals (Kratus, 2019). Elitism was also present in *exposure* to music as referring to

Western classical music. The implication was that without their music class at school, students did not have music in their lives. However, many students shared that they enjoyed listening to music at home and some participated in music-making. Some mentioned having instruments at home and being self-taught, made easier by the prevalence of technology and increasing internet coverage in rural areas[17] (Federal Communications Commission, 2020). When they discussed music education, participants in Fairmills did not include popular music or amateurism.

I noticed a devaluation of singing during my residence. Mattson appeared to downplay singing development. When I asked him about singing, he shared previous teachers had only had students sing, primarily from a textbook or to a recording without additional instruction or explanation. I found this approach to singing surprising, given there was no band program and Mattson served as the middle and high school choir director. Singing is an essential part of childhood and a basic human behavior with connections to social inclusion and individual identity development (Welch, 2001; Welch et al., 2014). I wondered about the potential impact of the lower status of singing moving forward.

Summary

Within the community of Fairmills, the legacy of the music program permeated every conversation I had. There was a sense of loss regarding what the program had been, as well as a feeling of hope for what it could be with teacher stability. Students appeared joyful when describing their current musical experience and the relationship they've built with their music teacher. Mattson felt that he had shifted as an educator having worked with the students at Fairmills. He explained,

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[17] While internet access is increasing for rural areas, the report notes that rural areas are still the most affected by lack of coverage. In fact, while writing this dissertation, I had returned to my rural-remote childhood home and was still unable to access the internet. I wrote much of this final version using the internet at the public library 12 miles away.

My role, the crux of it all, is that I want to give the students, I want to show them the tools. I used to have the mentality of…I give them the tools and then they build from there. I don't even thing think I do that anymore…. I feel like I showed them the tool and then they build their own tool and I check on it and I go, looks good. And then they go on from there and they can tailor their own music experience and they can really find themselves.

Caregivers and administrators wanted more from the music program for their students. F. Smith shared, "we are lacking in the music area" and all participating caregivers wanted to see the program be supported and rebuilt. Despite this desire to rebuild the program, adult respondents held the music program in constant comparison to the program that was, resisting the change that needed for growth to occur.

This legacy illuminated a critical component for program success: the teacher. The music teacher was vital in setting the tone for the program, and it is difficult to maintain such a program when that teacher is different from year to year. Bricker summarized, "they don't last a year and they're gone." Keys suggested this turnover may be locale-based:

I think that's just the nature of small rural schools is we get someone and then they want to move on to something bigger because they feel like they're not using their degree as much as they want to or have the program that they want.[18]

Nonetheless, all participants were appreciative of the music activity taking place at the school. "Anything our music instructors can provide for these kids is humongous," K. Smith shared. Respondents viewed the music teacher as an essential figure in setting the tone for the music program and providing musical continuity and stability for the students and community.

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[18] This "program that they want" included working in a larger district, likely with more funding and greater opportunities for specialization. I discuss this emphasis on idealized music programs further in chapter 7.

CHAPTER 5: SWEETWATER (ROCKY MOUNTAINS)

Stillness permeates the expansive elementary music room as Mr. Parker prepares the smart screen at the front of the room for a busy day of instruction. Today, he has three fifteen-minute planning periods and nine 30-45 music classes spanning kindergarten through fifth grade. I can hear high school students loudly entering the building, stomping the rain and mud from their shoes before entering the gymnasium adjacent to the music room. With an upright piano on the right and rows of barred instruments to the left, a pathway from the door guides students to an open floor space under the high ceilings, facing the whiteboard and smart screen in the front of the room. A string of tiny pumpkins lights the top of the whiteboard, adding a touch of festivity for Halloween. Six large closet doors conceal additional instruments, props, and printed music resources. Checking the time, Mr. Parker walks to the door and quietly greets his first class of the day. The fifth-grade students calmly walk directly to their assigned seating spots, indicated by velcro lines on the floor. Three students take off their coats and quickly set them along the far wall before heading back to their spaces. Mr. Parker takes his place at the front of the room and greets his students, singing, "Hello boys and girls" [Sol, mi, sol sol mi]. The students respond, singing, "Hello, Mr. Parker" [sol, mi, sol sol, mi mi].

Class begins with a vocal warmup echoing four-beat melodic phrases with students gesturing to their hips, shoulders, and heads to correspond with the solfege of Mr. Parker's pattern. He demonstrates "Sol, mi, do" (head, shoulders, hips), and the students repeat the pattern and movements back. They continue with several patterns, including the same pitches with varying rhythmic complexity in different orders. After one last melodic exchange, Mr. Parker and the students read the week's music goals from the smart screen. Accompanying himself on the piano, Mr. Parker next introduces the song, Ghost of Tom, singing it through

once. He teaches the song phrase-by-phrase with students echoing back. After the students

master the song, Mr. Parker reveals a parachute and describes a movement activity to

accompany the singing, much to the students' excitement. With a few reminders, the class

completes the activity, including launching the parachute toward the ceiling on the exciting BOO

at the end. The room fills with laughter as the parachute slowly falls and lands on four of the

students. Mr. Parker collects the parachute and puts it to the side of the room for use in another

class later that day. The 45-minute class continues with students practicing pentatonic pattern

reading from a treble-clef staff on the smart screen using solfege and hand signs, learning a new

minor song about creating a Spider Stew, and then adding a level bordun on E and B on

xylophones for later use with the stew activity. As the next class (first grade) arrives in the

hallway, the students reset the bars on their instruments and line up, still quietly humming and

singing the new song. Mr. Parker offers high fives, hugs, or fist bumps as the students leave and

greets the students in the next class as they walk in.

Case Description

Visiting Sweetwater

Sweetwater, or Sweety to residents, was nestled at the base of a mountain and featured

large trees, wide spaces, and an expansive river filled with wildlife and outdoorspeople (Figure

4). The town had a rich history as the ancestral home of a local Indigenous nation and one of the

older colonial settlements in the area. Murals of historical events and nature scenes decorated the

hallways of the primary school building, bringing the town's history alive for many students.

According to locals, this rural-distant community of approximately 2,000 residents was primarily

a bedroom community. Most adults in Sweetwater traveled approximately 30 miles one way to

the nearest city (population of approximately 70,000) for work. The commute to the city, which I

drove daily during my residence, included winding mountain state highways (no interstates), large fields with cattle and bison, and distant homes, all set within a mountain valley. The downtown area of Sweetwater featured small shops and a local grocery store. During my visit, I saw leftover decorations scattered around town from a recent fall festival.

Figure 4.

Sweetwater

Note. Photo taken by W. Mayo in October 2021.

Sweetwater residents included a blend of families who had lived in the area for multiple generations and new residents. Many families had moved to the area in the past five years, particularly from larger city areas. One resident described the population, saying, "it's a wide variety of backgrounds and third, fourth generation [locals] all the way up to recent transplants." Several participants, including adults and students, cited enjoying the outdoor views, the ability to work remotely, and a desire to be further from large populations due to COVID-19 concerns as reasons for relocating to Sweetwater. Participants described Sweetwater as a supportive, kind, and welcoming community and as a place they enjoyed living.

Sweetwater Schools

Sweetwater School District consisted of a primary school (kindergarten through third grade with approximately 275 students), a middle school (fourth grade through eighth grade with approximately 350 students), and a high school (ninth through twelfth grade with approximately 375 students). There were three or four class sections of each grade level within the elementary, with an average class size of 26 students. Staff, students, and community members I spoke with seemed proud to describe themselves as Sweety Steelheads. All three school buildings were separate but located on the same campus within walking distance of one another. Approximately one-third of the students rode buses to school, sharing buses across campus levels, while the remainder were dropped off and picked up by caregivers. The school grounds were under construction, as a recently passed bond included expanding the primary school building, renovating the high school, and connecting all buildings via covered walkways. Approximately fifteen years ago, the district added a dedicated facility with an elementary music classroom and a K-12 gymnasium. During my visit, this facility was separate from the other buildings, but once construction was completed, it would be connected to the primary school building and shift the primary school main office to just outside the music room door.

The elementary music room was large and stocked with classroom instruments. Brightly colored posters decorated the walls, with reminders of rules and expectations, proper mallet and recorder techniques, music terminology, and classroom instrument names. Different colored velcro lines and spots on the floor served as seating markers and reminders for dance formations and movement activities. Three rows of barred instruments occupied one side of the classroom, with the fourth row of glockenspiels on plastic containers lined up in front of a row of cabinets filled with an array of unpitched percussion instruments. Above them, an assortment of hand

drums hung on the wall on small hooks. The music teacher said that "it was a really well-equipped [music] program" when he arrived. At the front of the classroom stood a large whiteboard and a smart screen (a large touchscreen monitor that looked like a television but was a computer). During my visit, students shared how much they enjoyed participating in activities or watching videos using the smart screen.

Sweetwater Music

The music program at Sweetwater benefited from long-term stability, in contrast with the frequent turnover of grade-level teachers within Sweetwater Schools. The previous elementary music teacher had worked there for 20 years before retiring and was replaced by an early career teacher who stayed for approximately five years. Theo Parker, the current K-5 music teacher, was in his fifth year at the campus, his 13th year teaching overall. The middle and high schools had both band and choir programs, with a dedicated instructor for each (5-12 band and 6-12 choir). Although they were in the fourth-eighth grade building, students in fourth and fifth grades were still classified as elementary students and they attended general music with Parker. Fifth-grade students had the option to start beginning band as part of their specials rotation (including general music, band, PE, and library). Students in kindergarten-second grade attended music two times per week for 30 minutes each class, and third-fifth grade students had music twice weekly for 45 minutes per class. Before school, students in first-fifth grade could participate in Sweet Pipes, a voluntary honor choir, and at the time of my visit, nearly 110 students were regularly attending. Fourth and fifth-grade students could also participate in an Orff-style percussion ensemble once a week during their afternoon recess time, and this ensemble typically had 20 students.

Findings

Meaning of Music as Content

Students and adults smiled when describing their enjoyment of music. For some, music was a source of comfort. Burr, a second-grade teacher and caregiver (father of children in prekindergarten, second, and fifth grades), said, "I feel like I've always been connected to music" and that "[music] is kind of my comfort zone." Fenton, a caregiver (mother of children in kindergarten, second, and third grades) and part-time substitute teacher, connected her musical enjoyment to her work in theater. During focus groups, all students discussed the positive role of music in their lives, including Vivian (fifth grade), who remarked: "music to me is very calming." Third-grade student, Nova, stated that "music is important because it's fun." Parker, the elementary music teacher, credited his upbringing with his love of music. He said, "my dad was a pretty great musician, a singer…so I grew up listening to a lot of diverse music, and I learned to love all of it. But jazz really hooked me when I started playing saxophone." For secondary choir teacher and caregiver Deppen (mother of one child in eleventh grade and two adult children), music was a source of something beautiful, and she advocated that music was necessary "for the sake of music." Respondents believed these feelings of enjoyment were fuel for students' future music engagement, whether through participation or listening.

Participants described enjoying the various ways to interact with music, including seeking and enjoying the music of multiple genres and possible avenues for participation. Parker believed that "singing is the basis for all musicianship." Thus, he worked to build his students' audiation and singing skills as a foundation for musical growth and opportunity, including instrument playing. Caregivers and students valued music as something to create and viewed music-making as a skill to be built. Adults saw the variety of future musical possibilities for

students as an important component of music engagement. These possible futures primarily included participating in amateur music-making and enjoyment as informed music consumers (no one mentioned specific musical careers). Further, they enjoyed the diversity of musical genres and valued variety in music for themselves as listeners. Swaney, a stay-at-home mom (children in kindergarten and third grade), shared a musical guessing game she and her family played, switching between various genres. She said, "we'll listen to something and let our playlist randomly play…and so [the kids] are learning that music is very broad." Musical variety was also important to Burr, who said, "if I need to get away from it all, I'll get on iTunes and just kind of explore to try and find new artists."

Students and adults highlighted connections between music and social-emotional health and well-being. For some, music helped them to understand or express emotion. Parker said that for some students, "singing is what heals them." Tuen (fourth grade) echoed the sentiment, saying, "I like music because it makes me in a good mood." Hammel, a caregiver (mother of a child in fourth grade), shared that for her, listening to music was "almost therapeutic." During her interview, Martin, the primary school principal, argued that music is cathartic: "there is a song that resonates with every single mood you could ever have, and they [the songs] help you get through that mood." Martin also valued music as a source of unity and connection and wondered about the possibility of taking a moment early in the school day to promote that shared experience, as "everybody's hearing this today…it would connect the entire school through music." Fenton shared that for students and herself growing up, she felt connected to others through music, pushing against the idea of isolation. Through music listening, she thought students might say, "Oh, I'm not the only one that feels this way. There's this song about how I'm really feeling right now." Caregivers and students were also able to explore emotional

understanding through music, according to Tatum, a homemaker and caregiver (mother to children in prekindergarten, fifth, and seventh grade). She said, "it's amazing to watch your kids question, and [my daughter] is questioning [an artist] saying, why is this guy sad and lonely? I wanna be his friend…and I'm like, it's ok, it's just the song." Participants valued exploring and expressing their emotions through music.

Respondents recognized the intergenerational connections made possible through music. Burr reminisced about sitting with his family as a child listening to music and how his 11 siblings brought new musical style preferences into the household soundscape, crediting shared moments that formed the foundation of his musical enjoyment. Music was a bonding activity for caregivers Swaney and Tatum and their families. Swaney shared,

> I think even in movies…the music in *Trolls*[19] or *Frozen,*[20] the music is so catchy that my husband one day is humming the songs, and I realized I am humming one of the songs from *Frozen 2*[21]….It gets caught in your head.

Tatum responded,

> We are *Descendents,*[22] oh my gosh. We're like, alright, we each have our parts of who we are when we're singing these songs…and we're singing it all as a family with all of our parts because it's good music.

Students also felt connected to their families through music. Hope, a fourth-grade student, said "on the way to school, we'll listen to our favorite radio station" and Crystal, also a fourth-grade student, recalled "whenever we're barbecuing, we might have some friends over and put some

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[19] Dohrn, W., & Mitchell, M. (Directors). (2016). *Trolls* [Film]. DreamWorks Animation.
[20] Lee, J., & Buck, C. (Directors). (2013). *Frozen* [Film]. Walt Disney Studio Motion Pictures.
[21] Lee, J., & Buck, C. (Directors). (2019). *Frozen 2* [Film]. Walt Disney Studio Motion Pictures.
[22] Ortega, K. (Director). (2015). *Descendents* [TV Film]. Disney - ABC Domestic Television.

music on. We'll all just have fun and sing along." Music became an experience families could enjoy together.

Adults also valued music for its believed impact on brain development and connections to their students' academics. All caregivers and administrators highlighted music's relation to learning and its possible use as a tool. Fenton summarized by saying, "music has such a great connection to kids. Because even in kindergarten, they're learning their alphabet with song, and it makes it easier for them to remember." Burr valued music for its ability to "access another part of the brain" for his children and his students. Brown, a speech-language pathologist and caregiver (mother to children in first and seventh grades), shared she would advocate for music because of "how important it is for the brain and other areas of growth for academics, how [music] supports it." For many adults, music was influential in its role in service to or preparation for something else, namely academic development or future pursuits.

Elementary Music's Value to and in the School

Respondents considered music to be an "essential part of the school community" (Burr). Structurally, elementary music was well-supported with a purpose-built music room and protected instruction time. Administrators did not permit students to be pulled from music for other services. Parker said, "in that way, I feel pretty respected…no, it's music class, they can't be pulled out of music for testing." Beyond elementary school, music remained a required course for students in sixth grade, which meant enrolling in either band or choir for at least one year, according to secondary choir teacher Deppen. Throughout conversations, respondents centered on the music teacher as essential to the school. For many, their first response describing the music program was to talk about Parker. Martin, the school principal, said "he has added a huge amount of love to the school…he's an amazing teacher." Both Deppen and caregiver Brown

valued Parker's role as an active musician in the community and his positive impact on the students. Adults and students believed strongly in the music program's role in the school. Martin shared that from her perspective, the music program was "absolutely necessary. It would not be something I would ever consider cutting." Students also advocated for the importance of the music program. Ivan, a first-grade student participating in the interview with his mother, Brown, and older brother, was devastated at the idea of not having music[23] and said that he would speak up for music in his school "because music makes me happy." For all respondents, the music teacher and elementary music program were highly respected.

Adults valued the elementary music program as a space that nurtured the musicality of all students. When discussing his teaching philosophy, Parker reflected, "every kid gets to do something. I think that's important." He worked to ensure there were opportunities and variety for students by allowing for student choice in instrument selection and presenting an array of musical styles in class. During her interview, Deppen beamed, saying "I'm really proud that Mr. Parker is able to attempt or able to pull that musician that's inherently in every kid and just really honor that." She also reflected on the importance of the elementary music program as an "outlet for students to be expressive." She argued

> there's just no time to do something beautiful for the sake of doing something beautiful. And I think that's something kids don't know how to do these days. I think there's a bigger need than ever just to have music for the sake of music and art for the sake of art…I would fight tooth and nail to keep it [in the elementary school]. Kids need a space to be beautiful and be expressive.

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[23] As part of the student focus group protocol, I asked students to consider what they might say to an administrator who was considering cutting the elementary music program. See Appendix F for full protocol.

Respondents connected this outlet for expressivity to students developing a sense of confidence, particularly in performances, according to caregivers Brown and Fenton. Brown enjoyed attending performances to "watch [the students] participation and their confidence." Fenton, who was actively involved in theater, valued performances for the group support students experienced, saying "even some of them that are timid, when they have the support of their buddies for the concert, they just feel a lot more encouraged and safe." By fostering a nurturing musical environment, Parker was also facilitating students' abilities to be expressive and confident.

Nurturing musicality for all students included additional support for students with disabilities, according to Martin, the primary school principal, and Brown, the school's speech-language pathologist. Parker shared that part of his teaching schedule included two blocks of *music therapy*[24], or what he called an "adaptive music session," wherein students with disabilities attended music with their self-contained classes[25]. It was unclear if these sessions were intended to focus on musical goals or other developmental goals. Martin advocated that the music program was beneficial for students with disabilities, sharing,

> we've seen a huge increase in how many people qualify for something in the DSM-V[26]…and these are the things, art, music, anything we can put together. That's what helps kids. When you watch kids tactile learning, and you know they're soaking it in…I've even thought about asking Mr. Parker to play music in the lunchroom to calm it down

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[24] Music education is not music therapy, and Parker confirmed that he was not a trained music therapist. Nevertheless, this class period was designated as *music therapy* on the school's master schedule.

[25] Students who participated in the *music therapy* class also attended music with their grade levels peers, often accompanied by a paraprofessional who assisted them with participation.

[26] American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596

For Brown, the music class was an opportunity for students with disabilities to be successful in different ways. She reminisced about one student's achievements, saying, "she has worked really hard in speech therapy and just to get the power behind [her voice] to sing…it was just a huge accomplishment." Parker created an inclusive space that welcomed and supported all students in his music program. Martin and Brown valued the impact these experiences had on students with disabilities in the school.

Adults and students valued elementary music as a source of exposure to the possibilities of music. For many adults, this meant exposure to Western classical music. Burr, a longtime resident of the area, viewed the music program as filling a need for the community, saying, "there is a lower kind of economic group of people here that aren't exposed to the arts that they are in other places." Within his classes, Parker presented an array of musical styles. When asked why he shared popular music and focused on variety, he explained that he selected one video as "something that would bring [the students] joy and something that would be relatable." Parker was proud of the purposeful sequencing and scaffolding in his teaching, and the community valued the music program for it. Swaney, a caregiver, marveled at her daughter's music learning: "he's actually *teaching* them about music, not just songs…she's actually *learned* about notes and music and lyrics and how a song is put together." Parker reflected on one conversation he had with a caregiver, saying, "These are the skills they're working on…I mean, the kids are learning to read music and you're doing all this stuff." Students were exposed to broad music possibilities and experiences through the elementary music program.

The students valued having a space within the school to formally explore music, an experience many of them may not otherwise have. Vivian, a fifth-grade student, shared, "I like the program because [Mr. Parker] teaches a bunch of songs and teaches you how to play the

instruments." When asked what they might say to advocate for the music program, Kevin, a fifth-grade student, argued that music should stay because without it, "other kids can't learn how to do other types of music…you don't learn how to do music." Many students found the instruments to be a meaningful and enjoyable part of music class. Several echoed sentiments like "music is exciting to me because I love playing the instruments" (Ivy, third grade). Thinking back to his elementary music experience, Finn, a seventh-grade student who plays trumpet in the band, recalled, "I remember playing lots of instruments and stuff, so this is my totally amazing drawing of a xylophone and a drum in music."[27] The students developed powerful connections from their experiences in the elementary music program.

The music program at Sweetwater Elementary became a space where students felt they could connect and support one another. As one example, Parker shared about Sweet Pipes, the before-school volunteer choir. He said, "It's really neat, I think, for my younger kids to get to sing with the older kids, and the older kids feel like they're pretty cool too." Caregivers Brown and Fenton shared similar sentiments about students supporting one another. Perhaps caregivers felt the importance of connection was more explicit because of the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, Parker, like many teachers, had to transition his instruction to a distance format. Tatum shared about the struggle of distance learning with music, saying, "Online music, I think, [my son] hated it at that point because, he's really social, and it's like, we do this in class, and we do this as a group." Students missed the opportunity to make music with their peers. During my visit, the principal paused Sweet Pipes rehearsals due to high case numbers of COVID-19 in the area, and students voiced their disappointment throughout the week. For some students, music

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[27] As part of the student focus group protocol, I asked students to write or draw their responses describing the community and the music program as a way to generate conversation and provide think time.

class provided "a good space to know each other" (Sheryl, fifth grade) and a way to socially engage in music-making.

According to students and adults, the elementary music program functioned as a source of variation in the school day. Many adults viewed the program as part of a well-rounded education. Martin argued that "[the music program] is a place where they have an outlet to explore their feelings, explore their movement, learn history, learn about different types of music throughout the years, play instruments, become artists, show who they are, create a talent." Swaney, who also advocated for technical programs at the school, said "it's a balance. Your kids are not going to learn well without that variety of ideas" She also added that "these types of things…bring kids to school and keep them in school." Students and teachers valued their music class as a change of pace to the day, providing teachers with "a time …to prep and refocus" (Swaney) and students with a break in the day to refocus. The music classroom was a safe space for many students, as well as a source of stress relief. Hope, a fourth-grade student, commented, "when I'm having a rough day, I go to music, and it makes me feel better." Within music class, Parker worked to present a variety of songs and activities, which the students valued. Several students shared "we get to do activities…we get to learn new types of music" (Bob, fifth-grade), "we learn new songs almost every time" (Rennoc, third-grade), and "Mr. Parker always has something fun to do" (Everly, fourth-grade). This variety in the school day and within music class contributed to the overall sense of well-roundedness in the students' education.

Adults also valued the elementary music program for its impact on the students' futures. Many adults saw elementary music as the foundation for future music participation or appreciation, and students thought their class could be preparing them for possible future career paths in music. Katie, a fourth-grade student, said that without her music class, "I'd be sad

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because what if someone wanted to be a musician? It would be really hard to do music" as a career or hobby. Caregiver Fenton and secondary choir teacher Deppen valued the preparation for middle and high school music in the elementary music program. Fenton focused on band:

> [Mr. Parker] is really developing these kids to be prepared for band, to be exposed to singing. And he's really trying to develop their instrument, their voice, and their beat for when they actually do learn the recorder, that they're ready, they understand the rhythm.

Deppen felt confident in Parker's work laying a foundation for her choir program.

> And he's actually worried about, okay so when these guys [the students] get to fifth grade and someone puts a saxophone in their hands, what's going to happen?... I just appreciate that he is thinking of our programs as well.

Caregivers and secondary music teachers trusted that Parker provided a foundation for future musical engagement and understanding. Parker internalized this trust, saying, "for a lot of these kids, I'm it for their music education, their formative years, and that's a big deal to me. I take that responsibility very seriously." He shared that he hoped to not only lay a musical foundation but also to "hopefully love music and to want to keep doing it when they leave me." The elementary music program and teacher provided adults with the knowledge their students had the opportunity to see what music could be to them.

Parker valued teaching elementary music because he could focus on pedagogy, and he enjoyed the autonomy and flexibility of his position. Parker appreciated the absence of the extracurricular pressures often associated with a secondary music program. When he described his teaching journey in one interview, he said,

> I wanted to be a high school band director coming out of college, but as I got older and had a family, I was like, man, I don't know if I really wanna deal with that headache of

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recruiting and dealing with retention and pep band and travel and fundraising. And I

found with elementary, *I could just teach.* I could just focus on teaching and lesson

plans…I really enjoyed that process with little kids.

In his elementary classroom, Parker felt he could focus on making music with the kids. He also

valued the freedom to design the curriculum for his music classes and to reevaluate areas of his

teaching as needed. He shared "I can create my own stuff" as well as draw from resources from

professional development experiences or printed resources, including the GamePlan[28] series. At

the secondary level, Deppen, the choir director, echoed valuing this autonomy, saying, "the

curriculum directors never asked to see my curriculum, and no one's asked me what I teach in

my classroom…so in a way, you feel like, thank God, 'cause they don't really know what [I]

do." I asked Deppen how she felt about Parker having such freedom at the elementary level,

knowing he was preparing students for her program, and she said she trusted him completely,

"because Theo knows what he's doing…his passion really helps [me] to trust him." Parker and

Deppen were both treated as experts capable of making decisions based on what their respective

programs and students needed.

However, both teachers acknowledged the double-edged nature of this autonomy and

trust. Deppen remarked, "on the other hand, no one's really checked on this [lessons or

curriculum] …*don't they care*?" Parker, who took great pride in his work, told me about his

experience teaching during the early days of the pandemic, and the toll it still took on him.

We went remote for the rest of the year…and I'm like, man, I gotta get to work. So, I'm

frantically coming up with all this stuff I can and building these lessons and putting it out

there into the universe. And my principal calls me and she's like, Theo, you're doing too

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[28] *GamePlan* is a curriculum series written by Jeff Kriske and Randy DeLelles (2015). It features sequential lessons organized by grade level and time of year and draws elements from Orff and Kodaly pedagogies.

much. How about you just *don't do anything* for a little bit…I'm like, you're basically

telling me none of the stuff I do is important…I was really depressed, legitimately

depressed because the thing I feel passionate about and called to do is just gone. I felt

relegated to the bench basically.

Parker continued, sharing about the lasting effect of this exchange on his mental well-being, and

despite having further conversations with his administrator and feeling supported overall, he still

wondered about the value of his program to the school.

Elementary Music's Value to and in the Community

The elementary music program served the community by providing activities for families

and community members to enjoy together. Parker had become known for soliciting involvement

from school figures, including the school administrators, during his concerts. For example, he

often asked Martin, the primary school principal, to read the spoken parts of concerts that were

based on storybooks. This connection, as well as the opportunities for students, resonated with

Fenton, who shared "they all feel like they're a part of it." Concerts and events, such as

informances and folkdance activities, were meaningful memory-making moments for some

caregivers. Brown, a caregiver and teacher, cherished the music events, sharing that as an

audience member, "you can just sense the pride when you're in there [the gymnasium where

performances were held]." She recalled feeling that pride toward one of her former students,

sharing, "it was a student I had since preschool and she's a fifth grader now and she sang a solo

from Coco.[29] And I just remember, I was sitting by her parents and I just remember [us] balling."

Caregivers during the focus group session also reminisced about moments watching their

children perform and lamented the lost memory-making opportunities due to COVID-19. Tatum

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[29] Molina, A., & Unkrich, L. (Directors). (2017). *Coco* [Film]. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.

commented, "I love watching the kids…all dressed up, and they sing their cute little songs," and Swaney continued, "it's so fun…I feel like we missed out. I mean, we missed out on a year and a half of that…my kids love it, and I missed it."

Informances and folkdance events were highly anticipated events for adults and students. Parker shared, "I do informances where the parents come into the room, and we just do things together…I make sure all the adults feel really uncomfortable,[30] but this is what your child is doing. Come do it with us, that sort of thing. And that's always really fun." He shared, "I think that's been really helpful for me to sell my program to the community," and he was proud of what families could see during these events. The folkdance event was a newer endeavor wherein families could attend with students after school and participate in dance activities. With excitement in her voice, Brown reminisced with her two sons during her interview, saying, "It was so fun! We had to do, like a folk kind of dance where we were all in a line, and I had a great time!" Fenton also recalled the impact of the folkdance event, sharing, "that was huge that the community came to support something you might think is just a school dance, but no. It was line dancing, it was swing dancing, it was folk dancing." Martin, the primary school principal, was proud of Parker's dance event, focusing on his energy, enthusiasm, and resulting family involvement. She recalled, "so he gets an [over ear] microphone, and he teaches kids folk dancing and their parents… they're all doing it, and he's leading, and he's playing the music too…he's getting people really involved, and they're all having so much fun!"
These events encouraged music enjoyment and connection and provided caregivers with a space to connect with their students and the school music program.

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[30] Parker was referring to helping caregivers move beyond their comfort zones into participating in elementary music activities. Adults who do not actively participate in dance or music activities may initially feel uncomfortable at being asked to dance or sing with a group.

Some caregivers viewed the school music program as providing students with access and support for music learning they may have otherwise missed. Burr, a caregiver and teacher, valued Parker's specialized knowledge of music learning and relied on the school music program to provide "musical learning experience[s] we [caregivers] can't give them," as caregivers may not possess such expertise. He also advocated the need for a music specialist to lead the program, saying that as an educator, he felt he could integrate visual art into his elementary classroom but not music. He stressed that the school would "need to have somebody who is highly qualified to teach music to do a good job." For students practicing informal music-making at home or taking private lessons, some caregivers believe the music program was a form of reinforcement. Caregiver Fenton the benefits of this connection, saying, "To me, it's support. My kids are doing piano lessons as well, and they can connect, this is what I learned at piano, this is what we did at music…it's just another way for them to learn." Deppen shared similar perceptions. Caregivers viewed music as an avenue into music learning and a way to expand music learning they may be pursuing outside of school

Many adults' evaluations seemed dependent upon how their children viewed the music program--caregivers shared their students' opinions as their own. For Burr, music was important to his children, and their enjoyment contributed to his overall view of the program. During the caregiver focus group, Swaney's first response about the program centered on her children's perceptions, saying, "my daughter and son love music…they love that they have it twice a week." Some adult respondents described the general curricular goals of the program (singing, music literacy, instruments), which they shared were primarily based on the concerts, but they did not externalize any value of the programs for themselves.

Community values and expectations played a role in how Parker directed the elementary music program. Many adults characterized Sweetwater as conservative. Martin shared,

> We've got some extreme right-wing folks who are adamant that we are indoctrinating our students, teaching critical race theory, lying to our kids, turning them gay…and they are going to board meetings…saying you're turning our kids gay, you're indoctrinating our kids. You're telling our white kids that they're bad because they aren't Indian or Black or East Indian. And you're making them feel bad about themselves…That is not happening. Have you met [our] teachers? They're amazing.

Parker acknowledged that for him, it was important to

> know politically and ideologically who the members of our community are and when it comes to things like climate change and sexual orientation and gender identity and gay marriage, those sensitive issues, I have to walk really carefully around those things.

He shared about unspoken repertoire expectations, saying that after the main portion of the winter program, "then we sing a couple of Christmas tunes to keep my town happy." He continued, "my kids enjoy singing them. I don't have any kids this year that can't sing Christmas songs…unless they didn't tell me." In conversation during my visit, Parker shared that many surrounding schools have Christmas concerts, specifically identified as such. He shared that he titles his concert as *Winter Music Program*, although it functions similarly to other schools. During the early spring, Parker had been holding a Martin Luther King Day program and lamented that he had to redesign for this year, shifting it to be a performance about wildlife at his administrator's request. Martin explained, "We're going to leave that alone this year with all the critical race theory stuff and everything. We're just not even going to touch anything that causes anybody to say anything about anything." During some caregiver interviews, I perceived tension

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between what Parker included as repertoire and what community members hoped he would select. For example, Fenton shared, "I wish some of them [the songs] were just a bit more familiar to the older generations," and specifically named *Turkey in the Straw*[31] as a song she remembered singing with her grandmother. Within his instruction, Parker acknowledged that he had to be mindful of connecting to community expectations while providing music instruction and repertoire that he believed was most valuable to his students.

For some adults, rural music programs were bridges for students. Deppen highlighted the importance of music exposure at an early age in Sweetwater, saying "I think we can show them the pathways to other things, or at least be aware that they're out there." She continued, "a lot of people stay here [in this rural area] and I think that's important too. But at least they know it's out there." To her, the music program provided connection or at a minimum the knowledge that a connection between music and life outside of the community could exist. She and other caregivers valued students having the choice in what they pursued as opposed to not knowing what possibilities existed.

Connecting Through Incorporation and Purposeful Interactions

Within the elementary music classroom, Parker worked to incorporate a wide variety of music styles, including popular music, folk music, world music, and both instrumental and vocal examples. During my visit, I observed Parker facilitating movement activities to folk music recordings, encouraging students to explore the difference between major and minor tonality, and supporting student enjoyment during a sea-shanty style listening and game activity. In his final interview, Parker shared a powerful listening activity that the students completed using *Be a*

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[31] I discuss this song further in Chapter 7.

Light[32], a popular country song by Thomas Rhett. He presented the original recording and a children's choir recording in class and asked the students to consider "something [they] carry around" such as a worry or burden and something that brings them joy. Parker selected the song not only for the message but also as something that would speak to his "country-loving students." Parker also shared a Line Rider video[33] on YouTube that functioned as a listening map, incorporating synchronized character movements with Grieg's *In the Hall of the Mountain King.* When I asked him about these inclusions, he shared that he chose the activities because they were something that would "bring [the students] joy and something that would be relatable."

Parker consistently incorporated holidays and special events into his music classes. As he prepared for programs throughout the year, he looked for holidays or local events to connect with concert themes, such as the Martin Luther King program or the upcoming Earth Day celebration for which he was planning. During the winter season, he and the students prepared holiday songs for the Winter Music Program and sang Christmas carols during Sweet Pipes rehearsals. My visit to Sweetwater occurred in the week leading up to Halloween, and many of the activities during class that week focused on Halloween themes, such as spiders, scarecrows, ghosts, skeletons, and candy. For example, his kindergarten students participated in an activity where the teacher and class sang, "What will you be this Halloween," [sol sol sol, mi mi, sol sol, mi] followed by individual students responding by singing "I will be a…" [sol sol, mi mi, sol, mi] and sharing their Halloween costume plan. The students appeared excited by these incorporations and seemed to look forward to participating in the next component of the activity.

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[32] To hear the original song, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vU9b9AcwgQ. To view the children's choir video, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgYOQr6gBRE

[33] To view the Line Rider video, posted to YouTube by DoodleChaos, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIz3klPET3o.

The students played an active role in making choices within music, and Parker was proud to facilitate student leadership and student choice. During my observation of Sweet Pipes, Parker asked students to submit their ideas for a piece they'd like to perform in the spring.

I let them pick a song, like a song on the radio or song from a movie…they write down a song they want to sing, and then I just kind of go through them to see if there are any standouts…It's always something they want to sing.

Parker frequently invited students to use the barred instruments set up around the room in the music classroom, and he was intentional about allowing students to choose which instrument they played each time. During focus group sessions, the students shared various favorite aspects of music class, including playing different instruments. While there were some common favorites, such as the xylophones and the recorders, some students mentioned unpitched percussion instruments, hand drums, or boomwhackers as favorites and shared enjoying the freedom to explore various options. Parker valued students having the flexibility to select a different instrument each time and choose what they wanted to play that day. By incorporating student choice, Parker reinforced each child's sense of autonomy.

Parker's self-identification as a rural individual appeared to contribute to his connection with students. During an interview, Parker shared that although he was not from the area, "I felt like I was right at home almost from the minute I got here…I've always spoken kind of that same language as everybody in [the region]." Later, he reflected, "I just really appreciate small-town folks. It's just salt of the earth. They get up, they go to work, and they just do what they gotta do." This feeling of being rural seemed to contribute to Parker's assimilation into the community when he first arrived. Parker was hard-working and enjoyed the outdoors, working as a fishing guide during the summers. His students enjoyed connecting with him about his

interests. During his mother's interview, Ivan, a first-grade student, shared that "Mr. Parker likes to fish, and I like to fish," recalling Parker's fish photos in the classroom. For Ivan, this non-musical connection was a strength of the music program.

For Parker, relationships were essential. He intentionally worked to build relationships with colleagues, families, and students. He acknowledged that, with his teaching schedule, it was at times challenging to connect with students, saying, "you have to go out of your way to get to know the kids, for sure…After school, I have [after school] duty every day, which I actually enjoy because as the kids get out of school, I can talk to them. He valued opportunities to interact with families, including during informances and after-school duties. Parker spoke at length about the students and family connections, demonstrating an understanding of each student as an individual. During the school day, he worked to connect with colleagues by joining them for lunch and volunteering for additional opportunities. While I was visiting, the principal and a small group of teachers participated in a Celtic cleansing ritual to provide a blessing over the ongoing construction. Parker joined the group and assisted Martin, the primary school principal, by teaching her how to hold and play the hand drum she used throughout the ceremony to represent the rhythm of a heartbeat. For Martin, Parker's willingness to step up and be involved endeared him to the school. She also saw his investment in the success of the music program, sharing, "I think that's a big thing that Parker is [him saying] I don't expect a stipend for that. This is what a music teacher does. You're not going to hear a lot of other teachers say that." She commented on his connection to the families in the area, saying, "it's amazing that the families love Mr. Parker so much…he does his own stuff and volunteers for everything." His commitment to building relationships connected him and the music program to the students and the community.

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As a strong advocate for his music program, Parker was proud of his purposeful curriculum sequencing. During my visit, Parker commented that within each activity, there was always a reason or goal. Countering his perceptions of common beliefs about elementary music, he shared, "no, it's not just fluff. We are learning." Caregivers also valued the depth of the curriculum that Parker taught, appearing to marvel at their children's music learning. Many adults recognized the importance of a music specialist in this role, saying "you're not just playing music" (Martin) and acknowledging the depth and specialized skill required to teach music. When asked what she might say to advocate for the music program, Martin said, "do you know what this person envelops and what they can offer children?" Deppen relished Parker's status as a currently performing musician, as he performed locally with select community groups. "I love having a performing musician in that position," she commented. Reflecting on his time at Sweetwater Elementary, she said, "his legacy is already started. I get those kids in sixth grade, and they just love music, and they love to sing…his legacy is well on its way for sure." Parker remained conscious of the foundational nature of his program and viewed his responsibility seriously.

Interpretation

As adults and children discussed why they valued the music program, I observed a tension between the ideas of *being* and *becoming* (Deleuze, 1990). Many students focused on each child's musical *being* in the present, while adults focused on musical *becoming* or what children would do in the future, such as secondary music ensemble participation and music appreciation. Parker seemed to balance ideas of being and becoming, interested in future music participation but supporting creativity in the moment. He focused on music-making and exploration in tandem with skill building for the future. For students, there was some

consideration that music class might be preparing them for future music engagement, but the primary focus was on the enjoyment it provided at the moment. Participants presented mixed views about valuing music for children presently or in the future.

I also observed a tension surrounding the terms *access* and *exposure* to music. For example, for caregiver Burr and school principal Martin, *exposure* referred primarily to Western classical music, including orchestral instruments and Western standard notation. *Access* for several adults meant that the students were working with a trained musician or that they were able to obtain specific kinds of music knowledge through the school. Both asserted that there were limited opportunities for students to engage with formal music-making in their rural community. For Parker, *exposure* meant experiencing a broad variety of classical and non-classical music styles, including popular, folk, and world music. He viewed his role as providing students with knowledge of musical possibilities, saying:

> I take that responsibility very seriously and knowing that their only exposure to art will come through me, their only exposure to movement in dance will come through me, their only exposure to jazz or classical music or multicultural music and all these different traditions, that all comes through me…I feel a pretty big responsibility to do things right.

Caregivers and administrators valued the elementary music program because they believed it was providing classical music training and opportunity, whereas Parker, while also valuing Eurocentric music, wanted to expand the genres that students experienced. As such, there was no unified understanding of what the music program was doing for the children. Further, children mentioned they did have access to music at home, including musical listening with their families and the ability to explore music training on their own through formal lessons or informal learning online.

Community values were influential upon what Parker and the school administration felt could be brought into performances and the music classroom. Many Sweetwater residents described the area as *conservative*, which included strong Christian religious values and Republican political ideologies. For example, Parker highlighted an ongoing tension within the town regarding the nationwide debates about Critical Race Theory in schools (PEN America, 2022) and its impact on an upcoming performance:

> [You've seen] the whole Critical Race Theory and the backlash against that. I can drive around town and see people with bumper stickers that say "STOP CRT in Our Town," and my principal was like, "I don't know if you want to do your Martin Luther King program right now because of what's going on" …I let it go, but I wish I was doing that program because the kids need to hear that stuff.

Parker and other residents connected conservative values to other small-town communities, for example saying, "like with any small town" (Parker and Burr) or "in a little town like this" (Martin). Notably, many adults I spoke with seemed to hold themselves as separate from the far-right, pushing back against the notion of the community as monolithic. Farmer (2009) described the potential influences of local politics on education systems in rural areas, illustrating the tensions that can occur between a local community and its school district. Further, Richerme (2020, 2021a) demonstrated the political nature of music teaching and the ways in which actions and non-actions can be considered political. During this school year, Sweetwater Schools were working to navigate a recently passed divisive topics law, which barred educators from discussing topics that could cause an individual to feel "discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of physical of emotional distress on account of that individual's race or sex" (PEN America, 2022). In Sweetwater, choosing to continue or reimagine the Martin Luther King

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program was equivalent to making a political statement with the possibility of legal consequences.

All adult respondents highlighted the value of music for brain development and academics in their students. While this was not the sole value, respondents viewed it as particularly salient for music's place in the school. However, researchers label this assertion of a broad causal relationship a neuromyth (see Young, 2020). While there may be correlations between music study and academic performance, as often presented by advocacy committees and policymakers[34], participating in music has not been shown to cause an overall increase in academic success (Mehr, 2014, 2015). The perpetuation of these neuromyths poses a particular danger for elementary music educators, as caregivers may support school music with the belief that it will make their child smarter or raise their achievement in a particular non-music content area. Administrators may place pressure on elementary music teachers to increase overall school test scores. Caregivers may feel frustrated or misled if their children do not improve academically after starting music instruction. Music educators must be mindful of presenting neuromyths within advocacy, as well as addressing such misrepresentations of science in the community as they arise.

Further, some respondents placed an emphasis on music for social-emotional health or music as a therapeutic intervention for students. Students shared that participating in music class made them feel good or helped them to regulate their emotions. Similarly, some adult respondents shared that music listening was therapeutic or cathartic for them, contributing to their valuing of the elementary music program for their students. Scholars including Edgar

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[34] For example, the annual presentation of standardized test scores by all-state ensembles at the Texas Music Educators Association Conference and Convention. See https://www.tmea.org/all-state/sat-scores/ Covariates for participation in all-state and high test scores include zip code, family income, IEP designation, parental education level, and race (Elpus, 2013b; Foster & Jenkins, 2017).

(2017) have drawn connections between music education and social-emotional learning. While music can have an emotional impact on individuals, it is important to note that a music education certification does not also qualify an individual to be a therapist. Similarly, there are connections between methods and practices used in music education and music therapy, but the goals for the two approaches are different (see Salvador & Pasiali, 2016). Educators and administrators must be cautious of presenting general music classes as emotional or therapeutic interventions, as this may deny students access to needed professional services.

Summary

In Sweetwater, the music program was well-supported overall. Students, caregivers, administrators, and colleagues described valuing the program and the music teacher for numerous reasons and saw both as essential components of the school community. Administrators protected the students' time in music class by not allowing them to be pulled out for testing, services, or consequences. They enjoyed the opportunities for connection that Parker provided through classroom instruction, performances, and special events. I perceived joy in every class observation and conversation I conducted. Students and special music events were influential for caregivers in forming an understanding of the music program.

For elementary music teacher Parker, purposeful incorporation of variety, holidays and events, and community participation was a strength of the music program. He shared,

> I feel a pretty big responsibility to do things right and to instill, hopefully, a love of music in these kids. Not only just skills, like I want them to have skills, I want them to match pitch and be confident and all those other things, but I guess overriding all of that is, I just want them to hopefully love music and want to keep doing it when they leave me.

He worked to intentionally build relationships with students and their families and nurture positive connections with his musical and non-musical colleagues. His efforts, in turn, endeared the program to the school and community. As a stable member of the school, Parker's legacy in the music program had a strong foundation and built upon a previous tradition of success.

CHAPTER 6: ROSEVILLE (UPPER SOUTH)

A flurry of energy swirls around the music room as Mr. Medley prepares for the second half of his day. The school day started two hours late today due to concerns about black ice[35] on the roads in the area. There had been eight school cancellations this month due to the weather. Mr. Medley reviews his notes, checking which classes have music today and when he saw them last. In the back of the large classroom, he checks a pocket chart with grade levels and times, which he makes sure he changed from the day prior. A whiteboard in the front of the room unites two halves of the classroom: a general music space to the left and band seating to the right. The general music side holds large bookshelves with a collection of barred instruments. The floor has large foam squares arranged like a colorful checkerboard as a makeshift rug. The band side has three rows of chairs with music stands facing a collection of band instruments, which Mr. Medley keeps close at hand to demonstrate fingerings and embouchures. There is no piano, but there is a tech cart at the front of the room.

Mr. Medley makes a few final jottings about the three band classes he had just taught, noting that Jordan, a returning fifth-grade student, would be coming by after school to select an instrument for band. Mr. Medley takes the last bite of his lunch as sounds of children flood the hallway outside the music room door. Kindergarteners dressed as dalmatians for the 101st day of school excitedly wait at the door. Students quickly find their assigned squares on the floor and flop to their seats. Mr. Medley begins the class singing "Hello boys and girls" (sol, mi, sol sol, mi), and students respond "Hello Mr. Medley" (sol, mi, sol sol, mi mi). They use Curwen hand signs to accompany their greeting. Mr. Medley invites the students to stand and copy his body

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[35] Black ice is a thin coating of ice on a surface, especially on roads. It is transparent, allowing the black coloring of the road to be seen through it. Black ice creates hazardous road conditions because drivers cannot see the ice before they reach it.

movements, demonstrating various moves to an electronic-sounding, royalty-free exercise song.

The movements Mr. Medley demonstrates are preparation for the next activity focused on

movement exploration. After the warm-up, he reviews the story, In the Small, Small Pond[36]. *He*

asks students to demonstrate their understanding of the different animal movements, highlighting

the nuances between related terms such as wiggle, jiggle, and wriggle. They read through the

story, performing the different moves. After their story, Mr. Medley asks the students about the

three pitches they have been learning. He presents paper-covered cups, each a different color, to

represent sol (green), mi (yellow), and la (purple). He and the students review the solfege and

hand signs to match the cups. Mr. Medley retrieves his recorder from a nearby music stand and

performs a four-note pattern. He and the students decode the pattern using the cups. After

practicing patterns and changing the cups, he passes out small packets of cards for students to

try decoding patterns on their own. The ice delay resulted in shortened classes, so students only

try one pattern today. They quickly clean up their cards and wait for Mr. Medley to ring the desk

bell that matches the color they were seated on. They return the cards to a bucket and line up

near the exit door on the band-side of the room. The next group, a second-grade class, is already

lined up eagerly in the hall, wondering what they will do in music today.

Case Description

Visiting Roseville

Roseville, designated as rural-distant, sat atop a large hill in the Upper South. Traveling

to Roseville required traversing two-lane roads that wound through the hills, surrounded by rock

faces and trees (Figure 5). One resident described the drive to Roseville, highlighting the shady

roads which often stayed colder during the winter: "If there's a snow day on Thursday, there's

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[36]Fleming, D. (1993) *In the small, small pond* (D. Fleming, Illus.). Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

probably gonna be one on Friday as well, 'cause it does not melt quick." During my visit in late

January, I observed ice hanging from the rock faces through the afternoons until the sun could

briefly reach them. With a population of approximately 480, Roseville was about 11 miles

outside of the nearest town (approximately 12,000 people). When residents described their

location, they frequently identified the larger town prior to naming Roseville. When I asked

about visiting Roseville, participants said I had already been through it since I passed a local café

and town museum to reach the school. The school building was in the heart of the town, and I

could see the edges of town from the school parking lot. While the town's population had not

fluctuated much in recent years, the school population had recently been increasing as families

returned to the school after a change in COVID-19 protocols.

Figure 5.

Roseville

Note. Photo taken by L. Medley in April 2022.

Roseville was primarily a retirement community (average age of 72.5 years) in part due

to community aging and out-migration of younger people. One participant also described a

prevalence of custody challenges in the area due to caregiver incarcerations and custody battles, so many students resided with grandparents or extended family. Many residents in the community faced challenges with poverty (median household income of $34,700 annually).[37] Residents who were not retired typically worked in what one participant described as "blue-collar industries." According to one resident, "a lot of people are just under-employed…they're employed, they're just not making enough to make it." Participants described the community as politically conservative and having strong ties to Christianity. "We're Sunday-Wednesday[38] people here," remarked one participant. They continued, "I'll put it to you this way, you can put up your Christmas tree and you won't offend anybody." The community was proud of their commitment to helping one another, as students and adults highlighted the community "looks out for each other." One resident shared, "I've noticed that even with the smallest things that happen, it doesn't necessarily have to be a traumatic thing or a bad thing, we all come out." Residents described Roseville as welcoming and a nice place to live.

Roseville Elementary School

Roseville Elementary School was part of Duplin County Schools, which included ten elementary schools and two high schools.[39] There were no middle schools in the district; each elementary school housed prekindergarten through eighth grade in one building. For students in fifth grade through eighth grade, staff tended to omit the word *elementary* when referring to the school to support the students' identity as being older. Within the last ten years, the district built

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[37] The U.S. Census defined the poverty threshold for a family of four to be $26,496 in 2020. See Shrider, E. A., Kollar, M., Chen, F., & Semega, J. (2021, Sept 14). *Income and poverty in the United States: 2020.* United State Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html

[38] The participant was referring to the fact that many Christians in the area attended church services on both Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. This is common for Christian churches in the South.

[39] Neither high school was located in Roseville. Duplin County High School (where students from Roseville were zoned to attend) was approximately 10 miles away. The other high school campus was approximately 13 miles away.

onto the main building, creating a dedicated seventh- and eighth-grade area. The multi-leveled building divided approximately 600 students[40] by grade level, and each grade typically had three class sections. Students and community members proudly identified as Roseville Commanders, particularly due to their ongoing success in elementary athletics. One teacher described the school-community connection, saying, "the school *is* the community…as you drive around Roseville, the school is the center of [town]...anything happening there, that's gonna be it." Numerous area businesses had sponsored the boys' and girls' basketball teams and banners displaying business logos decorated the gym and the hallway. Many students rode the bus to and from school. Because of a bus driver shortage (a challenge common in many places at the time of this study),[41] students occasionally had to stay after school longer waiting for a second bus route to take them home.

Within the past year, a strong tornado struck Roseville during the school day. The building was severely damaged, but thankfully no one was hurt. Students and caregivers highlighted this tornado as an impactful event on the town and individuals. Each morning, the principal shared the day's forecast so students knew what to expect from the weather. One teacher described the students' sensitivity to the weather as post-traumatic stress. I saw lingering evidence of tornado damange during my visit. Many classroom windows, including in the music room, had stickers that said "RES Strong," which had been sold as a fundraiser for the school and a sign of community solidarity. Located on the uppermost floor, the music room housed pk-4 general music and fifth through eighth-grade band. Access to the upper level of the gymnasium

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[40] Students were bused in from outside of town limits, resulting in a school enrollment that was larger than the local population.

[41] For example, see Wright, 2021. "Bus Driver Shortage Stresses Rural School Districts" https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2021/10/11/bus-driver-shortage-stresses-rural-school-districts. See also Lieberman 2021. "No Bus Drivers, Custodians, or Subs. What's Really Behind Schools' Staffing Shortages?" https://www.edweek.org/leadership/no-bus-drivers-custodians-or-subs-whats-really-behind-schools-staffing-shortages/2021/09

was across the hall from the music room, and I could hear the sounds of gym classes or pep assemblies during music classes.

Roseville Music

The music program at Roseville Elementary was under reconstruction after it nearly died out. In the early 2000s, a veteran music educator who had spent most of their career at Roseville retired, and the program fell into disarray. Administrators and secondary music teachers speculated that the nature of the position, being split between general music and band, created challenges that resulted in high music teacher turnover. At one point, two retired community members with music backgrounds volunteered to restart the music program, with one teaching general music and one teaching band. Landon Medley took over as the PreK-8 music teacher and band director three years ago, after teaching in other rural schools in the Upper South for 18 years.

In Roseville, all pre-kindergarten through fourth-grade students attended general music once per week for approximately 45 minutes. Fifth through eighth-grade band students could elect to participate in band[42] three times a week for between 30 and 45 minutes per class. The instruction time for band varied because, on select days, band was shortened to allow students to get their state-mandated weekly physical education minutes. Since Medley began, the band program had seen an increase in student enrollment and retention. He believed the school-wide level of respect for the music program was increasing, with teachers and administrators anecdotally reflecting with him about how music classes were beneficial for their students and their community.

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[42] Band was the only music option for students in fifth-eighth grades.

Findings

Meaning of Music as Content

All participants characterized music as something that was meaningful and beautiful. For many, music was a source of personal joy through listening, creating, or teaching. High school choir director Moore shared, "I've never talked to any student that doesn't love some form of music. We may not all agree on our favorite types of music…but I guarantee you there is something for everybody." Several caregivers and students described music listening at home. J. Connors (father of children in fifth and seventh grades) spoke about deliberately listening to new music as a way to continue learning and to keep up with his children's listening preferences. He said, "I have made it a point to listen to music that is coming out now and try to listen to every genre of music that I can indulge in." Third-grade students in one focus group became excited recalling moments of music listening in the car as they arrived at their destination. Bob said, "It's fun to listen to in the car, but it comes on at sometimes the worst times. I would almost be home and my favorite song would come on." Lexi continued, "you get like halfway down [the driveway], and your favorite song comes on, like everybody, please don't get out of the car till it's over!" For others, music represented beauty in their lives. Caregiver Castillo (mother of children in kindergarten, fourth, and seventh grades) shared, "seeing and hearing the music, music is beautiful, beautiful, beautiful." When asked how she would advocate for the music program, Moore replied, "why not keep music? If we take away all of our ways to enjoy life and we're stuck with the rest of it, I can't imagine." Music appeared to be special to respondents.

Participants described their personal experiences within music. Dale, the principal of Roseville Elementary, fondly recalled making music with her parents and siblings. "We sang around the piano all the time, and so music is just who we are and what we do," she explained.

This background shaped how she self-identified as an adult, saying, "I'm an arts person, I believe in the arts" and informed how she approached the music program at Roseville. Elementary music teacher Medley and high school directors Moore (choir) and Lunsford (band) shared similar personal histories, citing music as a source of joy and belonging during their education and finding their passion in music learning, education, and performance. Moore summarized, "I know how much it has meant to me over my lifetime…I feel like everybody has some version of music that they love. Everybody." During one caregiver meeting, Smith (mother of children in second and seventh grades) shared a story about her child being excited about boomwhackers, and Krugle (mother of a child in fifth grade) was struck by a memory of her own experience. She said, "I haven't heard [boomwhackers] in so long, but the second you said that, I remembered what it sounded like and it made me think of rainsticks too. I loved those!" This memory was powerful and joyful for Krugle and the group laughed together recalling their own elementary music experiences. For adults, their personal connections with music contributed to the ways in which they viewed music for the students.

Students and adults highlighted various mental and emotional impacts of music in their lives. Numerous participants indicated music was calming for themselves or their children. Caregiver Lindstrom (grandmother of a child in fourth grade), stated, "I love music…it puts you in a good mood. It brings back good memories. It makes you want to dance." In sharing about her fourth-grade student, whom she identified as having "severe ADHD," Johnson (mother of children in kindergarten, second, fourth, and sixth grades) said, "if I turn on some music, even at home, it just soothes him and it calms him." Liz, a fifth-grade student, shared, "I think [music] has improved my mental health…I had a bunch of family problems, and it helped me stay happy." Students also noted, "you can express yourself through music" (Coffey, fourth grade)

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and that they felt "happy because I can express my feelings in music" (Jaime, fourth grade). For students, adults recognized music as an area that could "help them in communication" (Krugle) and to "see their imagination…along with how they get creative" (Medley). Caregiver J. Connor, a former Army servicemember, shared how music helped him during his physical training: "I had a drill instructor who showed us just how much singing changes what you can do…I did this cadence singing when you're running, [and it] lets you run farther 'cause it takes your mind off the physical stress." Other caregivers in the focus group agreed that music could be meditative or help students with "getting their energy out and getting that exercise in" (Johnson). For many respondents, music allowed for self-expression and provided a sense of comfort and support.

Many respondents valued music as a skill to be developed and practiced. Adults focused on students developing patience and work ethic while also building confidence. Caregiver Smith (mother of children in second and seventh grades) shared her belief that music teaches "patience that [my son] doesn't have." D. Connors (mother of children in fifth and seventh grade) said, "I think it gives them confidence," describing the growth she has seen not only in her own children but also in the students she serves in the school's cafeteria. She added that for her daughter, "her confidence has come up quite a bit, especially for reports and speaking in front of the classroom," and she credited her participation in music with that growth. Johnson advocated for the program, saying that music "brings them out of their shells" and "boosts their confidence." D. Connors added she believed that playing instruments contributed to a greater sense of "look what I can do" after practicing, and the caregivers in the group agreed. Dale, the school principal, valued music as a capacity-building opportunity for students. She described the school climate prior to her arrival,[43] saying "we don't have the intense culture of learning that I would like to

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[43] Dale was in her third year as the school's principal. She joined the campus the same year as Medley.

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see…we start to know these kids and then we start to feel sorry for them rather than empower and grow the student." She believed the music program was a space for the students to engage in "productive struggle," building their capacity to overcome challenges in other areas of their education. Jamie, a fourth-grade student, valued the skill-building opportunities during music class, saying, "we don't just spend one time on it. We practice it over and over again."

Students shared that learning a new skill made them feel special and proud, appearing to contribute to their sense of self-esteem. Several students connected their music learning to their family's legacy, naming family members who had participated in music. Memphis (fifth grade) highlighted that learning an instrument in fifth grade made her feel special because that was something she could not do previously. Fourth-grade students highlighted their favorite aspects of music class, which included "learning a new skill in life" (Jack), "being able to read music" (Coffey), and "learning instruments" (Jimmy and Thomas). For some students, music class, and later band, provided a new hobby. Frank, a fifth-grade student, was happy about his decision to continue music by enrolling in band, saying "it gave me a hobby. Now I have archery and band to do." Music learning contributed to the students' overall sense of self and confidence in their abilities.

Caregivers and school administrators discussed how they saw music supporting academics and development, as well as music as another way for students to be successful. Caregiver Krugle summarized,

> There's so many things developmentally, cognitively, that they can develop at such a young age. And that's why it's so important to start music at a young age even if they're not interested in joining band in the future, music is still so expressive and it helps with so many other things, like fine motor skills…it helps them in communicating, it helps

them with social skills…. as young children in those programs starting out, they're like

sponges, they absorb everything... they see it all, they hear it all, they smell it all, they

taste it all, all of those things develop who they're gonna be and so having programs like

that at such a young age is crucial and vital… and it's all about learning through play.

Adults connected music as helping to "stimulate the mind" (J. Connor) for young children,

saying "they may learn something in music that helps them in math…patterns, consistency,

rhythm" (Smith) and connecting "some of the vocabulary they would hear in their poetry"

(Dale). While considered supportive of academics, music itself was considered a non-academic

area to caregivers and administrators. One caregiver described, "Music offers, I think, something

for the child that maybe's not academically gifted. The child that gets his attention from that…or

the child who doesn't play any sports, not coordinated or whatnot. And I think music can just

make them come alive" (Brown, grandmother of a child in fourth grade). In other words, music

was beneficial for students who were not athletic or struggled with academics. Dale categorized

music as part of the school's *exploratory courses*[44], and while such courses could be considered

career preparation, she also viewed them as areas for students to shine outside of the general

classroom. Adults viewed music as a means to support students' cognitive development and self-

confidence.

Elementary Music's Value to and in the School

The music program at Roseville Elementary School was an essential component of the

school environment. The school principal highlighted the program as "one of my pride points."

Students described a sense of progress and accomplishment regarding their musical

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[44] Dale, the school principal, described the *exploratory courses* as those including "art, choral music, the band, STEM, teen living, [and] computers…all these things that could be considered career exploration, but it's just really exploring different things besides just academics." Within the school schedule, these classes were referred to as *special areas* and also included library time and PE.

development. During my visit, I saw kindergarten and first-grade students jumping with excitement and smiling when they were able to connect solfege syllables to a pitch contour activity they had been practicing. For some students, music class was an important experience in and for itself. When asked how they would feel if the school did not have a music program, Becky, a fifth-grade student, said, "I would be really upset considering that's a lot of memories that were made that would just be gone, and considering that nobody else would get to enjoy what we enjoyed doing." For her, music class was a critical part of her school experience. Medley viewed the program as a foundational experience for students, saying,

> whether they're going to be a patron or supporter of the arts, whether they want to go and make that a career…if they're just a consumer of music and only stream it…whatever their life choice is, I want this to be a moment in their life that they will be able to take forever.

The music room functioned as a positive and safe space for students. Medley valued creating an open space for students, saying, "I've had students at the school who will come in and you can tell they feel safe in the music room because they can be themselves." Lisa, a fifth-grade student, said, "I rely a lot on the band as a safe place to go when I feel down." Students looked forward to going to music, and some viewed it as a motivator to come to school. Liz (fifth grade) added, "it makes me feel excited about other things [at school]." Dale, the school principal, identified music as a source of connection between the students and the school. She shared,

> everybody connects with music…then some of the kids who don't have the home life that maybe we wish all kids had, they connect early with something, and connectedness is the key to success. And so that lets them connect with music, then they connect with the school, they connect with the people, and they aren't lost anymore.

She went on to connect music to students' identity development, saying, "music is another way for them to connect and find out who they are." Students in focus groups unanimously shared their enjoyment of music class and looked forward to attending.

The music program and school structure provided Medley with flexibility and autonomy with his teaching. Medley valued the ability to work with both elementary general music and middle school band, saying, "I get to see both my worlds that I enjoy." Because he also taught secondary band classes, he was able to prepare students for the next step in their school music experience. He remarked, "I know what my kids are getting into, so when they get to the band side, I know what they can do and what they can't do." Medley took pride in his elementary classes and was happy to see his colleagues taking note of his curricular focus. During my visit, he shared a conversation he had with fellow teachers:

> They (the teachers) were reflecting back…it's like, you really do teach them (the kids) something. They don't just go in and fluff off…[the teachers] know I do assess, they know I have a curriculum, and they know that the kids have expectations to learn that they've not had in the past.

Medley took this responsibility to heart, carefully selecting the repertoire presented in class, considering the ongoing discussion in the music education professional regarding appropriate repertoire.[45] "There's a lot of things we have to be very critical about, you know, that we can't sing any more that even when I was a kid we sang all the time," he acknowledged. He enjoyed his ability to curate his instructional materials to address the musical needs of his students and of his program.

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[45] I discuss this further in Chapter 7.

Stakeholders valued the music program as a source of formal music instruction. Students shared that it was beneficial to have a teacher to help them begin their musical journeys. Craig, a third-grade student, asked, "what if we wanted to be musicians, but we didn't have a music teacher and we didn't know how to do music? Then we'd mess up a lot?" Piper, another third-grade student, added, "if you didn't know anything about it, just how would you do it?" Caregivers valued the fact that students could engage with someone outside of the home about music. Caregiver Castillo shared that other than the music program at school, her children only experience music through her, and while she is looking for lessons for her children, she valued the school program for the additional music experience. Lunsford, the high school band director, asserted that for students to be successful in high school band, "we need kids taking private lessons, but we have to travel 30, 45 minutes to get those private lessons." At Roseville Elementary, Medley provided students with additional instruction outside of the school day. Dale, the school principal, valued this service, saying, "[Medley] will stay after or come in early and give lessons to the kids, private lessons, not for a charge." Students were able to access individualized music instruction through Medley and the school music program.

All participants described music in school as foundational, presenting it as an educational right. Students often viewed their K-4 music instruction as laying the groundwork for what they would do next (e.g., band). Patricia, a fifth-grade student participating in band, reflected, "Once we got up into fifth grade, I feel like it really benefitted us to learn all the notes and stuff." Advocating for music in the younger grades, Lisa (fifth grade), argued, "I think all ages deserve to enjoy music as much as we do." Medley viewed his role in providing music as a responsibility. He described music in the K-4 setting as "the foundation of everything they do from here on out in their musical life." He recognized that "fourth grade music may be the last

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time they ever have music education in their life." Students and caregivers valued music learning, particularly notation literacy, as a skill and knowledge set students could hold onto. Jimmy (fourth grade) commented, "I like [knowing] how to read some music," and Brown (grandmother of a child in fourth grade) argued, "you learn to read music, they're not going to take that away from you." Throughout conversations, it was apparent that respondents viewed music as essential in part because *someone needs this.* When asked how they would feel if the K-4 music program were to be cut, Ivy (fifth grade), who had not spoken during the focus group discussion to this point, immediately raised her hand, sharing, "it makes me feel sad because kids won't have the chance to be in band. Because maybe being in band is something they'd enjoy." Similarly, Dale (school principal) and Moore (high school choir director) maintained that music provides something for everyone, and that the elementary music program functioned as a foundational component.

During the school day, Medley and other participants described the music program as part of a well-rounded and cross-curricular approach to education. He viewed the program as an essential part of teaching the whole child, frequently referring to his "holistic view" of teaching. He described several examples of cross-curricular connections in the music room, including connecting a movement story to building vocabulary or collaborating with the science teachers to explain sound waves and frequency. Dale valued Medley's purposeful instruction, saying, "he's explicit. This is how it connects." She highlighted music's benefit as part of a diverse school curriculum, saying, "it's about exploring different things besides just academics." Students shared that "music is one of the special areas…you don't get to do that anywhere in class" (Frank, fifth grade). They valued the variety music class added to their day. The music program provided students with a change of pace and opportunities to explore musical possibilities.

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At Roseville Elementary, the music program contributed to the overall school "culture of providing opportunity" (Medley). While many co-curricular activities, including athletics, took place outside of the school day, caregivers and school officials valued music as a special program occurring during the day. Underwood (mother of a child in fifth grade and three adult children) shared, "when you have a big family, you can't be driving in nine different directions, so [music] was something they could do…because you didn't have to drive everywhere and out of the county." During general music, the opportunity to participate in fifth-grade band was "something they can look forward to" (Medley). For younger students, caregivers Johnson and D. Connors felt there were limited extra-curricular options, and they saw music as one way they could plug in. Dale (school principal) recognized the transportation challenges of her rural community, with most students being bused to and from school. "We don't have an activity bus here for any after-school events," which made the timing of the music program during the school day ideal for ensuring students had the ability to participate. For both Dale and Medley, it was important for students to see they could participate in seemingly oppositional activities, namely arts and athletics. Medley shared wanting them to see, "oh, I can do both." Similar to most general music programs, there was an emphasis on helping students to explore a range of opportunities as they developed their identities and shaped their futures.

Students and caregivers identified the social benefits of music program participation. This seemed particularly salient given the school structure of a fifth-grade[46] band program within the elementary building. Some students saw music as contributing to creating a sense of belonging within their peer groups and the larger school population. For Frank (fifth grade), his elementary music work contributed to his sense of belonging in band, and his brass instrument made him

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[46] Here, I focused on the fifth-grade band program because I spoke to fifth-grade students. I chose to limit my focus groups to students in third-fifth grades to remain consistent across sites.

feel like an important part of the group. The structure created opportunities for students to see and serve as role models, an important component for fifth-grade student, Lisa, and her mother, Krugle. Lisa proudly shared,

> I'm the only girl out of my entire school who plays the euphonium. So it just really brings me excitement to play it because I know I'm the only girl and I'm showing other little girls they can follow their dreams that they wanna do.

The music program also supported student interactions by teaching group skills. C. Brown (caregiver) said making music required cooperation, "you need the whole team there…you learn to depend on each other and you're proud of each other." Underwood (caregiver) highlighted inclusivity, saying there are "all sorts [of kids] are in there," and seeing music as a place for students to cross social stratifications. Students enjoyed working together through music. For example, April (fifth grade) remarked, "I like to listen…I like to hear everybody else play," citing listening as one of her favorite aspects of music class. Music gave students a space to develop social identities and engage with others.

Within Roseville Elementary, all participants maintained an eye on future music participation, namely enrollment in the band.[47] Caregivers and students shared that they would like to see band instruction begin earlier (for some, as early as second grade). Music in kindergarten through fourth grade, according to many adults, served primarily as preparation for band enrollment. High school band director Lunsford shared,

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[47] All district elementary schools (K-8) had a similar structure to Roseville Elementary, in that one music specialist taught all music courses. As such, the ensemble offering was theoretically flexible based on the teacher's area of specialty, according to Medley, Lunsford, and Moore. However, given the emphasis on band in the district, many elementary schools had focused on hiring teachers with a band background and pushed for the continuation of the band programs. At the time of this study, there were choir programs at both high schools but no choir programs at the fifth-eighth grade level.

in my opinion, that age group is vital…that's when students are most

impressionable…we can make sure that they're learning [music] right the first time

earlier…as teachers, our main job is to set our students up for success…with K through 4

[that means] this is what they're gonna need to know when they transfer to middle school

and high school.

Students who participated in focus groups saw band as the logical next step in their musical

journeys. After participating in music class for several years, Patricia (fifth grade) wondered,

"why would you want to stop there… for nothing?" For Medley, encouraging students to join

band was not an ideological concern, but rather a practical one. "That's the next step that they

have here to continue music," he shared. "That's it. They do not have another option, so I'm

trying to get as many kids in…as many kids that can be lifetime learners of music…yea, there is

a big push, that's no secret." This emphasis on being a "lifetime learner of music" was crucial for

Medley and some caregivers. They viewed music at school as providing a foundation for future

musical endeavors and creating potential opportunities that would manifest later.

Elementary Music's Value to and in the Community

Music held meaning for many families in Roseville, including functioning as a source of

family connection and legacy. Many caregivers and students shared family history as a reason

for involvement in the music program. Underwood shared "I've had kids in Roseville for 20

years…everyone was in band." Her daughter, Christina (fifth grade) shared "I want to be like my

mom and play the clarinet." Similarly, Smith (mother of children in second and seventh grades)

shared that her daughter "is in band, I was in band, my husband was in band…we were tickled

cause (she) is actually playing my sister's old clarinet!" Music was also something that could be

shared with extended family members. D. Connors laughed and recalled that leading up to every

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performance, her children would say "to every relative, can you come? Can you come?" Students valued the ability to share music with their family members, including siblings. Liz (fifth grade) proudly described playing her recorder for her baby brother, and caregiver Castillo wondered in what ways her son, Jack (fourth grade) might teach her unborn daughter music when she was older. Music served as a shared interest between caregivers and their children. Krugle reflected on her daughter's musical preferences and Castillo shared that while some caregivers are interested in sports, her husband was invested in music and he shared that with their children. Caregivers and students seemed to view the music program as a potential continuation of their musical family legacies.

Caregivers appeared to value the music program based on their child(ren)'s enjoyment and involvement. When asked about the music program, Lindstrom (grandmother to a child in fourth grade) replied simply, "he loves music." Underwood said, "of course, it means a lot to me because my child's involved in it." In one focus group, J. Connor shared, "it gives my kids enjoyment, which means the world to me…I love seeing the fact that when they learn how to play something new, them showing us," and D. Connors and Johnson agreed. The music program provided a venue for caregivers and teachers to see their children shine, including witnessing their musical and personal growth over time. Johnson reflected, "from the time that he started in kindergarten as a little bitty kid, up until now in sixth grade, the difference just blows me away, and I credit all that to him being in music and band." Medley recalled conversations with teachers following performances, echoing sentiments of pride in the student growth and confidence. For adults, the children's experiences and perceptions were a source of value for the music program.

Adult participants identified the music program as a connector between the school and the community. In one sense, the music program unified the community, according to Bowen (mother of a child in fifth grade). She explained:

> I think it benefits the community, 'cause with sports…it can devolve into tribalism where, like, the Jets are better than the Hornets or whatever. But with music, there's really not that much actual competition. It brings more people together. It's more of a bond.

This unification seemed to create a sense of camaraderie within the district, as all stakeholders expressed a desire for greater intra-school collaboration within the music program. Music performances brought caregivers and community members into the school building. For Dale (principal) this connection was critical for school success and growth. Medley explained one example of program support for him was seeing the families attending the concert. He shared that a "packed house shows me…that it's supported. We want this to happen and we appreciate what's happening." Both Dale and Medley wished for a larger gymnasium to support concert attendance. Events drew residents into the school building and built community.

The music program was also a way for community members support and give back to the community. In 2019, a local community member donated a grand piano[48] and monetary gift to the school because of his wife's personal love of music and their love for the community and school. Caregivers were searching for ways to be involved with the school and the music program. Smith shared, "I looked forward to when my kids got into school that I could come and volunteer for this and that…they don't really [allow parents to come in] here." Caregivers in one

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[48] Notably, this piano was not housed in the music room, but rather in a multipurpose room. This was because the music room did not have space for the large piano and the multipurpose room was more frequently used for community gatherings.

focus group brainstormed ways to support the music program through fundraisers or bake sales. Medley recognized this desire for community connection. In one interview, he described a myriad of potential community connections he hoped to facilitate post-COVID. Dale described his efforts, saying "he's trying to connect our kids [with community opportunities]...he's wanting to get us involved…so that's huge." The community, according to respondents, had a strong desire to engage with the school and the music program.

Both high school music directors acknowledged the importance of music at the elementary school for their own programs. Because of the school structure within the district, there are no middle schools to speak of, although many stakeholders dropped the elementary designation when discussing grades five through eight. Band director Lunsford and choir director Moore called music at their "feeder schools"[49] "foundational" and wished they were able to do more recruiting. Both directors recognized the impact of the teachers at the elementary schools in shaping the high school programs. Lunsford shared one set of challenges for band:

> and then the other challenge is that some of the people that are hired to do middle school band are not band people. They're vocal people and they don't know diddly squat about band. It really makes it challenging to run a band program when you know nothing about band.

Moore recognized a similar recruitment challenge with the erasure of choir. She said,

> most of the county, at least the [schools] that feed into our programs, are more-band based because their teachers have a band background. It makes it really difficult to recruit. They have these preconceived notions about choir and no other experience to base it on.

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[49] Roseville Elementary School is one of four schools that send students to Duplin County High School, one of two high school campuses in the district.

Both teachers mentioned a strong desire to connect more with the elementary campuses because of the role those campuses played in the future success of their secondary programs.

At the elementary level, stakeholders shared a sense of gratefulness toward the music program. Many shared that they were "glad to have music at all" (J. Connors). Students shared that "music is what keeps the school alive" (Liz, fifth grade) and "the school really isn't that good without music" (Thomas, fourth grade). During focus groups and interviews, I asked all participants what they might say in response to the elementary music program being cut. Every participant shared a sense of outrage at the idea and brainstormed ways they might advocate for the program. Krugle summarized her group's conversation, saying, "*especially* in a small town like this, we would fight for (K-4 music) because that's how much we love it. That's how much we can see the potential that it is creating for our kids." All participants were grateful that music was part of their school and community.

Connecting Through Tradition and Rebuilding

As the K-4 general music teacher and the 5-8 band teacher, Medley worked to connect to the school and community through traditions and the rebuilding of the music program. Prior to his arrival three years ago, Roseville's music program had struggled to survive after its longtime music teacher retired. Medley shared that his first task was to gain an understanding of the community's musical goals (namely the strong instrumental program and elementary music performances). Caregivers recognized his efforts and supported his work in the music program. "People see that, they remember that, [the music program] was ingrained in," shared caregiver Smith. "It's been a big part of the community and they wanna see it continue." Medley recognized the need for growth, saying "I see it as I'm gonna build something there." He viewed the general music and band programs as partner endeavors and worked to grow them together.

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Understanding Roseville music required an understanding of the importance of instrumental music. "That's the norm here, that band is more of the big thing," said Medley. Respondents described family connections with instrumental participation, and students looked forward to starting on their instruments. Caregivers took note of the work that had occurred in the past three years. J. Connors remarked, "it's grown. It was very small, but now they can actually divide it (the band into parts) ...and the quality that they've gone through has gotten so much better too." D. Connor continued, adding the variety she heard in the band program was also increasing. At the high school, there is a desire to see the elementary programs grow from a potential recruitment perspective. Lunsford, the band director, said,

> we're in a rural setting and we don't have a lot at our disposal…how can we as a small
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> program in rural Duplin County start working toward, okay this is what the bigger,
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> successful programs are doing. How do we accomplish this with 30 kids?

Medley shared that the band program had increased enrollment at Roseville every year since he arrived, and younger students looked forward to when they would be able to begin in fifth grade.

Part of Medley's rebuilding included the reestablishment of expectations and consistency within the music room. According to Medley, there were little to no expectations for musical progress or behavior in the music room with some previous teachers. Medley prided himself on the sequential nature of his curriculum, building skills across the years to prepare students for future musical endeavors, including band. "We're working on making them (the kids) understand there is an expectation for everything we do," Medley shared. "The more consistent you are with them, you're going to get more from the kid." During my visit, I observed the same greeting routine used across grade levels, where Medley would sing "Hello boys and girls" (sol, mi, sol sol, mi), and the students would sing back "Hello Mr. Medley" (sol, mi, sol sol, mi mi).

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According to Medley, this consistent greeting provided structure to class in a way that administrators appreciated and students learned to expect. Teachers and students were becoming accustomed to more rigorous curricular expectations in the music classroom, and while there were some growing pains (e.g., caregivers questioning a student receiving a lower grade for music class), the consensus appeared the be that "he's the real deal" (Dale).

One community-focused initiative that Medley had undertaken was to make the music program and events more open to the community. Prior to Medley's arrival in Roseville, the music program was largely inaccessible to many caregivers, as performances and any events were hosted during the school day. This scheduling conflicted with work schedules (for those who were employed) and transportation needs for many residents (as many elderly residents in the community no longer drive). Lindstrom (grandmother of a student in fourth grade), shared, "I haven't really been able to go to any of the plays or anything cause I don't drive. I'm not able to get there." Medley shifted performances back to the evenings and explained:

> they (parents) see the products from the process, and they appreciate the fact, the first
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> year I was here three years ago was the first time they had a nighttime performance in
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> years because everything was during the day. So a lot of parents didn't get to see their
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> children perform, and I think that's made a big difference

Caregiver participants shared that they greatly appreciated the shift and enjoyed seeing their students perform. Performances and events seemed to be the primary source of information about the music program for caregivers, as many were not aware of instructional goals within the classroom. Many caregivers believed the county's annual Music and Movement event to be hosted by the music teachers, when in fact this was a PE dance event. Medley shared that communicating with the elementary caregivers remains a logistical challenge, given the number

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of families and the requirement that communication goes through grade-level teachers, but that it was something he was still working on.

Medley's passion and excitement for music and for his students helped him in growing his program. Students in all three focus groups discussed their teacher, saying "the teacher is nice" (Bob and Craig, third grade) and enjoying his understanding of them. "On a Monday, Mr. Medley just goes along with the vibes, and then sometimes we do funny dances," remarked Emily (third grade). Caregivers valued Medley's passion for his content and his students. Smith explained, "He's very enthusiastic about music…you can see that he loves what he does and it really trickles down to all the kids…when you love what you do, it radiates off of you and he *really does love* what he does." Krugle added, "He shows that *joy* and that *passion* that he has and the kids see that." Part of the reconstruction that Medley focused on was sharing that passion and giving the students something to look forward to. Lisa (fifth grade) recalled, "when Mr. Medley used to play the instruments when we were in the younger grades, I just really wanted to be able to play an instrument too!" Medley's excitement for music inspired his students to want to continue beyond fourth grade when music was no longer compulsory.

Interpretation

Students and adults seemed focused on what music could provide for students in the future. Within interviews and focus groups, there was very little discussion of what students were capable of at the moment or what music could do for students in kindergarten through fourth grade. In fact, it became difficult at times to ensure conversations were focused on K-4 music, as *elementary music* at Roseville was nearly synonymous with *band.* That is, I would ask a focus group about elementary music and they would frequently respond about band. While one caregiver did mention the developmental support for music, stakeholders did not often name

missing word creativity and musical exploration for the sake of music as important. Band director Lunsford shared wanting to build the band program at Duplin County High School to be competitive, with "super high functioning, high-level programs," with an eye on preparing students who might want to pursue music beyond high school. While one caregiver (Krugle) did discuss some exploratory and developmental benefits of music instruction for children, she was a minority voice. At times, Medley also seemed interested in exploration, describing his desire for students to have elementary music as something positive to look back to. However, the primary focus for music instruction in the younger grades centered on music in students' futures—and specifically their participation in band--rather than prioritizing their musical present.

This emphasis on future music participation highlighted a hierarchical divide that placed elementary general music as subservient to the secondary band. This division was further evidenced by some adults' perceptions of instrumental success as more of an accomplishment than vocal progress. One caregiver shared,

> I feel like band shows them that they can do it and that they can show people a lot easier and people will say, "yea, that's cool" cause you can do something that I can't do. I mean, I can (imitates singing a high note)...when *I* was kid, when I learned to play music, it felt like *more* than when I tried to sing. It's the, 'I can do this *with this*' (J. Connors)

When asked what changes they might like to see in the music program,[50] many caregivers described wanting to see instrument instruction starting as early as second grade. School structures at the elementary and secondary level supported instrumental over vocal music, namely in what courses were offered in fifth-eighth grade and the limited instruction time for the high school choir. These structures and caregiver perceptions indicated that participants had

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[50] This was part of the focus group protocol.

internalized a hierarchy common in music education, wherein instrumental music is superior to vocal music. In the elementary classroom, I observed Medley using one song[51] as an end-of-class reward game but did not see songs being used in instruction. Instead, he focused on pattern identification as preparation for notational literacy and developing familiarity with instruments. In Roseville, the emphasis on instrumental over vocal music (including choir's structural erasure from the middle school grades) resulted in a choral program at the high school that was struggling to survive. Instrumental music was the next step in the elementary students' progression, and vocal music was not an option.

As adults described *supporting* the music program, I observed tensions between spoken support and action-based support. For some, acknowledging verbal support for the program (Dale) or seeing the performances were well-attended (Medley) demonstrated a certain level of community support. However, some actions seemed to contradict this support, including cutting music class time to ensure students had PE minutes and the designation of music as *exploratory*. All three music teachers described a need for time to collaborate between campuses and additional music staff to properly teach the specialized content areas (general music, band, choir). Moore, the high school choir director, lamented, "it's very much a lip-service support, but when you get down to actually supporting, like doing things would actually be helpful." Notably, in focus groups, caregivers appeared willing to help by volunteering in the classroom or fundraising, but they did not know how to help, what was needed, and what school procedures they would need to follow. The varying understandings of *support* created a disconnect between the music program in the county, the school, and the community.

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[51] If students had extra time at the end of class, Medley would invite them to play a hide-and-seek variation, hiding a large sponge in the music room and singing Black Snake at different volumes to indicate how close the seeker was to the sponge. Notation for the song can be found at https://kodaly.hnu.edu/song.cfm?id=994.

During my analysis, I discovered a tension regarding performance times. Some caregivers and administrators valued the elementary music program as something that all students had the opportunity to participate in during the school day, eliminating transportation as a barrier to access. Medley shared that his predecessors had scheduled performances during the school day. While this performance timing was optimal for student participation, it limited caregiver access. Given the importance of performances to the adult respondents, shifting the performances to the evening would seem like a positive change. However, while more caregivers were now able to attend, I wondered if this change reintroduced challenges for student participation. This led me to question the true value of the performances and whether they were intended to be demonstrations for the caregivers or opportunities for students.

Reflecting upon Medley's role in the program, I noticed respondents talked primarily about his work with the band program, and then the elementary program. His campus principal and colleagues valued him for the extra work he did with band students, noting that he did not request or expect additional compensation for before and after school work. Medley shared that he felt the grade level teachers were beginning to see the purposeful sequencing of his curriculum, saying he was the "real deal." However, I was unable to separate his work as a band director from his work as a general music teacher, leading me to wonder how adult respondents valued his work with the younger students.

It was difficult at times to discern the exact legacy of the music program given the amount of teacher turnover. Medley and Dale, the school administrator, were both new to the district three years ago and worked to piece together an understanding of the program's history. Caregiver respondents focused on the band program, as many of them had ties to instrumental music within their families. The lack of details about the legacy led me to see the program's

history as apocryphal or idealized. I wondered what the legacy truly looked like but was unable to speak directly to anyone who was present during that time.

Summary

Respondents from Roseville described valuing the elementary music program in their school and community, although the enactment of their support was less evident. Caregivers and students saw the music program as a source of preparation for future musicking and a way to engage with the school. Students across grade levels described their music classes as joyful and fun, saying they looked forward to attending and for some, it was a reason for them to come to school. Administrators valued the music program for the diverse curricular opportunities it afforded to students and the confidence students developed as they progressed through music. Elementary music teacher Medley valued his role in students' lives, emphasizing his hope that they become "lifelong learners of music."

Medley's connection to the school and community centered on an understanding of the band tradition in the area and the desire to see the program rebuilt and strengthened. Drawing on years of teaching experience at previous schools, he focused on setting expectations and maintaining consistency for students and families, molding general music and band classes into structured classes focused on music growth. He described his approach, saying,

> My role and view as the elementary music educator at Roseville School are to teach holistically. I put the pieces of each non-art [curriculum] into one integrated curriculum. I also create lifetime future lovers of music that will continue to consume and perform music throughout his or her life. Finally, I have a curriculum that promotes music literacy and fluency.

He outlined plans for continued growth and worked to build new relationships between the students and the community. Caregivers, students, and administrators appreciated the passion that Medley brought to his teaching and the energy that he had infused into the music program thus far, looking forward to continued growth.

CHAPTER 7: CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

I traveled to three rural communities across the United States to explore the meaning and value of elementary music in rural communities. I constructed individual case studies examining elementary music's meaning and value to stakeholders and the ways music teachers connected to their communities. Study participants, including elementary and secondary music teachers, administrators, caregivers, and elementary students, shared about their communities, schools, and music programs. They described several values that I anticipated I would hear, such as music enjoyment, music as a social connection, and community expectations for the music program. In this chapter, I examine themes that emerged when I looked across the case studies, including hierarchies within rural music programs, understanding and navigating community perceptions, and rural music programs creating connections. Then, in light of my findings, I revisit the idea of *rural*, including engaging with place and the impact of rural as a location on music programs.

Hierarchies within Rural Music Programs

My primary finding from this cross-case analysis was the abundance of hierarchies being enacted in rural elementary music education. By hierarchy, I am referring to the systems by which people arrange ideas according to their importance. Many of the hierarchies I observed seemed to be implicit rather than explicit. However, the consequences of these prioritizations created tangible consequences for elementary music programs. In this section, I outline evidence of hierarchical divisions, including *core* over *specials*, secondary over elementary music, instrumental over vocal music, and Western classical music over *other* styles.

Core over Specials

Many adult participants across sites viewed music as a valuable tool in connecting to other content areas. They saw music as supporting academic pursuits and contributing to a

holistic or whole-child approach to education, similar to VanDeusen (2016). Several adults

mentioned that music helped them with mathematics skills like fractions or patterns. This is a

familiar trend in music education, as administrators "seem to value the ways music can connect

with other subjects, such as writing, history, and multicultural studies" (Abril & Gault, 2006, p.

17). Alternatively, Dale (Roseville administrator) valued music learning in part for the

productive struggle it created for students, and Krugle (Roseville caregiver) advocated the

developmental benefits of music play. It is in the active music making, skill learning, interaction,

and creation that students benefit. Academic benefits may then be derived not by using music to

reinforce other content, but by participating in music – by learning music as and for music.

Hallam (2010) outlined several positive connections between early music exposure and literacy,

phonemic awareness, and numeracy, noting that an influential component in this learning

appeared to be the child experiencing repetition and success. The connections between music and

academic skills are often overstated, contributing to the perpetuation of the neuromyth that music

participation causes academic growth (Düvel et al., 2017; Young, 2020). This concept, popularly

known as the Mozart Effect (Rauscher et al., 1993), persists despite scholarly evidence that the

connection is not causal (Elpus, 2013; Foster & Jenkins, 2017; Mehr, 2014, 2015). Still,

administrators and caregivers across sites saw music as a way for students who struggle with

academics to be successful.

Understanding the overall value of music for administrators was difficult, as there were

differences between their statements and the actions I observed. During interviews, each

administrator spoke highly of their school's music program, regarding it as an integral part of

their school. When I asked about how they might respond to the school board cutting the music

program, each administrator said they would advocate for the program. However, according to

teachers, this support did not extend to equal value with *core* subjects. For example, Parker's administrator told him to stop providing instruction so students could focus on their grade-level assignments during distance learning, a familiar experience for many elementary music educators (Shaw & Mayo, 2021). Medley shared that at his school, he had restrictions about when he could hold concerts and events, particularly around state testing windows. Mattson described students being pulled from his music class to complete other assignments or to receive intervention services. The administrator in Fairmills saw music as a behavior incentive and allowed students to be pulled from music to serve behavior consequences, negating the curricular status of Mattson's music class. There also appeared to be a disconnect between administrators' spoken support and action-based support. High school choir director Moore described this disconnect as "lip service support." Mattson summarized, "presence-wise, [admin] will all tell you [they support you], but when the rubber meets the road, I think they can take it or leave it...nowadays elementary music is so unsung."

School administrators across sites designated elementary music programs as part of the *specials* classes. They used the term *specials* to group class offerings like music, physical education, library, art, and computers, among other less common options. *Specials* separated these classes from *core* subjects, including reading, writing, math, social studies, and science. Referencing Foucault, O'Toole (1994) argued that "language is not neutral or innocent" (p. 12). By designating music classes as *special* and setting them apart from *core* classes, there is an implication of value, or rather, a devaluation. Use of the *specials* designation placed music as peripheral or supplemental to *academic* content. In conversation, Medley flipped this script, referring to *core* classes as *non-arts* subjects. Generally, elementary music teacher participants

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used the term *specials* because that was their campus designation, although they advocated that

the community valued the music program as part of a well-rounded education.

The subordinate status of music in relation to other school subjects is not a uniquely rural

phenomenon; rather, it is indicative of a larger systemic issue for music education advocates.

Shaw (2020) argued that policies relating to music education were primarily initiated as an

afterthought or as a consequence of policies involving other content areas. Music's status as a

content area remains peripheral to discussions of what students need in a well-rounded

education. Regelski (2002) discussed the subjective nature of value, highlighting that to argue

music's value is to argue the praxial nature of music (e.g., what is music good for?). Participants

exemplified this argument during my interviews as they sought to describe all the potential

benefits music could provide, primarily those outside of aesthetic experience. While those

applying the hierarchy appeared to lack malicious intent, the music teacher participants clearly

felt less valued or less important than other teachers and areas at their campuses.

Secondary over Elementary Music

I noticed administrators, caregivers, and other teachers prioritized secondary music over

elementary music programs. Music education standards position music as an output-driven,

performance-based artform. Many music professionals, administrators, and caregivers consider

the ensemble model or final performance to be the pinnacle or end goal of music pursuits. This

emphasis on performance or a final product creates an artificial divide within schools between

elementary and secondary music and devalues elementary music (Kertz-Welzel, 2009).

Caregivers may internalize this emphasis on output, influencing their views of a school's music

program and the elementary music teacher. The focus on output was evident in Fairmills and

Roseville. Adult respondents valued the elementary music program in part for its foundational

work in preparing students for ensemble possibilities in middle and high school. In Fairmills, participants longed for the return of the band program and believed that Mattson's work at the elementary would be integral in restarting the band. In Roseville, music teachers acknowledged that the next musical step for students beyond fourth grade was band, and so Medley worked to prepare students to transition to an ensemble setting. By focusing on the outcome of polished performances and large ensemble recruitment, adult participants often overlooked the work and accomplishments of the elementary music program.

Positioning secondary over elementary music may also stem from a general view of elementary music as superfluous or, as several respondents perceived, "babysitting." Many in education erroneously view working with young as easier than secondary or collegiate education (Becker, 1999), resulting in the perception of early childhood and elementary music positions as inferior to secondary positions. In music, this may be due to the non-performance focus of most elementary music programs. Although elementary music educators often do performances, learning performance repertoire is not often central to elementary music curricula as it is in secondary ensembles. Notably, all three teachers in this study acknowledged the pressures to stage performances, although this had been slightly alleviated due to the pandemic. Mattson and Parker described being perceived as babysitters on occasion, recognizing the logistical role of music class in providing a planning/prep period for grade-level teachers. Medley did not describe this feeling, perhaps due to his direct role in preparing students for his own band classes. Elementary music educators can provide rich, developmentally appropriate musical experiences for young children, facilitating and encouraging exploration and supporting student creativity. Viewing elementary music educators as warm bodies to provide a break for grade-level teachers devalues their expertise and the overall value of what they do for young children.

Importance of Enjoyment

Elementary music programs can simultaneously address exploration, skill-building, and enjoyment. Students across sites unanimously described music as fun and something they enjoyed participating in. While fun may seem like a superfluous bonus of a music program, it contributed deeply to students' valuing of the music program and their overall perception of their schools. Enjoyment is a deep and important component of the human experience. Relating to music, Koops and Keppen (2014) described enjoyment as a state of experiencing satisfaction, delight, and pleasure. Abril and Gault (2007) noted that administrators rated "music's role as a pleasant diversion" (p. 34) as unimportant to music's value in schools. However, students across sites in this study saw music enjoyment as a central value. Perhaps due to the specials/core hierarchy, music educators may hesitate to talk about music enjoyment as a component of their instruction, but my research indicated that many students felt strongly about preserving music within their school because of the joy it provided.

Instrumental over Vocal Music

I also observed a hierarchy between vocal and instrumental music-making. In Roseville and Fairmills, stakeholders viewed instrumental music as superior in difficulty and prestige to vocal music. Duplin County administrators had eliminated choir from the elementary schools and significantly reduced the high school choir's instruction time. Some caregivers in Roseville argued that anyone could sing, but it was a special skill to play an instrument. In Fairmills, Mattson did not sing much in his elementary curriculum, preferring to address what he described as "music fundamentals, history, technology, and literacy." Adults in Fairmills discussed the potential revival of the band program more frequently than they did the active choir program. During focus group conversations, students said that playing the instruments was a highlight,

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while only a few mentioned singing. Community perceptions of instrumental music as more important than vocal music or more of an accomplishment seemed to influence the teacher's curricular decisions, leading to the solidification of the preference in a repeating cycle.

These findings reflect the hierarchy of instrumental over vocal music in the field of music education. Many school band programs receive significant monetary support, often with multiple directors and a large budget. Musicians are often asked what instrument they play, implying that to be a musician, one must play an external instrument. Scholars and educators identify individual instrument types because of the differences between them, while vocalists are often grouped only as *voice* (see Hewitt & Thompson, 2006). In Fairmills, adult respondents seemed to view the music program as lacking because it did not have a band. Roseville did not offer choir at the middle school level and offered choir during the shortest instructional block of the day. Given the emphasis on funding concerns at both sites, I was surprised by the diminished status of vocal music. Singing is arguably more accessible in communities with less funding as students all have access to their voices (Palkki, 2022). However, as Deppen (secondary choir in Sweetwater) acknowledged, "you just *gotta* have a pep band." Community expectations of a marching band or pep band at athletic events may support this hierarchical divide (VanDeusen, 2016). The enactment of this hierarchy can be detrimental to children's vocal exploration and development opportunities in elementary school and to secondary choir programs.

In Sweetwater, this hierarchy was less prominent. Structurally, band (fifth grade) started before choir (sixth grade). Parker offered a before-school choir (Sweet Pipes) and an Orff-style ensemble. Notably, Sweet Pipes generated more interest, with approximately 110 students participating each year, while the instrument ensemble had around 20 students. Parker believed that singing was foundational, calling it the "basis of all musicianship." During his instruction,

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he balanced his instruction to include singing skills and instrument playing skills, transferring

content from the body and voice to instrument playing. As noted above, the elementary music

program at Sweetwater seemed to have its own legacy apart from the secondary band and choir. I

wondered if this independence, in conjunction with the teacher's purposeful balance between

vocal and instrumental instruction in elementary music, may have contributed to a more equal

valuation.

Western Classical over Other Styles

Across sites, adult respondents highlighted the importance of *exposure* to music, namely

Western classical music, for their elementary students. They shared concerns that without the

school music program, students would not have access to music, echoing sentiments like

Jorgensen (2020), who said,

> Fostering a love of Western classical music stretches minds and hearts beyond the
>
> ordinary to the extraordinary, towards musical grace, style, and virtuosity as manifested
>
> in this tradition, thereby fostering imagination and augmenting the human experience (p.
>
> 139)

During my visits, I observed all three elementary music teachers focusing on music skill-building

in the Western classical tradition, including literacy using standard notation and listening

examples that reinscribed the Western classical canon. In terms of access to music, popular

music was readily available to students and many described listening to music at home and with

their families. Parker included some popular and folk music styles in his lesson plans. However,

his focus remained primarily on Western classical skills. The emphasis on Western classical over

popular music styles illustrated another music hierarchy in action. Green (2006) wrote that

educators, at times, incorporated popular music into school music curricula in "the hope that this

will lead them to something more 'worthwhile' (that is, classical music). Such an approach implicitly downgrades the value of popular music in and for itself" (p. 102). Ilari (2020) illustrated that longitudinal research regarding music and child development has often centered on Western classical music. This may contribute to the perpetuation of the neuromyths described above as well as reinforcing the idea that Western classical music is superior to all others. Adult participants across sites seemed focused on the need for classical music for their children rather than a broader approach to music learning and music making.

In conversations about education, discussions of rural locales often include comparisons to urban ones. Fulkerson and Thomas (2013) coined the term *urbanormative* to describe the biases and normalization of that which is considered *urban*, centering urban or progressive qualities while rejecting rural ways of being as peripheral. Bates (2016) argued the field of music education privileged urbanormative pursuits, including a focus on large ensembles and on musical styles like Western classical music and jazz. However, urban and rural schools are both frequently disadvantaged in terms of funding and resources (Clark, 2022; Frierson-Campbell et al., 2020), curricular prioritization (being cut in favor of test prep or core classes) (Farmer, 2015), and ensemble enrollment (Bates, 2018a; Isbell, 2005; Fitzpatrick-Harnish, 2015). In fact, large, well-funded programs found in suburban locales have become the ideal. Shouldice and Woolnough (2021) found that "larger schools and suburban schools [showed] greater likelihood of earning a 'I' rating" (p. 160) in secondary ensemble festival competitions. In the elementary classrooms I visited, the instruction and content that I observed would be similar to, if not the same as, that found in suburban schools. I argue that it is not urbanormativity, but rather *suburbanormativity* that is being enacted in music education, where rural and urban music programs are equally (yet differently) disadvantaged compared to suburban music programs.

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Understanding and Navigating Community Perceptions

In this section, I discuss the challenges elementary music teachers faced in understanding and navigating their rural community's perceptions and expectations for the music program. All three teachers were outsiders to their respective communities, having grown up in different areas and attending universities out of the area. Mattson and Medley had grown up near their current schools while Parker was from another region.[52] Across sites, I noticed the music teachers grappling with communication, program legacy, conservative beliefs, and mixed feelings of contentment and longing. I discuss each component below.

Communication

Communication between the schools and the caregivers seemed to be a challenge for elementary music teacher participants. Caregivers across sites struggled to articulate what was happening within music classes outside of what they observed at concerts and special events. In Fairmills, Mattson described limited caregiver response because of communication tensions[53] and phone and email overload. This presented difficulties for me as a researcher, because these tensions appeared to be the main reason my surveys failed and I struggled to recruit caregiver participants. At Sweetwater, Parker worked to communicate via email and through his contacts with kids and caregivers through after-school duty, but the number of students he was responsible for made initiating and maintaining contact difficult. In Roseville, Medley shared there were too many students to communicate with each family directly. Additionally, any large group communication from Medley would need to go through either the grade level teacher or the school's newsletter. Communication challenges do not seem to be ubiquitous across or within

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[52] I discuss each teacher's locale background further below.
[53] Mattson described a negative conditioning associated with school phone calls. He said caregivers had become accustomed to phone calls related to negative behavior and so they often did not answer calls from school phone numbers.

locales. Doyle (2012) described similar challenges in an urban setting, but Fernsler (2020) noted that at the three rural elementary schools she visited, communication between music teachers and caregivers was never a challenge. Abril and Bannerman (2014) reported that music teachers found stakeholder communication to be an important factor in program success. As a result of the communication barriers at these three sites, caregivers were often unaware of the important learning taking place in the music room and the impact that progress might have on their children's lives and in shaping the program's legacy moving forward.

Program Legacy

Community members shared strong beliefs about the legacy of their schools' music programs. For Fairmills, this legacy was a strong band program and a history of long-time teachers who built the prestige of the music program at the elementary and secondary levels. Roseville residents focused on the legacy of the band program across the county and the elementary music program's role in preparing students to participate in band. It was difficult at both sites to ensure that conversations remained focused on elementary music. Like VanDeusen's (2016) findings, the music programs' history and legacy were inextricable from the vision respondents had for the program presently.

However, in Sweetwater, the impact of the legacy appeared to be far more subtle, perhaps because the music program had been more stable than those at Roseville and Fairmills. Parker discussed a higher teacher turnover rate in other areas, but not in the elementary music program. Sweetwater's elementary music legacy was one of support and success without relying on strong ties to secondary ensembles. Participants were able to speak directly about the elementary music program without defaulting to middle and high school band (choir was often absent from these conversations in Fairmills and Roseville despite both sites having a high school choir). Material

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support for the elementary music program was evident in the purpose-built music room and the collection of classroom instruments. Caregivers described informances and concert events that they looked forward to annually and they valued Mr. Parker's work in the school, seeing his legacy as already begun and intertwined with the music program legacy.

Students valued their music program for helping them create connections with their families. This was particularly true in Roseville, where students looked forward to participating in activities as family members had, including participating in the band. Students across sites enjoyed sharing musical moments and talking about their music class with family members. By providing a space for music instruction, the schools facilitated additional possible connections between students and their family legacies.

Concert Expectations

Caregivers I spoke with frequently discussed performances when asked to describe the elementary music program. All three sites typically[54] held several performances per year, with Christmas and Veterans Day concerts as expected annual events, similar to the community expectations Smith (2014) and VanDeusen (2016) reported. Adult participants lamented the loss of some performances due to the pandemic. Mattson, Parker, and Medley each felt certain repertoires were expected for holiday programs. For example, they described certain pieces as being for the caregivers (e.g., more traditional Christmas tunes such as *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*) and others for more educational purposes, music to celebrate Hanukkah or address a more complex musical skill like part-singing. This aligned with Haning's (2020) finding that "community expectations [for performances] seemed to have been internalized by teachers, even to a point at which they could be considered structural points of the music program rather than

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[54] The COVID-19 pandemic had impacted these performances, requiring teachers to either cancel the performances or live-stream them.

external influences" (p. 8). Many caregivers saw the concerts as highly anticipated school events, building community engagement and bringing families into the school.

Performances and special events became one of the primary avenues for caregivers to see the music program in action. "I don't hear too much from families. They just show up [at concerts/events]," Parker shared. Mattson argued,

> It's all about the concert. And I'm not saying concerts are evil, I'm not saying they're bad because especially in the rural community… if we don't sound good, people are going to say, it ain't sound good,[55] you're not doing your job.

During interviews and focus groups, caregivers struggled to articulate what their children were doing in music classes. Caregivers looked forward to attending concerts to see their child(ren)'s progress and enjoyment, as well as to understand more of what was happening in the music room. Peterson (2004) acknowledged, "like it or not, this performance often becomes the primary assessment by which a music educator and the music department are judged." Performances became the main window into the music classroom and the foundation for caregiver perspectives of program strength and success.

Role of Conservative Beliefs

Participants across sites described their communities as *conservative*, which influenced the school and the music program. Drawing from their responses, *conservative* referred to Republican political affiliation, Christianity, strong family ties, and resistance to talking about topics such as race, sexual orientation, and gender. Wuthnow (2018) described rural areas as *moral communities*, wherein moral does not refer to right versus wrong, but rather as a

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[55] In this quote, Mattson was mimicking a stereotypical rural dialect to portray the caregivers' perceptions of the concerts and subsequent valuation of the music program and teacher.

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specialized sense of a place to which and in which people feel an obligation to one

another and to uphold the local ways of being that govern their expectations about

ordinary life and support their feelings of being at home and doing the right things (p. 4).

The communities of Fairmills, Sweetwater, and Roseville appeared to align with Wuthnow's

description, including a resistance toward change and outsider influence. Community cultural

life may influence curriculum (Angelo, 2015). School administrators and teachers in this study

acknowledged community values, including when those values presented challenges for the

schools, such as the ongoing debates regarding Critical Race Theory in schools.[56]

    I was surprised by the lack of focus on patriotism within the three music programs, given

participants' emphasis on conservative community beliefs. While each site did have a Veteran's

Day program each year, I had expected to find more of a focus on patriotic material throughout

the school year within the music program. National and state level social studies education

standards include patriotic symbols, including the national anthem, as components of elementary

school curricula. Hebert and Kertz-Welzel (2012) highlight this inclusion considering common

school emphasis on respect and good citizenship. Conservative community values are often tied

to traditional, patriotic movements within the United States (Courtwright, 2010). However, the

respondents I spoke with did not address patriotism outside of the Veteran's Day program.[57]

    Mattson, Parker, and Medley described themselves as more progressive when compared

to the communities they served. They each described efforts to present diverse musical

examples. Medley selected video examples that included black males demonstrating musical

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[56] Debates about Critical Race Theory in schools were receiving national attention during the 2021-2022 school year, including numerous state legislative proposals and school board initiatives banning the use of Critical Race Theory or discussions of race in K-12 public education (Sawchuk, 2021). During my residences, two of the three participants were working under "educational gag orders" (PEN America, 2022), otherwise known as "divisive topics laws" that had already passed in their states.

[57] I did not specifically ask participants about patriotism because I did not want to make assumptions about their communities.

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concepts. Parker highlighted stories such as *Charlie Parker Played Bebop*[58] and *Change Sings,*[59] as well as incorporated a variety of musical examples including *Danse Macabre, La Raspa,* and *Chicken and a Chicken.*[60] Mattson described his desire to present a diverse curriculum, including incorporating some popular music at the junior/senior high school level; however, I did not see evidence of diverse curricular materials in the elementary school during my residence in Fairmills. The music teachers were all careful about the repertoire and song materials they presented, working to weigh community expectations with musical goals. The spring after I visited, Parker had to adjust his spring program away from the annual Martin Luther King Jr. program he planned to do because of his principal's perceptions of how the community would respond this year. Medley and Mattson believed that any repertoire highlighting race, gender, or sexual orientation would be negatively received by the community. Because of this, they sought to avoid such topics in their instruction. Seiger (2020) reported a similar tension between one rural elementary music educator and her community. All three teachers felt an awareness of their difference in worldview from some members of their community and worked to navigate potential sources of tension.

I noticed an opposition between the "welcoming community" descriptions and the need for a sanctuary space in the schools. When I asked participants to describe their communities, most highlighted the kind and welcoming nature of their school and town. The three teachers described their classrooms as a "safe place" for students, particularly those who identified as LGBTQIA+, indicating that students' identities would not likely be welcomed elsewhere. Medley described being asked to call one student by a different name during class than with

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[58] Raschka, C. (1997). *Charlie Parker played be bop* (C. Raschka, Illus.). Scholastic Inc.

[59] Gorman, A. (2021). *Change sings: A children's anthem* (L. Long, Illus.). Viking Books for Young Readers.

[60] To view music notation, see https://music.appstate.edu/sites/music.appstate.edu/files/chicken.pdf. To hear a recording, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxSaR_3G6D4

caregivers. Mattson mentioned having a small rainbow sticker in his choir room so students could identify him as an ally. Parker said all his students could sing Christmas songs because no one told him otherwise. The teachers also highlighted the need to tread carefully with certain subjects (race, gender, sexual orientation, religion) out of concern for community backlash. The teachers' need to be subversive to avoid community retribution stood in contrast to the idealized communities as kind and welcoming, begging the question of who would be welcomed.

I love where I am, and yet…

Each music educator shared a sense of contentment with their rural teaching position while also expressing a sense of longing to provide more for their students. The teachers valued the ability to teach elementary music as they saw fit. This included an adherence to state and national standards, as well as the community expectations about what kinds of music are good for kids in school. Despite this autonomy, they felt tension between community beliefs and their own professional and moral obligations. Community ideals set implicit restrictions on what the teachers felt they could teach (Seiger, 2020). One caregiver in Sweetwater stated she would like to hear her students singing more familiar music, specifically citing *Turkey in the Straw* as an example.[61] However, songs like *Turkey in the Straw* have come under criticism for their use in the elementary music curriculum (Hess, 2021; Kelly-McHale, 2018). Repertoire including *Jump Jim Joe* and *Eeny Meeny Miny Moe* is racist, including roots in blackface minstrelsy (Ermolaeva, 2019; Urbach, 2019). Within music education, teachers are wrestling with the notions of challenging established canons and working to make decisions about what materials to bring into the classroom considering sensitivity to musical origins. This ongoing change in the profession presented challenges for Mattson, Medley, and Parker, who were conscious of promoting music

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[61] The caregiver told me that she had not shared this concern with the music teacher directly. However, Parker was aware of the importance of folk music traditions within his community.

that does not harm students while recognizing the strong ties community members may have to folk song material.

The three teachers also grappled with reconciling the outside opportunities they hoped to provide their students with the realistic barrier of their location. Each teacher had dreams of connecting with local performing groups, colleges and universities, theaters, and fine arts experiences. However, the distance was a barrier to these opportunities. The schools lacked the additional funding and personnel required for longer field trips. During the interviews, each teacher was still brainstorming how to build those connections despite the distance.

Rural Music Programs Creating Connections

Many respondents viewed the elementary music program as creating connections for students. These connections came in various forms. Here, I describe the ways the rural music programs connected students to their communities, their schools, and their peers.

Connecting Students to their Communities

Administrators and caregivers described the community connections they saw between students and the music program. Students shared about the community events they enjoyed participating in. Prior to the pandemic, all sites would invite families into the school for performances, fostering that connection further. Roseville and Sweetwater also held holiday performances for local retirement communities. Administrators described future initiatives they saw from the music teacher in building new community connections. Medley and Parker were looking to build connections with the local community theaters. Mattson and Medley hoped to connect with local colleges for field trips and collaboration opportunities. Such community connections may support a shift in the trend Myers (2007) identified regarding the sharp decline in music participation after graduation. Brook (2013) highlighted the elementary music program

as contributing to students' sense of place and community when they engage with local musical traditions. Identifying local traditions and expectations may be a challenge for teachers who are unfamiliar with their community. However, Mattson, Parker, and Medley seemed to recognize the musical priorities of the communities (in many cases, music literacy, Western classical music, and preparation for instruments) and adjust accordingly.[62]

Connecting Students to their School

Students and adults described the elementary music program as a way for students to connect with the school. Administrators named music classes as a reason children would want to come to school. Students similarly looked forward to the days they would attend their music classes. Harwood (2017) and VanDeusen (2016) said students looked forward to traditions and special events in their music programs. Scholars have reported positive connections between music programs and school attendance across grade levels (Brizuela, 2017; Kelley & Demorest, 2016) and included music as one of the reasons students may feel an attachment to their school (Eith, 2004). At the elementary level, school attendance is primarily the responsibility of the caregiver rather than the student, as students are unable to transport themselves to school. However, students are instrumental in expressing the desire to attend and succeed in school. Amidst conversations about supporting rural students' school achievement (Showalter et al., 2019), perhaps school music programs might provide students with additional incentives to remain enrolled.

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[62] In this adjustment, though, the music teachers reified the cycle of Western classical music being perpetuated as school music described above. Community members believed Western classical music was superior and should be taught in schools, and so that is what the teachers centered. This highlights the internalization of neuromyths and/or a lack of awareness regarding other ways to engage with music in schools.

Connecting Kids to their Peers

Students who participated in focus groups valued the opportunity to work with their peers during music class. They shared that music class provided a space for them to collaborate and interact with one another. The music teachers also highlighted this aspect of their class, with Parker and Mattson especially focusing on students working together. Elementary music programs can build connections between students, particularly during group music-making activities (Brook, 2013; Smith, 2014). At the three rural schools in this study, the emphasis on community building aligned with the school-wide focus on good citizenship[63]. Students were able to build social connections with their peers through music.

Engaging with Place

Across sites, participants engaged with the concept of place. This was evident in how they conceptualized their communities and schools, how they approached education, and how they believed they were perceived by outsiders. Butler and Sinclair (2020) argued that "place is an inescapable aspect of daily life and is intimately linked to our life experiences" (p. 64) As I discussed in Chapter 1, place encompasses location, locale, and a sense of place (Cresswell, 2014). Here, I describe community and teacher engagement with the ideas of locale and sense of place.

Community Engagement with Locale

Participants at each site I visited described common and unique aspects of their communities. Across sites, they identified their communities as being helpful and caring, a common narrative associated with many rural communities (Howley & Redding, 2021; Wuthnow, 2018). They described local businesses and landmarks, town events, and challenges

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[63] The emphasis on fostering good citizenship is not limited to rural schools.

the community faced. However, each site manifested different community foci. Respondents in Fairmills emphasized the legacy of the town and the school, centering on the historical consolidation of the four towns that now comprise Fairmills Schools. In Sweetwater, outdoor living and the natural beauty of the mountains were central to residents, with the school nestled at the base of a large mountain. Participants in Roseville highlighted the impact of the weather (recent tornado and abundance of snow days), community events, and strong family ties within the community. These three communities simultaneously shared common aspects and represented examples of diversity in rural spaces.

Some respondents described their school's music program in comparison to other schools and locales. For example, caregiver J. Connors (Roseville) was grateful his child's school had music, referencing another school in the South that had lost its program. Mattson and Lunsford (Roseville) compared their secondary ensembles and the elementary programs proceeding them to "larger, more successful programs" (Lunsford). Parker and Medley did not compare their programs as much but described them in ways that felt more accurate to them. Medley described his school as "out in the sticks" or "in the holler." Parker was generally positive about the support he received from his school and community in terms of instruments, instruction time, and school structure. Adult respondents seemed conscious of outsider perceptions of their school and music program.

Across sites, the idea of *rural* influenced how individuals viewed or valued their school's music program. Administrators saw the music programs as providing opportunities to their students. K. Smith (Fairmills) shared, "talking about our district and being so rural, you have to know that these kids have no exposure to things outside of this (school music) ...talking about classical music, there is no exposure." Dale (Sweetwater) described her experiences growing up

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in a rural school and shared how the music program provided her opportunities to visit other places and connect with her community through performances. Notably, the idea of *rural* as a locale seemed to influence the administrators' perceptions of why a music program was beneficial for their students. Other adults also saw the music program as filling a need for their students based on exposure and socioeconomic status. Burr (Sweetwater) viewed poverty as a barrier to (classical) music access and believed the school's music program was providing an avenue for students to explore such music. For high school band director Lunsford (Roseville), living in a rural area meant "places that struggle with their socioeconomic level" and "communities that have limited resources." He viewed the school music program as a means to "help correct some of the stuff…we are seeing in these rural communities." Mattson (Fairmills) discussed rural poverty and viewed music as an emotional coping mechanism for students as well as a way to connect to "the outside world." Given the view of music as non-academic, some caregivers and administrators valued the music program as an additional way for children who struggled academically to shine.

Savior narratives are often associated with rural locales (Bates, 2016; McShane & Smarick, 2018).[64] Such perspectives rely on the idea of rural as a deficient space, wherein "well-established stereotypes…position rural citizens as narrow, prejudiced, lacking innovative flexibility, and pretty much inhabiting dysfunctional places" (Corbett, 2013, p. 2) and therefore in need of outside intervention. Elitist tendencies exist within such savior narratives, and research literature regarding class in music education remains limited (Bates, 2018b, 2019; Beveridge, 2021; Richerme, 2021b). Several adults perceived children would not have music or dance without their school music program. However, students described participating in at-home

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[64] A similar savior narrative exists for urban music education, namely that music can save the inner-city kids (see Farmer, 2015; Frierson-Campbell et al., 2020)

(music listening, making music by singing with their families to the radio or at social events) and music learning through lessons or self-instruction. Numerous tutorials and music examples can be found online. Dance and movement exposure can come from games like *Just Dance*[65] or through popular media, including network shows like *So You Think You Can Dance.*[66] Music programs can provide students with opportunities they might otherwise miss. It is important to consider that students might benefit from a music education that reflects and honors their culture and values rather than one that seeks to save them from being *rural.*

Teachers' Engagement with Locale

All three teachers described themselves as being from rural areas, and by their self-identification, they described places that seemed and felt rural to me. Their background and experiences did prepare them to understand the communities they were currently working in. Upon further investigation, while all three identified as being from a rural area, none of them were from places that would be categorized rural according to NCES. Mattson and Parker were from distant towns[67] (approximately 30,000 and 7,000 people respectively), and Medley was from a remote town[68] (approximately 5,000 people). As rural is a self-selected identity (Azano et al., 2021; Tieken, 2014), it was interesting that all three teachers identified differently than their hometowns' government classifications. This definition discrepancy provides further evidence of the need for specificity when describing rural locales and identity points. Nonetheless, their self-selected identities appeared to help them build connections with their communities. Medley and

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[65] *Just Dance* [Video game series]. (2009-2021). Ubisoft.

[66] Adelman, B., Fuller, S., Lythgoe, N., & Shapiro, A. (Executive Producers). (2005-present). *So you think you can dance* [TV series]. 19 Entertainment; MRC Live & Alternative.

[67] NCES defines *town-distant* as territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 10 miles or less than or equal to 35 minutes from an Urbanized Area.

[68] NCES defines *town-remote* as territory inside an Urban Cluster that is more than 35 miles from an Urbanized Area.

Mattson described understanding more about their students having grown up nearby. Parker had many shared interests with his students, including fishing and being outdoors. Their rural experiences gave them an insider perspective about their students despite their outsider status when they initially entered their communities.

While none of the elementary music teachers saw their students as deficient, I did perceive some deficit perceptions influencing how their viewed their roles. Mattson and Parker viewed themselves as providing access to movement and music that students would otherwise miss, negating popular music independent music exploration. Medley saw himself as preparing students to be lifelong learners of music, which at Roseville, he acknowledged, meant preparing for band. Amateurism remained absent from how they described their positions. These perceptions of need seemed to stem from suburbanormative ideals of what music success and engagement should look like, rather than encouraging students to engage with music in more familiar ways.

I noticed that all three teachers were expected to take on additional duties and perform tasks outside of their contract day. They each had some form of monitoring duty during the school day (Mattson had lunch duty, Parker had after school duty, and Medley had before and after school bus duty). The idea of *extra duties as assigned* is common in many elementary teacher contracts (Ledesma, 2011). In addition to monitoring duties, administrators valued the elementary music teachers for the extra work they did outside of school hours without additional compensation. This included providing free lessons (Medley) and organizing concerts and special events (all). Administrator respondents acknowledged that the teachers deserved additional pay for the extra work, but emphasized that the teachers did not expect compensation. Secondary music teachers are often compensated via stipends for commitments outside of

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contract hours. This focus on extra, unpaid work illustrated a mindset of *it's just what we do for the kids*. While this mindset is prevalent in education, I wondered if rural ideas of taking care of the community were also present (Budge, 2006).

<div align="center">

Impact of Rural as a Location on Music Programs

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In this section, I discuss the physical location of the schools and its impact on elementary music programs. Rural as a physical location differs from notions of locale and sense of place (Cresswell, 2014). The physical location presents challenges that are not based in ideology or perception, but more on logistics. Here, I describe challenges for the music programs based on student population, transportation, and funding.

Student Population

School size (enrollment) and structure appeared to influence the elementary music teacher positions. According to Mattson and other adult respondents, declining student population was raising the likelihood of another consolidation. The district would not be able to justify hiring another music teacher to split the elementary and secondary positions. The opposite was true in Sweetwater, where a growing student population meant program stability for Parker. Growing student enrollment in the district demonstrated a need for an elementary music specialist as well as dedicated band and choir directors, to facilitate the music rotation schedule. Despite the growth, there was no discussion of expanding the elementary music program to include a second teacher. Roseville Elementary was part of the larger Duplin County School District, drawing together students from across the county rather than only within one area. While the school was larger, the music program spanned more grade levels than the elementary schools in Fairmills and Sweetwater. The structure of each school varied based on the local population and logistical needs of the district.

In Fairmills and Roseville, adults valued the elementary music program for its role in preparing students for secondary ensembles, where music was no longer compulsory. This was less prominent in Sweetwater, where choir or band was compulsory in sixth grade, giving the secondary directors more opportunity to recruit for their programs directly. Still, Sweetwater choir director Deppen was glad that Parker kept an eye on recruiting for the secondary programs. In Duplin County, high school directors Lunsford and Moore described their reliance on the elementary music programs and subsequent fifth-eighth grade ensembles to prepare and recruit students for their own programs.

I wondered about measures of success in terms of the elementary music program. It seemed that caregivers and administrators viewed programs that were growing as successful while shrinking programs were considered failing. Growth and shrinkage are logistical considerations of population and are also socially constructed and value laden. At the elementary level, program growth and shrinkage were contingent upon overall school enrollment, particularly where elementary music was compulsory (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012). This trend continued toward secondary music in Fairmills especially. Mattson was proud to have grown the high school choir to 14 students, representing nearly 20% of the high school's total enrollment. Nationally, Elpus and Abril (2019) reported that 24% of high school students enrolled in at least one year of ensemble participation in high school, making the 14-member choir at Fairmills comparable to national numbers. In Fairmills and Roseville, residents discussed population shrinkage due to factors beyond the school district's purview (e.g., lack of employment opportunities, aging out, out-migration; see Howley & Redding, 2021). Conversely, Sweetwater as a community was experiencing population growth and a surge in student enrollment at the primary school. This growth translated to an additional success for the music program. Across

sites, stakeholders judged the elementary music programs for factors that were beyond the music teachers' control.

Transportation

Transportation in rural communities was a factor for families and their engagement with the music program. Many students across sites rode the bus to school, and as mentioned previously, bus driver shortages nationwide had made ride times lengthier than normal. "When you talk about a rural community, [transportation] is a drawback of coming early and staying late. The only way you get to do that is if there's an early busy or a late bus," shared Dale (Roseville). Additionally, administrators acknowledged that funding challenges made it difficult to consider an activity bus. Students in Fairmills had a difficult time connecting to larger group opportunities as they were hosted by Johnson, their co-op school (approximately 18 miles away). Caregivers who worked or did not have vehicles may not have been able to help students get to events, including rehearsals. In Roseville, caregiver Underwood valued the school music program because it was available to students during the school day. In Sweetwater, the Sweet Pipes met before school, which relied on caregivers to drive students to the school early to participate. Notably, while all three areas are considered rural, the commute times for Sweetwater were much shorter than that of Fairmills and Roseville, both of which were widespread communities. Transportation was also a challenge for caregivers who wanted to be involved with the music program. Caregivers Underwood and Lindstrom (Roseville)[69] shared that they struggled to attend performances without assistance. Mattson shared a similar phenomenon for Fairmills caregivers, noting that a car and the ability to drive were necessities.

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[69] Both caregivers participated in this study via phone interview due to transportation challenges.

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Rural schools, particularly consolidated districts or those that are remote or cover large areas, face increased challenges with transportation, including student travel times extending to over an hour one way and increased costs (Killeen & Sipple, 2000). Tieken and Auldridge-Reveles (2019) argued that historical school closures and consolidations and disproportionate distributions of opportunity can result in spatial injustices, separating students from educational experiences. School closures have disproportionately affected rural schools over the past ninety years.[70] Increased travel times to schools require families to invest resources they may not have into connecting their children with educational opportunities and school districts to establish infrastructure that can support such connection.

Funding

Participants across all interviews and focus groups discussed the influence of funding for their elementary music program. They believed that funding would be the primary reason their music program would need advocacy. When I asked how they would respond to the school board cutting elementary music, many adults and students suggested fundraising initiatives and alternative budget cut options (including one student group in Sweetwater who shared they would rather lose their school store than their music class). Participants shared that if the music program were ever to be in jeopardy, it would be the result of a funding issue rather than a lack of community support. Clark (2022) reported similar findings, where administrators and community members joined together to look for funding sources and community resources, including local musicians, as support for the program. This banding together to support a common interest aligned with the idea of a rural community.

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[70] "The country has dropped from more than 270,000 schools in 1919 - most of them rural - to less than 100,000 in 2010" (Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019, citing National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Summary

Participants across sites described music's meaning to them and its value to the students. Music education hierarchies and suburbanormativity permeated school structures and curricula, and community expectations influenced the music program in both positive and challenging ways. Ideas of *rural* as a locale and a geographic location shaped the music programs in terms of logistical challenges and social dynamics. While these three sites do not represent all rural areas, they provide insight into what the music program can mean to a rural school and community.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I summarize the research questions and method for this study. Then, I review each case independently and outline the cross-case findings. Finally, I offer implications from this study and suggest avenues for future research.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. Specific research questions included:

1. How do students, music teachers, administrators, and caregivers in rural communities view their elementary music programs, and what meanings do these stakeholders construct?

2. In what ways do elementary music teachers connect with and respond to their communities?

I designed an instrumental multiple case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) to explore these questions. I used social constructivism (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Kim, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978) with a focus on meaning-making (Charmaz, 2014; Hayes, 2020) as my theoretical framework, guiding study design and analysis.

I recruited elementary music teachers from rural communities as primary participants. These teachers brought me to three sites: Fairmills (lower Midwest), Sweetwater (Rocky Mountains), and Roseville (upper South). The elementary teachers (Mattson, Parker, and Medley) participated in three in-depth, phenomenologically based interviews (Seidman, 2019). I conducted individual interviews with campus administrators and secondary music teachers (where applicable). I held caregiver and student (third through fifth grade) focus groups (Hatch,

2002; Krueger & Casey, 2015), as well as individual caregiver interviews (at the caregivers'

request). I observed each classroom via Zoom® once and visited each school in person for one

week, generating field notes and thick descriptions.

Summary of Findings

My analysis was guided by social constructivism. Using inductive analysis, I employed

initial and open process coding, followed by axial coding (Saldaña, 2016) to uncover emergent

themes. Throughout data collection and analysis, I generated reflexive researcher memos. I

constructed individual case analyses for each site, and then a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2018). In

this section, I summarize the findings from each case, followed by an overview of the cross-case

analysis.

Fairmills

Fairmills was a rural-distant town located in the lower Midwest. It encompassed four

small communities that had been consolidated into in district in the early 1970s. Fairmills had

strong generational community connections evident in local land and business ownership and

residents described it as a "close-knit" community. Fairmills School District included an

elementary and junior/senior high school, serving approximately 300 students. Chris Mattson

had been the PreK-12 general and vocal music teacher for the last three years.

Respondents reported numerous reasons for valuing the elementary music program. They

valued music for its role in providing students with a well-rounded education, seeing music

access as an educational right. Adults described perceived cognitive and emotional benefits of

music while students focused on music enjoyment. Music in school was a source of exposure and

variety for students. The community had lost its secondary band program, so many adults saw

the elementary program as an incubator to potentially bring back the band. Participants described

school-community communication as tense, and some school employees valued the music program as a source of positive public relations. Student experiences and the music teacher's reputation seemed to strongly influence community perceptions of the program. Mattson reported navigating trust issues with the community when he started in Fairmills because of high teacher turnover. He also worked to navigate community expectations for concerts and curriculum.

Mattson worked to connect with his school and community through student enjoyment and a focus on well-being. He prioritized relationship-building with students in response to their "sense of abandonment" from previous teachers. He also worked to build trust with school administrators and community members. Mattson prioritized student well-being over musical skill-building within his instruction. His students enjoyed getting to know him and valued his presence in their school.

Sweetwater

Sweetwater was a rural-distant community nestled in the Rocky Mountains. Sweetwater's history included Indigenous residence and colonial settlement. Residents identified strongly with outdoors activities and natural beauty of the area. Sweetwater was a growing bedroom community with a blend of families who had lived there for multiple generations and new residents coming to the area. Sweetwater School District had a primary school, a middle school, and a high school serving approximately 1,000 students. Theo Parker had been the K-5 music teacher for the past five years.

Participants from Sweetwater smiled when describing music in their school. They saw music as a source of personal comfort and a way to address social-emotional health and well-being. Some participants described family connections embedded in music listening at home.

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Respondents considered music as an "essential part of the school community," emphasizing its benefits for a well-rounded education and supporting students with disabilities. They saw music in school as a source of exposure and appreciated the access to music the elementary program provided. They also valued the opportunities for community engagement Parker fostered. Performances and folk-dance events were anticipated local events, and Parker worked to navigate community expectations for these events.

Parker connected with his school and community by incorporating numerous influences and through purposeful interactions. He was intentional about relationship building and proud of the sequential, purposeful nature of his curriculum. He valued having autonomy in his teaching but recognized community beliefs as impacting his program. He worked to incorporate holidays and special events into music classes and to provide diverse musical examples. Parker strongly identified with the outdoor lifestyle of the community, and his students connected with him over outdoor activities like fishing.

Roseville

Roseville was a rural-distant community in the upper South. Roseville residents described the community as a welcoming and kind. Local weather events, including a recent tornado and an abundance of snow days, impacted students. Roseville was predominantly a retirement community, and those who worked were often employed in blue-collar jobs. Roseville Elementary School was part of Duplin County School District. Roseville Elementary included kindergarten through eighth grade with a population of approximately 600 students. Landon Medley taught K-4 general music and 5-8 band at Roseville for the past three years.

Respondents in Roseville highlighted personal values of music, including individual and family histories and perceived emotional and academic benefits of music engagement. They saw

music as a skill to be practiced and developed. Music in school contributed to what Medley described as a holistic approach to education. Respondents highlighted the importance of instrumental music within the county and valued the elementary music program as preparation for future band enrollment. Music in schools provided access to formal instruction and adult respondents saw its inclusion as an educational right. Students valued gaining new knowledge and skills. The music program also gave community members an avenue to remain connected in the school.

Medley worked to connect with his community and school through tradition and reconstruction. The program struggled after its longtime music educator retired and Medley was actively working to revitalize the program after two local community members had sustained it during a time of high teacher turnover. He recognized the community's emphasis on instrumental music and worked to prepare students for band so they could continue music-making in school beyond fourth grade. Medley was passionate and excited about the school's music program, and that transferred to his students, resulting in energy and increased enrollment in music.

Cross-Case Analysis

I observed many common elements across sites. Students reported valuing music enjoyment and social interaction through music. Administrators reported viewing the music programs as a source of positive school-community connection, enjoying the performances that brought community members to campus. Caregivers described their children's engagement with the program and their own anticipation of concerts and special events. Elementary music teachers enjoyed the autonomy they experienced in their teaching positions and valued their communities.

The primary finding of my cross-case analysis was the hierarchies being enacted within rural elementary music education. Respondents valued music for its inclusion in a well-rounded education, but still prioritized *core* subjects over *specials*, rather than viewing them as equal or *co-curricular*. Elementary music programs served as the foundation for secondary music programs. Many respondents valued the ability to play an instrument over singing development to the point teachers did not include singing opportunities in elementary instruction. Adults saw elementary school music programs as a way to expose children to (Western classical) music. The enactment of these hierarchies highlighted the suburbanormative nature of music education.

Elementary music teachers worked to understand and navigate community expectations for the music program. These expectations stemmed from local traditions and the legacy of the school's music program and included concerts as highly anticipated events. Participants described their communities as *conservative* and the elementary music teachers worked to honor their communities' beliefs while remaining true to their own professional (more progressive) beliefs. They described a sense of contentment with their rural teaching positions but also longed to provide more opportunities for their students.

Rural music programs provided connections for their students, according to participants. Students were able to connect with their communities through performances. They looked forward to coming to school on days they had music class and administrators valued the music program for providing attendance incentive. Students were excited to interact with their peers through music.

Participants engaged with the idea of *rural* when describing their community and elementary music program. They were cognizant of outsider perceptions of their communities and had also internalized some of the common stereotypes associated with rural spaces. Teachers

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navigated their own experiences as rural individuals while being newcomers to their

communities. *Rural* as a physical location also impacted the music programs, generating

challenges with student enrollment, transportation, and funding.

Implications

Enacted Hierarchies

One of the primary findings of my cross-case analysis was the prevalence of hierarchies

found within education and music, illustrating the suburbanormative nature of music education

overall. These hierarchies seemed to be socially engrained, as individuals who did not actively

participate in music-making or music education perpetuated them, reinscribing preferences for

instruments over voices, secondary ensembles over elementary music, and Western classical

music above all other genres. Rather than experiencing a music education that honored their

lived experiences, students instead learned what music professionals and school administrators

had been socialized to believe was a recipe for success outside of music. In the field of

education, where music is already considered *special* or an *elective* in terms of curriculum, it

seems ill-advised to continue privileging ways of making music or devaluing certain music.

Music teachers and music teacher educators can work to shift these hierarchies through explicit

naming and identification, followed by the redefinition of what it means to be *successful* in the

field of music and music education.

One way to reconsider success could be to embrace a both/and approach to supporting

music learning and performance production in elementary music. By removing the dichotomy

between the exploratory process of music learning and the product of a polished performance,

music educators might better serve their students. Many students in this study indicated music

was a source of enjoyment. They valued the ability to be creative in music. Some students

enjoyed performing, while other enjoyed participating in music-making. Performances were critical for maintaining connection between the school music program and families. Striking a balance between valuing exploration and performance might better support more students in music education.

It is important to note that in reconsidering success, I am not suggesting a decrease in quality or lowering any standards. I advocate for a critical examination of what that realistic quality means. For example, while a small school may not have all instruments parts represented for a wind symphony piece, the instruments they have may be playing beautifully. While music educators should still advocate for a fair portion of school funding, perhaps they can also look for cost-effective alternatives to classroom instruments and props. Music education and its supporting industries are currently structured to support the large, well-funded programs, relegating smaller programs to inferiority and holding them to unrealistic suburbanormative ideals for success. I advocate for a more equitable approach to viewing music success without the implication of lower standards or lesser quality.

The Power of Language

As discussed in chapter 7, words and names hold power. Terminology like *specials, starter job*, and *feeder schools* perpetuate hierarchical divisions, placing elementary music and rural communities as lesser. As the music profession is moving to address racist, heteronormative, and ableist language (Hess, 2017, 2018; McKiernan, 2021; Victor, 2022), I call for an additional inward attention where music teachers and music teachers educators reconsider the language used to refer to music programs and schools.

The Teacher *is* the Program

Music program value seemed interrelated with the respondent's perceptions of the music teacher. If the students and caregivers liked the music teacher, they related an overall positive perception of the program. Music teachers are often the face of their programs. Mattson, Parker, and Medley each had their own approaches to building community connections, but all of them valued relationship building. While teachers should not center their jobs around being liked, it is important to consider the role of teacher charisma on program perception.

The importance of music teacher longevity was central across sites. The music program legacies in Fairmills and Roseville struggled in part because of the high teacher turnover for many years, while the program in Sweetwater remained strong. Student respondents in this study highly valued their teachers, seeing them as important role models and positive, caring adults in their schools. Given the discourse of rural teaching positions as *starter jobs* (Bates, 2018a; Seiger, 2020)*,* music teacher educators should highlight the importance of relationship building and teacher longevity with pre-service educators. This is not to say that music teachers should stay in a job that does not fit them, but rather to think critically about their impact on their school and community when applying for positions.

Given the perception of elementary music teachers as "babysitters," it is important to consider markers of program quality. In this investigation, I did not ask participants to discuss the perceived quality of the elementary music program. However, I wondered if idea of being a "babysitter" may come from respondents' lack of understanding regarding elementary music instruction. The three elementary music teachers in this study were unique in that they were all instrumentalists who had planned to teach secondary band. One high school director commented on the importance of an instrumental specialist teaching band but did not seem bothered by the

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idea of instrumental specialist teaching elementary music. Upon starting their positions, Parker and Medley recognized a need for professional development and sought additional trainings to better understand elementary music. High-quality elementary music instruction centers developmentally appropriate, immersive musical experiences for young students. Elementary music educators play a critical role in shaping program quality and subsequent perceptions. Therefore, it is important they have a deep understanding of early childhood and elementary music making to provide quality musical instruction.

Beyond the Music Teacher's Control

Elementary music teachers engaged with factors that were larger than their own programs. Fluctuations in local population meant that schools experienced either growth or shrinkage. This shift impacted community perceptions of the music program. Political tensions between communities and schools placed implicit – and at times explicit – restrictions on what music teachers could or could not do. Ingrained, deficit perspectives of rural schools and students shaped respondents' interpretations of the music program's value. This investigation provides an example of some of the ways elementary music teachers are impacted by changes and tensions that go beyond the music room and how they navigate those factors.

Seeking Essential Perspectives

Students play important roles in shaping their educational experiences, yet they remain relatively silenced in education and music education research. Further, most examples of student voice in music education scholarship are from middle or high school students. In this study, the elementary students provided important perspectives, sharing the music program's meaning and value to them and the ways they interact with music outside of school. It is important to continue seeking and sharing young children's voices in music education research.

In this study, I sought to elevate caregiver and community member perspectives. As the individuals who help effect change in the school and who see the results of public education in their children, their perspectives are powerful. Schools are not only sources of education, but also sites of community connection and legacy. By including their voices, I was able to present a broad view of the three music programs.

It is important to solicit multiple voices within school music research. Music teachers share their expertise and perceptions of the classroom, but there is always more to any story. By exploring multiple perspectives, I was able to generate a more complex picture of each community. I was also able to share counternarratives, highlighting the variety of values and meanings in rural elementary music education. I encourage future music teachers and scholars to continue this approach.

Future Research

Teaching elementary music in a rural community comes with strengths and challenges. Community members in this study were generally supportive of the music program and grateful for its inclusion in schools. When music programs are in danger of being lost, non-music teachers and retired community members may step in to help. Caregivers may be willing to organize fundraisers when they know what help is needed. Rural music teachers may face the challenge of discerning the program legacy or community expectations while navigating their own desires to create a new legacy. Like Bannerman's (2019) findings, school music programs and their communities demonstrated desire to see each other thrive. Scholars should continue to investigate the connections between rural music programs and their local communities, as well as work to understand the needs of rural music elementary teachers.

Rural schools and communities are not monolithic. While my research represents an important step toward including rural voices and understanding rural communities, further research is needed to explore a broad range of geographic regions and school-community structures. I recommend a replication of this investigation, expanding to include more locales within the United States. Given the variety of school structures, I also suggest replication including an array of elementary music teacher positions.

Interestingly, the elementary music educators in this investigation shared unusual characteristics, namely that they all identified as male and had instrumental music backgrounds. As undergraduates, all three educators reflected as envisioning their careers teaching secondary band and have since found their home in elementary music. During my visits, I observed very few male teachers at the elementary campuses. This observation of male figures at the elementary level aligned with national trends and Gardner's (2010) finding that elementary music teachers were more likely to be female. Robison (2016) and Shouldice (2017) have both explored the experiences of male elementary general music teachers, highlighting the potential reasons for choosing to teach elementary music and describing the gendered nature of elementary music education. While gender was not a factor in participant selection for this project, it is interesting that all three primary participants were male.

All three elementary music educators also identified as being from rural areas. This self-selected identification suggests a connected between the teacher's upbringing and their job selection, possibly supporting the popular "grow your own" approach to recruiting future teachers. Scholars should examine the role of the teacher's self-selected identity regarding locale in relation to their teaching position.

Concluding Thoughts

Rural music education has remained a minority voice within scholarship. In the United States, 20% of students attend rural schools (NCES, n.d.). While this study may not relate to all rural elementary music programs, it may provide a springboard for further investigation. It is not enough to say that music education is important for all students. Instead, policymakers, educators, and scholars must continue to investigate the wants and needs of rural school music programs. To provide an equitable music education experience for *all* students, it is important to continue exploring rural stakeholders' perceptions of music in their schools, the needs and experiences of the rural music teachers who serve them, and the legacy and desires of the community. Such exploration can be one way to break down barriers between rural communities and the field of music education. Rural locales are unique and diverse. While this study may not relate to all rural elementary music programs, it may provide a springboard for further investigation. It is not enough to say that music education is important for all students. Instead, policymakers, educators, and scholars must continue to investigate the wants and needs of rural school music programs.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CAREGIVER AND STUDENT NESTED SURVEY

This appendix contains the survey questions for caregivers and students. The survey was distributed as a single nested link. Caregivers had the option to hand their device to an additional caregiver before being prompted to move to the student survey. The student survey was repeatable for up to three children. Each research site will have a unique survey link featuring the school/community name and any relevant changes to the survey (e.g., grade levels included at the site).

Survey consent/assent language was included in the solicitation email.

> You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. I am interested in hearing from community stakeholders (including caregivers, students, teachers, and school administrators) regarding their perceptions of the community, school, and music program. This research is part of my dissertation for my Ph.D. in Music Education at Michigan State University. The results of this study will be used to provide valuable insight into rural elementary music programs, informing future research and considerations for teacher preparation and policy.
>
> You will be asked to complete a short, anonymous survey. Your consent and participation are voluntary. You can skip any question you do not wish to answer or withdraw at any time before you submit the survey. Multiple caregivers per household may complete the survey and are encouraged to do so.

By clicking through to the survey, you indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. To begin the survey, please follow this link: (link to Qualtrics survey)

If you have any questions please contact Whitney Mayo at (254) 317-7561 or mayowhit@msu.edu.

Caregiver Section

- Participant Background
    - Select the number of students that you have currently enrolled in (name) Elementary School.
    - Select the grade levels that you currently have students enrolled in. (Select all that apply)
        - (Grade level options will match that of the school)
    - Please select your relationship with the students at the school. (Select all that apply)
        - Mother, Father, Grandmother, Grandfather, Aunt, Uncle, Guardian, Other (please describe)
- Open Response Questions
    - Please describe the elementary music program at XYZ Elementary School.
    - How would you describe the community of TOWN to someone who is now from there?
    - In what ways do you see the elementary music program interacting with the school and/or the community?

- o Please describe the value and/or importance (or lack thereof) of the elementary music program to you as a community member.

- o Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the elementary music program, XYZ school, or the community of TOWN at this time?

- Participant Demographic Information

  - o Please select your race.

  - o Please select your gender.

  - o Please select your age.

  - o Please enter your occupation.

- Are you willing to participate in a small group discussion regarding the elementary music program at XYZ School?

  - o Participation in this small group discussion will include (IRB consent language)

  - o Yes/No

    - ▪ If yes, please enter your name, email, and phone number.

    - ▪ Please select your available meeting times (matrix including specific days with morning, afternoon, and evening options)

    - ▪ If selected, the researcher will contact you to with additional information regarding your participation, including location details prior to the small group discussion.

- Is there another caregiver in your household that would like to participate in the survey? (Yes/No)

  - o If yes, please hand the device to them. Caregiver survey will repeat).

- o If no, the survey will continue.
- How many students within your household are older than 8 years old and attend XYZ Elementary School?
  - o 1, 2, 3 or more, None.
- At this time, I would like to invite students older than 8 years old in your household to participate in a similar survey regarding the elementary music program at XYZ Elementary School. By continuing the survey, you as the caregiver/guardian of this student hereby provide your informed consent for their participation.
  - o (Yes/No)
- Please pass the device you are using to your child that is 8 or above to complete the following section. Encourage them to be honest and answer to the best of their ability. I truly value what they think. You are welcome to assist them as necessary.

Student Section

- Participant Background
  - o What grade level are you currently enrolled in?
  - o At what grade level did you start attending XYZ Elementary School?
- Open Response Questions
  - o What are your two favorite things about your music class?
  - o What are your two least favorite things about your music class?
  - o How does your music class make you feel?
  - o How do you interact with music outside of school?
  - o What would you say to a new student about your school?

- o Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about XYZ school or your music class at this time?

- Participant Demographic Information

  - o Please select your race.

  - o Please select your gender.

  - o Please select your age.

- Are you willing to participate in a small group discussion about your music class at XYZ Elementary School?

  - o (Focus Group details)

  - o Yes/No

    - ▪ If yes, please provide your name and your caregiver/guardian's phone number and email address.

    - ▪ If selected, the researcher will contact your caregiver/guardian with additional information.

- Is there another student aged 8 or older who attends XYZ Elementary School that would like to participate in this survey?

  - o Yes/No

    - ▪ If yes, please hand the device to them. Survey repeats from the Student Assent section

    - ▪ No displays thank you message and exit the survey.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ELEMENTARY MUSIC TEACHER

Interview 1 - Initial Interview

        The purpose of this interview is to understand the life history of the elementary music teacher as it relates to their musical, educational, and rural experiences. This interview will occur via Zoom®.

- Greeting/Introduction

- Tell me about yourself.

- How did you come to be interested in teaching elementary music?

- Tell me about getting started at your current teaching position.

- Tell me about your community.

- Tell me about your school.

- Tell me about your music program.

- Tell me about your approach to teaching elementary music.

- What is important to you in your music program?

- How did you establish yourself in your school and community?

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about today?

- Conclusion/Farewell

Interview 2 - Details of the Lived Experience

        The purpose of this interview, occurring shortly after the initial Zoom® observation, is to focus on the concrete details of the current experience and to provide context for the upcoming in-person visit. Questions will be reflexively based upon the previous interview and classroom observation. Potential questions include:

- Greetings

- How have you been since we last spoke?

- How do you feel your teaching went?

- How did you plan for the lessons today?

- I noticed that a student did/said _____, tell me more about that.

- Where do the lessons from today fit in with your plan for the week/month/year?

- Are there any upcoming events or assessments you are planning for?

- Tell me about your interactions with your school administrators and the other music teachers.

- Tell me about your interactions with the community.

- What kinds of feedback do you receive from the community about the music program? From your administrator? From the secondary music teacher(s)?

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about today?

- Conclusion/Farewells

Interview 3 - Reflecting on the Meaning

The purpose of this interview, occurring after the in-person visits, is to discuss the music program as a whole and its relationship to the school, the community, and the. It will also include think-aloud video examples from the in-person observations, focusing on the meaning of the interactions. Questions will be reflexively based upon previous interviews and classroom observations. Potential questions include:

- Greeting

- How have you been since we last spoke?

- I noticed _____ while I was visiting. Tell me more about that.

- Through my other interviews, I've head _____. Do that match your experience?

- Let's look at this video clip. Please tell me about it.

- What does the elementary music program mean to you?

- Tell me about the music program's legacy. How do you view it?

- In what ways does the community influence or inform what you do in the music room, or does it not influence you?

- Do you feel the music program is important to your school and community? Tell me about that.

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about today?

- Conclusion/Farewells

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

The purpose of this interview is to explore the elementary school administrator's perspectives regarding the school music program and its connection to the school and the local community. This interview will occur via Zoom® at the participant's convenience.

- Greetings/Introduction

- Tell me about yourself.

- Tell me about your school.

- Tell me about your local community.

- Tell me about your experiences with music.

- If you were to describe your campus and community to a prospective parent, what would you say?

- How do you view the elementary music program on your campus?

- Tell me about any special events the elementary music program conducts.

- If your school board was considering cutting your elementary music program, what would you say to them?

- What are you most proud of in your school?

- Are there any changes you would like to see occur in your school or in the music program?

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about today?

- Conclusion/Farewells

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR SECONDARY MUSIC TEACHERS

The purpose of this interview is to explore the secondary music teacher's perspectives regarding the elementary school music program and its connection to the district music program and the potential legacy of music in the school and the local community. This interview will occur via Zoom® at the participant's convenience.

- Greetings/Introduction

- Tell me about yourself.

- Tell me about your school.

- Tell me about your local community.

- Tell me about your music program (what courses are offered at your campus, how long has it been part of the school, what kinds of activities is it known for, etc).

- Tell me about the elementary music program.

- In what ways do you interact with the elementary music program, and how does it interact with your program?

- How do you see the elementary music program interacting with the community?

- What kinds of feedback do you get from the community regarding music activities in the school?

- What are you most proud of when talking about the local elementary music program?

- Are there any changes you'd like to see occur relating to elementary music in your district or community?

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about today?

- Conclusion/Farewells

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FOR CAREGIVER GROUPS

The purpose of these focus groups is to explore the meaning and value of the elementary music program to caregivers with children enrolled in the school. I will determine focus group locations in coordination with the local elementary music teacher. Focus groups will each consist of eight to ten participants purposefully selected from survey responses. Focus groups will last for approximately 90 minutes, with one occurring during the evening and one during the daytime. Due to logistic concerns, childcare will not be provided. Light refreshments will be available. Participants will have a few sheets of paper for use in the jotting activities and will also be invited to note any thoughts they have during the meeting that they did not get to share or did not feel comfortable sharing. All paper materials will be collected at the end of the session.

- Greetings/Introduction
    - Including brief summary of the purpose of the focus group, as well as the purpose of the overall investigation.
- Group Norms
    - A reminder that group conversation is welcomed and encouraged; disagreements are welcomed but arguments are not.
    - A reminder of informed consent and the participant's rights to not answer a question or to exit the focus group at any time. Provide a reminder about the audio and video recordings and confidentiality. Reaffirm participant consent.
- Participant Introductions
    - Ask participants to share their name, occupation, connection to the school/community, and the last song they were listening to before they arrived (as an ice breaker).

- Tell me about your background and experiences with music.

- I'm interested to hear more about your community. Before we share out, I'd like to invite you to jot down some thoughts that come to mind when you think about your local area. What might you say to someone who is considering moving to the area?

    o (Allow a few minutes to jot ideas)

    o When you are ready, please tell me about your community.

        ▪ (Reflexive questions based on group discussion)

- In what ways do you see music interacting with your community?

    o Follow up: Where do you see the elementary music program?

- Tell me about your school's elementary music program. What are your thoughts about the program?

- Hypothetically, let's say the school board was considering cutting the elementary music program. What would you say to the school board? Please feel free to jot down some ideas, and then we will discuss them.

    o (Allow a few minutes to jot ideas)

- What does the elementary music program mean to you? Does it hold meaning outside of the school as a whole?

- What value do you believe the elementary music program has for your students?

- What do you believe are the strengths of your school's elementary music program?

- Are there any changes you would like to see occur in the elementary music program?

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about today?

- Conclusions/Farewells

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FOR STUDENT GROUPS

The purpose of these focus groups is to explore the meaning and value of the elementary music program to students aged eight and above currently enrolled in the school. I will determine focus group locations and specific times during the school day with the local elementary music teacher and campus administrator. Focus groups will each consist of eight to ten participants purposefully selected from survey responses. Each focus group session will last for approximately 60 minutes. I will provide small bottles of water for students. Participants will have access to a few sheets of paper, coloring materials, and writing utensils as part of the procedure. They will also be invited to jot any thoughts they did not get to say or did not feel comfortable sharing. All paper materials will be collected at the end of the session.

- Greetings/Introduction
  - Including brief summary of the purpose of the focus group, as well as the purpose of the overall investigation.
- Group Norms
  - A reminder that group conversation is welcomed and encouraged; disagreements are welcomed but arguments are not.
  - A reminder of informed consent and the participant's rights to not answer a question or to exit the focus group at any time. Provide a reminder about the audio and video recordings and confidentiality. Reaffirm participant consent.
- Participant Introductions
  - Ask participants to share their name, grade level, and the last song they were listening to before they arrived (as an ice breaker).

- I would love to hear about your school and your community. On your paper, please draw what comes to mind when you think of your school and your community. You can include words, symbols, and pictures to help you express your thoughts. Remember, the only right answer is what is right and true for you, and this is not an art contest.

  o (Allow a few minutes to draw)

  o Please share your drawing. I'd like to hear from everyone first, and then we can open up for group discussion.

  o (Follow up questions based on responses)

- Let's talk about the music program at your school. On your next sheet of paper, I'd like you to jot some notes or drawings about music class. How do you see yourself in music class? Are there parts of the class that you really like, or that you do not like?

  o (Allow a few minutes to draw)

  o Please share your drawing. Again, I'd like to hear from everyone, and then we will talk as a group.

- If the school board and the principal were considering canceling the music program, what would you say to them? How would that make you feel?

- What is your favorite thing about music class? What is something you would like to see change?

- How important is music in your life? In what ways do you like to have music time?

- Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about today?

- Conclusion/Farewells

Brief Summary

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. You will not benefit directly from your participation. However, your participation may contribute to the understanding of the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. This study will include observations and interviews with elementary music educators, interviews with elementary administrators and secondary music educators, and a survey and focus group meeting with caregivers and students (aged eight and above enrolled at the elementary campus). Using a social constructivist approach, I will talk with participants about the meaning of the elementary music program to them individually and to the community. The results of this study may provide insights into the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities, informing policy, teacher preparation, and future community initiatives.

What You Will Be Asked to Do

You are being asked to participate in three 60-minute interviews about your community and your elementary music program. Interviews will be conducted via Zoom and will be recorded. You are being asked to be allow classroom observation for the duration of one week, including video and audio recording of teaching for discussion purposes. You are being asked to assist with the distribution of a caregiver and student survey to students aged eight and above at your elementary school.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Any identifying information, including consent forms, will be kept for approximately one year. These forms will be kept secure via a password protected server. All information collected will be anonymized to protect confidentiality. No identifying information, including name or school district, will remain with the data collected. Interview recordings will be kept confidential using a password protected server. After transcriptions and field notes are completed, video recordings will be destroyed. Audio recordings may be retained for future research presentations. All reports of this research will include pseudonyms for participants and any identifying information, such as places or names. Field notes will be taken, and no identifying student information will be recorded.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview process.

Contact Information

If you have any concerns of questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Whitney Mayo (345 W. Circle Dr, Rm. 221, East Lansing, MI 48824, mayowhit@msu.edu, (989) 303-8230), or the research supervisor, Dr. Karen Salvador (ksal@msu.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about you role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Documentation of Informed Consent

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX H: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR CONSENT FORM

Brief Summary
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. You will not benefit directly from your participation. However, your participation may contribute to the understanding of the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities.

Purpose of Research
The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. This study will include observations and interviews with elementary music educators, interviews with elementary administrators and secondary music educators, and a survey and focus group meeting with caregivers and students (aged eight and above enrolled at the elementary campus). Using a social constructivist approach, I will talk with participants about the meaning of the elementary music program to them individually and to the community. The results of this study may provide insights into the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities, informing policy, teacher preparation, and future community initiatives.

What You Will Be Asked to Do
You are being asked to participate in one 60-minute interview to discuss your elementary music program and your community. This interview will be conducted via Zoom and will be audio and video recorded for transcription purposes.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Any identifying information, including consent forms, will be kept for approximately one year. These forms will be kept secure via a password protected server. All information collected will be anonymized to protect confidentiality. No identifying information, including name or school district, will remain with the data collected. Interview recordings will be kept confidential using a password protected server. After transcription of the interviews is completed, the video recording will be destroyed. Audio recording segments may be used in future research presentations All reports of this research will include pseudonyms for participants and any identifying information, such as places or names.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview process.

Contact Information
If you have any concerns of questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Whitney Mayo (345 W. Circle Dr, Rm. 221, East Lansing, MI 48824, mayowhit@msu.edu, (989) 303-8230), or the research supervisor, Dr. Karen Salvador (ksal@msu.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about you role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Documentation of Informed Consent

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX I: SECONDARY MUSIC TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Brief Summary
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. You will not benefit directly from your participation. However, your participation may contribute to the understanding of the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities.

Purpose of Research
The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. This study will include observations and interviews with elementary music educators, interviews with elementary administrators and secondary music educators, and a survey and focus group meeting with caregivers and students (aged eight and above enrolled at the elementary campus). Using a social constructivist approach, I will talk with participants about the meaning of the elementary music program to them individually and to the community. The results of this study may provide insights into the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities, informing policy, teacher preparation, and future community initiatives.

What You Will Be Asked to Do
You are being asked to participate in one 60-minute interview to discuss your elementary music program and your community. This interview will be conducted via Zoom and will be audio and video recorded for transcription purposes.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Any identifying information, including consent forms, will be kept for approximately one year. These forms will be kept secure via a password protected server. All information collected will be anonymized to protect confidentiality. No identifying information, including name or school district, will remain with the data collected. Interview recordings will be kept confidential using a password protected server. After transcription of the interviews is completed, the video recording will be destroyed. Audio recording segments may be used in future research presentations All reports of this research will include pseudonyms for participants and any identifying information, such as places or names.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview process.

Contact Information
If you have any concerns of questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Whitney Mayo (345 W. Circle Dr, Rm. 221, East Lansing, MI 48824, mayowhit@msu.edu, (989) 303-8230), or the research supervisor, Dr. Karen Salvador (ksal@msu.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about you role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Documentation of Informed Consent

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

APPENDIX J: CAREGIVER FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Brief Summary
You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. You will not benefit directly from your participation. However, your participation may contribute to the understanding of the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities.

Purpose of Research
The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. This study will include observations and interviews with elementary music educators, interviews with elementary administrators and secondary music educators, and a survey and focus group meeting with caregivers and students (aged eight and above enrolled at the elementary campus). Using a social constructivist approach, I will talk with participants about the meaning of the elementary music program to them individually and to the community. The results of this study may provide insights into the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities, informing policy, teacher preparation, and future community initiatives.

What You Will Be Asked to Do
You are being asked to participate in one focus group session with other caregivers to discuss your community and your school's elementary music program. This meeting will last for approximately 90 minutes. The researcher will facilitate conversation among eight-ten caregivers. Focus groups will be video and audio recorded for analysis purposes.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Any identifying information, including consent forms, will be kept for approximately one year. These forms will be kept secure via a password protected server. All information collected will be anonymized to protect confidentiality. No identifying information, including name or school district, will remain with the data collected. Interview recordings will be kept confidential using a password protected server. After transcription of the interviews is completed, the video recordings will be destroyed. Audio recording segments may be used in future research presentations All reports of this research will include pseudonyms for participants and any identifying information, such as places or names.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You have the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview process.

Contact Information
If you have any concerns of questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Whitney Mayo (345 W. Circle Dr, Rm. 221, East Lansing, MI 48824, mayowhit@msu.edu, (989) 303-8230), or the research supervisor, Dr. Karen Salvador (ksal@msu.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about you role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Documentation of Informed Consent

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX K: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP CONSENT/ASSENT FORM

Brief Summary
Your child being asked to participate in a research study. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary and you/they may choose to end your/their participation at any time. There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study. You and your child will not benefit directly from your participation. However, your child's participation may contribute to the understanding of the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities.

Purpose of Research
The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities. This study will include observations and interviews with elementary music educators, interviews with elementary administrators and secondary music educators, and a survey and focus group meeting with caregivers and students (aged eight and above enrolled at the elementary campus). Using a social constructivist approach, I will talk with participants about the meaning of the elementary music program to them individually and to the community. The results of this study may provide insights into the meaning and value of elementary music programs in rural communities, informing policy, teacher preparation, and future community initiatives.

What You Will Be Asked to Do
Your child is being asked to participate in one focus group session with other students to discuss your community and your school's elementary music program. This meeting will last for approximately 90 minutes. The researcher will facilitate conversation among eight-ten students. Focus groups will be video and audio recorded for analysis purposes.

Privacy and Confidentiality
Any identifying information, including consent forms, will be kept for approximately one year. These forms will be kept secure via a password protected server. All information collected will be anonymized to protect confidentiality. No identifying information, including name or school district, will remain with the data collected. Interview recordings will be kept confidential using a password protected server. After transcription of the interviews is completed, the video recordings will be destroyed. Audio recording segments may be used in future research presentations All reports of this research will include pseudonyms for participants and any identifying information, such as places or names.

Your Rights to Participate, Say No, or Withdraw
Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. Your child has the right to refuse to answer any question during the focus group process.

Contact Information
If you have any concerns of questions about this study, please contact the researcher, Whitney Mayo (345 W. Circle Dr, Rm. 221, East Lansing, MI 48824, mayowhit@msu.edu, (989) 303-8230), or the research supervisor, Dr. Karen Salvador (ksal@msu.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about your child's role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503, or email irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

Documentation of Informed Consent

Your signature below indicates that you voluntarily consent to allow your child to participate in this research study.

_____   _____

Caregiver Signature   Date

Student Assent

I, _____, voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_____   _____

Student Signature   Date

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