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Examining factors of student retention in a middle school band program

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EXAMINING FACTORS OF STUDENT RETENTION IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL
BAND PROGRAM.

A Thesis

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Master of Music in Music Education

By

Tyler Renninger

Spring 2021

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ABSTRACT**EXAMINING FACTORS OF STUDENT RETENTION IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL
BAND PROGRAM**

by

Tyler Renninger

Spring 2021

This action research aimed to examine the factors contributing to student retention in a middle school band program through the self-reported perspectives of students. With a critical inquiry framework, it was anticipated that the results would inform potential action by the researcher aimed at increasing student access to music programs. Through an empirical descriptive design using survey technique, the study population included band students at the school where the researcher was teaching at the time of the study. Results of data analysis indicate that students mostly made their decisions independently, while some were influenced by parents and peers. The most prominent influences on continuing in band were reported as follows: enjoyment of the music itself, qualities of their instrument, social interactions with peers, the teacher, sense of accomplishment, and positive emotional experiences in band. Challenges to continuing in band were indicated by a few students to include: missing other electives, the appearance (condition) and mechanics of certain instruments, learning new music, financial obligations of the instrument, and reports of negative interactions with peers. Many students reported being unable to practice

outside of band however few mentioned this as a challenge to staying in band. It makes sense that students do not find this a major problem because this particular school allows for 50 minutes of band rehearsal five days a week. The results led to ideas for actions to be taken on improving retention.

Dedication

To the voices of my students. Your input is valued and appreciated

Thank you.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Woodward, for her patience and support during this project. This was made especially difficult due to the uncertain circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Preface

As a middle school band director, I have been especially aware of students who discontinue their participation in band class and wondered what might be done to prevent that ongoing reality. The dropout rate of students is most concerning as regards the potential loss of value to those students' education. I philosophically believe that all students deserve access to instrumental music and am concerned that there may be causes for student attrition of which I am unaware. In addition, I feel a partial responsibility for the success of the local high school band program that is closely related to that of my middle school band program. Embarking on this study has evolved in the hope that I might be able to learn some of the influences on student decisions to remain in band or not, thus informing any action I might later take to improve student access to band.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

The retention of students in middle school instrumental music programs is an ongoing concern for the researcher. In particular, he is determined that all school students should have continued and robust access to instrumental music programs. “Instructors who actively strive to reduce student attrition have the best educational interests of both the individual students and the school music program at heart” (Sandene, 1994, p. 61). Being aware of the potential impact on lifelong learning and wellbeing through school music engagement, Madsen (2000) noted that music participation in adult life has been identified as an important goal of music education. Examples of musical engagement in adulthood may include activities of community ensemble participation, informed listening, and becoming consumers of music in terms of attending concerts and listening to recordings. In encouraging students towards long term enjoyment in music, Madsen (2003) advocates focusing on practical applications by developing student achievement in the music classroom. More information on the importance of music retention in school music programs is presented in the literature review of chapter two.

In the USA, optional instrumental music programs are prevalent in many middle schools across the states (Hartley, 1996). However, there is interest in the access students have to those programs and specifically in the influences that impact students’ decisions whether or not to join and continue in those programs. Stewart

(2005) explored relationships between students' decisions to continue in band and specific defined variables. These variables included starting grade of instrumental music study, out-of-school private music lessons, school academic achievement, self-efficacy, interest in band, performance context, and home musical background. Stewart determined that most of these variables had no significant correlations, or only a slight positive correlation to student retention. The results of Stewart's study are regional and not generalized to the population of all middle school students.

There are several examples of research exploring student intention to continue in band between various grade levels (Corenblum & Marshall, 1998; Martin, 2012; Kinney, 2010). Kinney (2010) investigated student demographic information between students in sixth through eighth grade. Corenblum and Marshall (1998) surveyed students about their intention to continue in the high school music participation. Martin (2012) added the musical self-efficacy of students as they progressed through grade levels in middle school. All three studies were based in urban school districts and the researchers cautioned that different results would be expected in similar studies elsewhere, based on the time in which the surveys were collected, and the geographical location. Each of the studies found that factors of academic achievement and socioeconomic concerns were strong predictors of student retention through grade levels. As the academic pressure increased between grade levels, students were less likely to persist in music participation.

In an earlier study focused on teachers' perceptions regarding issues of student attrition, Gamin (2005) explored the factors that teachers believe influence students' decisions to drop out of instrumental music. The study focused on both urban and rural teachers in Ohio. Most teachers indicated unwillingness to spend time practicing and poor academic performance as the primary reason students had given them for non-continuance in their music program. Gamin's study did not ask for students' perspectives on the issue. The lack of student voice reported in the literature on the issue of student retention in band programs was a primary motivation for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

Critical theory research involves "empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender" (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 29). This type of framework is defined by "the particular configuration of methodological postures it embraces" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 29). Through a critical inquiry approach to action research, this study aims to identify any challenges impacting continued student participation in middle school band that might possibly be addressed by the researcher in improving broader student access to band programs. Furthermore, any positive influential factors on continuation might be specific aspects that he could potentially reinforce for future student populations. It is therefore anticipated that, through facilitating student voice on the topic, the researcher would not only listen to student views on the topic, but he would also use

those views to inform his own actions in improving student access to the band program. Furthermore, the researcher anticipates being better able to empower students to take their own action wherever possible to overcome challenges pertaining to their ongoing participation in school music.

Problem Statement

Student attrition rates in middle school instrumental music programs are a continuing concern for the researcher. At the middle school where the researcher currently teaches, the researcher has observed that the loss of student retention is the most significant between grades six and seven, with a less-drastic attrition rate occurring between grades seven and eight. Considering any potential influences that might either be encouraging or hindering student access to the school instrumental music program, the researcher was interested in providing opportunity for student voice on the topic.

Need for the Study

Studies in the field of middle school band participant retention tend to be localized and not generalizable to the broader population. Furthermore, there appears to be a gap in the literature in terms of student voice on the topic. The need for this study is to obtain student perspective on the factors that determine continuation in the band music program at the school where the researcher is employed, as well as on any challenges faced in continuing to remain in band. The hope is that results will inform the researcher's persistent attempts towards improving broader student

population access to the school's instrumental music program. While the researcher may have made assumptions based on his own observations of any influencing factors, he considers it vital to hear directly from the students themselves. He is aware that student views on the topic would be far more revealing than his own limited impressions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this investigation is to give voice to students regarding the factors that contribute to their decisions to stay in their middle school band program between grade levels in middle school. Furthermore, it seeks to learn of any challenges students may be facing in continuing to remain in band.

Research Questions

This study is based on three essential research questions: (1) What are the factors that contribute to continued student participation in middle school band across grade levels? (2) What are any factors that might make students consider discontinuing band? (3) Do the factors impacting continued student participation in middle school band differ between grade levels?

Research Design

A qualitative approach was applied to this action research involving a descriptive empirical design using survey technique. This design was considered the most viable, given that a qualitative study with open-ended questions would provide a more detailed student voice than a quantitative study with a predetermined range of

limited responses being offered by the researcher. Furthermore, gathering information through interview technique may not have provided students with the anonymity required for providing candid answers. The descriptive design allows the researcher to develop a broader picture of the student culture within the band program.

Philosophical Assumptions

There are two philosophical assumptions that are key to this study. The first is an ontological assumption the second is methodological. Creswell and Poth (2018) define the former as “the nature of reality and its characteristics” (p. 20). In applying this assumption, the researcher expected multiple perspectives and meanings to be reported by the participating students, and that no student reality would be exactly the same as any other. In his analysis and report, the researcher endeavored to represent those perspectives accurately and in their entirety. The methodological assumption is defined as an emerging process through the researcher experience, particularly in data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). This methodological assumption was applied to this study in the recruiting of the study population and administration of data collection. Various factors impacting changes to the design, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, are discussed later in this report. Furthermore, this methodological assumption was applied to this study in the analysis of the data, where the thematic categories to which responses were assigned that were not predetermined but emerged during the process of the analysis.

Ethics

As a teacher, the researcher overhears and has informal conversations with students regarding their decisions to continue or discontinue band participation. It is acknowledged that these sources of information are not comprehensive enough to allow the teacher to make accurate assessments on factors that impact retention. However, these sources have provided a fair degree of potential bias towards certain understandings. Thus, the researcher has undertaken to put aside any such biases in order to ask questions in a non-leading manner; to administer the survey with strict adherence to ethical procedures and to conduct the analysis with an open mind towards hearing and reporting the full scope and detail of students' multiple meanings and realities articulated in the data. The researcher also recognizes the power imbalance involved in conducting research amongst students for whom he is the teacher, particularly when the survey covers a topic directly related to the classes being taught by that teacher. While it is impossible to claim that this issue could ever be totally resolved, effort was made to explain to students that the goal of the action research was to make amendments where possible to improve student access to band. Thus, it was stressed that their honesty would be both vital and valued. In addressing that power imbalance, extreme care was taken to ensure anonymity of responses through distancing of the researcher from the participants during completion of the survey and having student computer screens facing away from the researcher.

Limitations

The limitation of the study lies in the study population that is a sample of convenience restricted to band students at one school in the Pacific Northwest of the USA. While it had been hoped to include students at the school who had discontinued band participation, insufficient numbers of those students returned signed consent forms to have them included. For practical reasons of access, the researcher did not try to recruit past band students who had moved away from the geographical area and/or transferred to another school. The results were also limited by the self-reporting skills of the students and to the level at which they were able and willing to articulate their experiences and thinking. Self-reporting does not necessarily provide a full picture of reality. Nevertheless, it was considered for this study the most important reality to determine, as students are the ones who finally decide whether to continue in band and can likely best tell us what most influenced that decision.

Definitions

Attrition. As defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary, this term refers to "a reduction in numbers usually as a result of resignation, retirement, or death." In this study, the term refers to the reduction of student enrollment in the middle school instrumental program.

Enrichment Class. A twenty-five-minute class in the daily schedule of the middle school at which the research was conducted. This class is designed to allow

for a study hall (time to do homework with the availability of a teacher for consultation), exploratory elective class, or social-emotional awareness activities.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature

Introduction

The issues of student motivation and retention in school music programs is an ongoing concern for educators at all levels of instruction. This review of the literature presents a variety of perspectives related to this concern. Firstly, it explores why we care about numbers in music programs, including perspectives on student well-being; ensuring inclusion in music programs; and the sustainability of music programs. Secondly, a few examples are provided of student retention in music programs being linked to theories of motivation. The third area pertains to factors impacting student retention in school music ensembles. Through reviewing these aspects, a background is provided that leads to awareness of gaps in the literature and the need for this study.

Why We Care About the Numbers

The key reason for wanting to have and retain students in music programs is the value that rich musical engagement brings to a student's life. As a music educator, the researcher's philosophical views on music education first center around the student's well-being and quality of life. It is also imperative to do all we can to ensure inclusion of all student populations and equity in student access to music programs. Beyond that, it is logical that having participants in our music programs is vital to sustainability of these programs.

Student Well-being

Reimer (2009) discusses the values of musical experience, stating that music “adds to the human experience, its uniqueness of creativity along with the ethical dimensions that make it possible, the unique ways it calls on the mind, the body, and the feeling does not prevent us from recognizing that music too, contributes to the greater good” (p. 127). He suggests that the value of music can be seen in its presence in all cultures: while music sounds different between cultures, the value of music is apparent in all human experience. Elliott and Silverman (2015) echo Reimer’s concern in their statement that “all school subjects, experiences, aims, and attainment ought to be conceived in terms of their relationship to life values” (p. 464). They see music as an essential part of the human experience and advocate for its importance to a student’s well-being through active participation in music and developing a lifelong enjoyment of music.

Furthermore, it is important to us that we provide as many students as possible with the critical social emotional learning benefits that can be achieved through student participation in music programs. The collective social action involved in the crafting of artistic creations, specifically in creating a unified group musical sound, facilitates opportunity for fostering the important sense of belonging described in Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation “If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs” (p. 20). The very nature of any band is that each of the

musicians play a vital part of the “whole.” Without the individuals, the “whole” would not exist. Given that a caring and collaborative ethos is nurtured by the director, students may find the sense of belonging (Laird, 2015; Adderley et al., 2003; Hendricks et al., 2014; Morrison, 2001). Once the need for belonging is met, the next level that Maslow describes is that of “esteem needs” (p. 21).

The esteem needs are an individual’s feelings of self-respect, or self-esteem. In any music class, frequent opportunities for bolstering sense of self-esteem are achieved through the accomplishments of successful performance of the selected repertoire. That sense of esteem has the opportunity for being enhanced by the pride that can come from being part of a select, skilled group and experiencing the overall improving sounds of the music being studied. A strong sense of self-worth can be achieved in the collaborative achievement of inspiring musical performances. In describing the culture of a high school music classroom, Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) describe student perceptions of themselves and how they are viewed by peers, these views changing as the student progresses. The authors view participation in a musical ensemble as representing a subculture within the larger school settings, suggesting that “these subcultures prove to be important vehicles for support and growth” (p. 191). They determined that both parent and student responses show a positive correlation with their perception of academic, social, and emotional student life and the student’s progression to higher grades (Adderley, Berz, & Kennedy, 2003). Shinn (2011) found similar indications amongst high school students.

“Although students can be encouraged by teachers in the classroom, the public performance provided them with the opportunity to listen to the praises of different groups of people, including family members, friends, and other teachers” (Shinn, 2011, p. 38).

Music ensembles can provide safe learning environments for students who may not feel as comfortable in other academic areas. Of course, music itself does not ensure safety, rather it is the efforts of teacher and cooperation of peers that create the safe environment for students. Building an environment of student respect, positive teacher attitudes, and fostering “purpose-driven student commitment and musical mastery toward a sense of self-actualization” are all critical steps in this process (Hendricks et al., 2014, p. 35).

The very nature of making music through group social activity and the emotional expression that is achieved through making music provide unique social and emotional learning opportunities. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is “the process through which children and adults develop the skills, attitudes and values necessary to acquire social and emotional competence” (Taylor & Larson, 1999, p. 331). Practically teachers focusing on SEL may provide opportunities for students to express and manage emotions. Middle school students’ need for SEL activities is developmentally appropriate as students develop through puberty. SEL skills benefit students’ abilities to develop healthy relationships among peer groups, and heightened emotions caused by hormonal changes (Taylor & Larson, 1999). Social

emotional learning models, when effectively implemented, can lead to long-lasting improvements in the lives of children. These improvements help to promote well-being and prevent mental-health disorders (Domitrovich et al., 2017).

The music classroom is able to provide a platform for stability, offering an outlet for emotional expression, physical activity, cultural connection and social engagement that sets them up for learning in other areas. Social emotional learning goals are often a by-product of music participation either by spontaneous opportunity or teacher design in the curriculum. Some of the goals of music education provide the direct opportunity to teach concepts in social emotional learning (Jacobi, 2012). Listening to music of different types and representative of different cultures with an open and accepting mind enables the student to embrace concepts that are different from their own experiences and preferences. Through rehearsal and performance in musical ensembles students learn the SEL skills of how to “take turns, listen to one another, show mutual respect for their classmates by supporting them through mistakes” (p. 72). In students working together to compose or improvise, the students develop awareness of each individual part becoming the whole.

Ensuring Inclusion in Music Programs

The need for inclusivity in school music programs is increasingly relevant in discussions pertaining to equity in student access. Fitzpatrick et al. (2014) point out that the marginalized population groups in music programs are seldom reflected in the teachers that serve those students and that some groups may find themselves

excluded from school music programs altogether. Furthermore, research has indicated that the typical school music offerings focused only on traditional ensembles (band, choir, orchestra) are not reflective of student culture (Bowers, 2012). Providing opportunities for students to engage with music through more diverse musical offerings is an ongoing discussion related to representation of the varied cultures of student populations. Other factors of student access pertain to issues of socio-economic factors.

In reality, access to school music may be negatively impacted by a number of socio-economic factors. The concept of social equity “draws attention to the human factor in terms of economic fairness and advantages” (Guy & McCandless, 2012, p. 56). John Rawl’s *Theory of Justice* provides a framework for issues of social equity. Part of this theory is the principle of “fair equality of opportunity” (Rawls, 1971, in Guy & McCandless, 2012, p. 56). There is concern that financial burdens related to instrument costs and other music materials might deny access to some. While it is well known that many schools across the USA offer students heavily subsidized rentals of instruments, even those may be prohibitive to some.

A study by Corenblum and Marshall (1998) examined factors related to students’ socio-economic levels. They suggest creating a more socially inclusive music classroom, reporting that educators describe the issues related to the challenges of students’ socioeconomic status in relation to ensemble participation. Furthermore, Corenblum and Marshall explain that socioeconomic status (SES)

impacts student access to resources and discuss factors related to income, resources consumed, occupational prestige, and educational level achieved. In a population of seven schools in Winnipeg, Canada, they found only 21% of all high school music students were participating in high school music ensembles. They found students in the lower SES quartile to be significantly underrepresented in that group and that this statistic held true for even low-cost ensembles such as choir.

With consideration for socio-economic disparities, Shaw (2017) stated, “In the United States income inequality, residential segregation, and a property-tax based system of public-school funding distribute resources unequally between neighborhood schools, solidifying existing class boundaries” (p. 24). The structure of music classes may be disadvantageous to low SES students in their abilities to participate in an ensemble if they also need access to remedial assistance. Special education and targeted support for remediation often occur during students’ general music classes in elementary school, thus denying these students a foundational education in music (Shaw, 2017, Hoffman 2013).

Bates (2012) observes that wide gaps in student socioeconomic status within public schools are an ongoing concern that may lead to “achievement gaps within the school,” noticing that “more affluent students, because of class-related advantages, consistently outperform students living in poverty” (p. 34). Bates also claims that socioeconomic issues may present in certain student populations as lack of space for music practice, transportation issues, problems in attaining concert attire, after school

commitments, and not placing value on music due to other financial concerns. He suggests that wealthier families may also have provided their children with access to private lesson instruction or early childhood music activities. Bates points out that the additional costs inherent in a school instrumental music program might increase the gap in equity of access between students of different socio-economic status. He explains this disparity as some students having a lack of access to quality instruments and instrument maintenance. Bates claims that financial inequalities are only one part of the problem. He suggests that achievement is not necessarily the result of hard work or skill but may relate to having better access to resources. Bates further advocates for a free and equal music education for all students. He suggests that remedial efforts may include providing all students with quality instruments, private (individual) instruction, and highly qualified teachers, along with transportation services. He recommends a less costly example where the instructor downplays the types of situations creating “winners” or “losers” in school. He explains how creating supportive environments for all might allow better access for those students who may not be able to afford the extra resources that often lead to a winner/loser culture. He suggests that teachers empower students of lower social economic status by recognizing the social structures that perpetuate poverty in the community and the school itself and by taking actions to overcome disparities.

Sustainability of Music Programs

Music directors naturally want success in their music programs in order to retain music courses as viable and sustainable components in the education system. Ensembles require not only initial recruiting of large numbers of students in early stages, but strong efforts in student retention (Sandene, 1994). While many programs may start with large numbers, a high attrition rate may lead to an underdeveloped music program overall. More importantly, attrition has been shown to have lasting effects on students' potential future involvement in musical ensembles: "Students who drop instrumental music in their first year of instruction rarely ever get the opportunity to become involved in band or orchestra programs later in their academic careers" (Sandene, 1994, p. 32). Music ensembles require their specific range of instrumentalists in order to have a full complement of sounds typical of those musical cultures. Balanced numbers in different sections of the band are important to retain the desired overall musical sound. Thus, sustainability of student population is critical to any school musical ensemble (Cooper, 2004; Granlie, 2009).

Music Retention Linked to Motivational Theories

This section explores examples where retention in school music programs is linked to motivational theories. The first is that of Criss (2011), in his application of process theory to middle and high school band programs. Criss cites McInerney's (2005) interpretation of the process theory that sees motivation lying in "the intrinsic desire to improve personally, to solve problems, and to gain understanding" and

being “less focused on needs and more attentive to mental processes and perception as well as the personal interpretation of experiences” (p. 66). Criss argues that, where this motivation exists, material rewards, such as prizes or financial incentives, are less valued by the student than the self-satisfaction and self-respect involved in giving a beautiful music performance. He advocates for teachers to provide motivation for students through forging strong relationship connections. Considering both the emotional component of musical expression and the emotional connections with others fostered through group musical activity, Criss’s explanation appears most relevant to musical ensembles. Music teachers may appeal to the affective domain of human emotional response through musical activities. Criss suggests “emotion is the strongest force in the brain” and argues “if teachers can appeal to the values and the emotional responses of the pupils, motivation is more likely” (p. 66). He explains that

This is especially relevant to music teachers, whose job is to reach the affective domain in order to create expressive melodies and exciting rhythms. Instructors who are skilled at motivating their students might be expected to make learning personally relevant to the children and to persuade them that their expectations for success should be high. Their students feel motivated if classroom activities encourage their feelings of autonomy and self-direction, and they feel respected and trusted. Music students want to feel a sense of ownership and pride in their performances. (p. 66)

The second example is that of Schmidt (2005) who linked school music performance achievement of band students in Grades 7 – 12 applying three factors of motivation referenced by March et al. (2003): (1) learning to task orientation, (2) performance to ego orientation, and (3) individual orientation. Schmidt’s results

indicated that learning to task orientation (where success is defined by mastery) is correlated with students' reported practice time, ratings of performance, and their own effort. Schmidt found that performance to ego orientation (performing in a manner that is avoidance of failure) negatively correlates with grade level and solo festival ratings. His results indicated that, as the students get older, ego plays less of a role in achievement and external measures of individual achievement are less important. Individual orientation (where success is based on individual achievement) positively correlated with ratings of performance, effort, and solo festival ratings.

The third example is Bruenger's (2009) linking of music participation in school ensembles with the motivational theory of cost. Bruenger references the cost-task theory of motivation and active goal settings, citing Maehr's (1991) theoretical model of task-goal orientation. Naturally, music participation comes with a degree of cost for students, and connections may be made to theories that explain the negative impact on motivation that arises out of students' perceived cost. Bruenger (2009) describes every music activity in which students participate as costing them time and lost opportunities for pursuing other activities. Furthermore, music students often spend hours in individual practice time, therefore missing out on other social activities.

Factors impacting student retention in music programs

There are multiple factors that impact student retention in school music ensemble programs. Scott and Wilkins' (2014) exploration of poor student retention

in a middle school band program indicates an extensive list of contributing factors identified by students that some band directors across the USA might recognize in their own settings. They suggested that students who had left the band program did so because of boredom; band taking too much time; loss of interest; the music not being fun to play; the student falling behind the ability of other students; the class not being challenging enough; band conflicting with other activities; their friends not being in band; social problems being caused by being in band; and not wanting to carry the instrument around. Hagner (1985) explained that student's own thinking can dissuade them from continuing in music programs. However, student thinking is naturally impacted by a range of factors, many of which were identified in Scott and Wilkins's (2014) report. How these factors, and numerous others impact student participation in music programs is explored through review of literature in this section. Hagner (1985) suggests that listening to student concerns and considering how to help the student to reframe or address those are critical steps.

Peers

Closely examining peer influences on student decision-making regarding participation, MacIntyre, Potter, and Burns (2012) determined that peer influences can have a stronger impact than influences of teachers or parents. They claim that students entering adolescence are seeking ways to be members of their society and that peer pressures influence decisions students make concerning music activities at school. The authors further explain that this pressure might either be positive towards

ensemble participation (having friends in the band) or negative (having friends outside of band). They highlight how the perceived social cost of music participation can be a challenging factor in students' decisions to continue music participation. Music students often spend hours in individual practice time, therefore missing out on other social activities. An additional example of cost to school ensemble participation is identified by Elpus and Carter (2016) as being the higher risk of victimization through bullying of students in music programs by others outside of the programs. Researching the reports of bullying among middle and high school students in correlation with student participation in a performing arts program, the study explored several forms of bullying such as physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Their investigation determined that "Students who participate in their school's band, choir, orchestra, or theatre program face a greater than one-in-three chance of being the victim of in-person bullying through any means" when compared to non-music school population (p. 334). A strong warning is issued: "Youth aggression may affect how school-aged students learn music" (Rawlings, 2016, p. 21). Music participation not only limits the time students have available for social interactions but may also be a critical influence on how they experience the greater school community outside of the ensemble.

Parents and Family

In addition to peer influences, adults' attitudes towards the music being rehearsed and performed might be reflected in the value students assign to that music

(Hagner, 1985). Dell et al. (2014) suggest that the general home environment relates to academic and psychosocial outcomes. In particular, they found that family music participation and musical expectations are shown to relate more specifically to music outcomes. Their research indicated that initial enrollment and continued music participation are higher among two-parent families. However, family activities that conflict with music or a change in a family situation can lead to students feeling added pressure to discontinue music activities (Hagner, 1985). Dell et al.'s (2014) findings suggest that music teacher efforts to educate and encourage parents to be involved in their student's musical study may enhance student outcomes in music programs. Briscoe (2016) sees parental support as critical to ensuring student engagement in the music program, exploring ways parents may get more involved with the student's learning process. He claims, "Parents need to be encouraged to maintain support for their young musician past the first year of study" (p. 42). Briscoe suggests that an approach of teaching and equipping parents to be more involved may motivate students further than minimization of parent involvement in the music program. Hagner (1985) describes parent involvement as being important for participation but warns that the music program should not be impeded if there is a lack of parent involvement. He explains how parent support toward involvement in the music program is most beneficial for the child and that simple acts of encouragement are what is needed for student motivation.

Time-commitment costs

Considering the long hours involved in learning to competently play an instrument, some students might find that other activities provide more immediate gratification for student efforts. Students who are used to activities providing instant gratification may have difficulty being intrinsically motivated in music and often leave music practice for other activities (Bruenger, 2009; Schmidt, 2005; 2007).

Financial Costs

The financial cost of providing an instrument for school ensemble participation might conceivably put financial pressure on lower-income, working-class families, even if those costs are subsidized. Kelly-McHale and Salvador (2017) suggest that this burden of cost significantly excludes several students of low-income areas from participating in the traditional school music. They determined that “Students who participate in traditional music ensembles such as choir, band, and orchestra are more likely to be from White, middle- to upper middle-class families” (p. 7).

The Musical Instrument Played

In a study examining student instrument choices, many students were reported to leave their school music programs because the student disliked the instrument they were playing (Fortney, Boyle, & DeCarbo, 1993). It is important to understand that students end up with one particular instrument rather than another based on a number of factors.

While student choice may be a factor, there may have been other factors involved such as the availability of an instrument in the home, parental choice, director assignment in order to have a full range of instruments represented in the ensemble, etc. Therefore, it is expedient to look at a student's attitude to their instrument as a possible motivating factor for continuing band. Students in this investigation described that the most preferred instrument would be the saxophone. It is common knowledge amongst band directors that there is likely a need to add restrictions on the number of students who can sign up for the saxophone. Besides saxophone, there has been evidence of a bias towards certain other instruments and instrument families. Fortney, Boyle, and DeCarbo (1993) report that female students indicate a preference for woodwinds, while the male students tend to prefer brass and percussion. They mention that this gender/instrument association may be influenced by other social influences. Directors may be guilty of assigning instruments based on gender assumptions and students may end up playing an instrument that was not their first choice, possibly impacting motivation to remain in the group.

Starting grade

Music directors naturally tend to want students to join music programs in earlier grades, giving them benefits of longer periods of study towards mastering their instrument(s). However, several studies have shown that a later start does not impact retention. For example, Hartley (1996, 2009) examined the influence that starting grades has on student enrollment and retention in beginning instrumental music programs. In the study, students starting instrument instruction in grades five

or six had no significant difference in retention in the seventh-grade year. In addition, a similar percentage of students began instrumental music instruction regardless of what grade it was offered. A factor in the study that seemed to most determine a student's retention is the frequency of instructional meetings. Classes that met more frequently had a higher retention rate. Hartley's (2009) research includes specifically examining string programs that start significantly earlier than band programs. Her results indicate that starting programs before grade five does not increase student involvement in later grades. Consequently, Hartley states that "at least from a retention perspective, string program directors should consider the potential benefit of increased long-term retention obtained through later start grades" (p. 382).

Teachers

Hagner (1985) describes how students can be influenced by teachers from outside of the ensemble and how the involvement and support, or lack of support, of those individuals for the music program may influence the student's decision on where they will allocate their time.

An obvious motivation for continuing in band, or not doing so, is the music teacher. Being the key person running the classes, an ensemble director naturally has a major impact on student mindset and attitude. MacIntyre, Potter, and Burns (2012) list the teacher as one of four major contributors to student mindset in an ensemble, "The motivation required to learn to play an instrument is supported by positive

attitudes towards musicians, the teacher, the course, and music in general” (p. 139). Scott and Wilkins’ (2014) chapter contribution to *Habits of a Successful Middle School Band Director* focuses on ways the director might be causing student attrition through negatively impacting student mind-set. They list a number of ways that a director may do so, including a director’s lack of preparedness; not being excited about class; not making learning worthwhile for students; talking too much in class instead of playing; setting class requirements that conflict with other activities; not using proper incentives; not choosing music appropriate for students; poor instrument assignments; and the teacher not being “fun.” The authors acknowledge that many directors are excellent recruiters but learn the hard way that “more difficult than recruiting is the issue of retention” (p. 189).

The band director is often the face and motivator of the school music program. How the band director chooses to spend rehearsal time is a factor in student enjoyment. In balancing curricular demands and social expectations of the broader community, Reimer (2003) suggests that the social expectations implicit in multiple public concerts often prevent fully creative teaching. There is a delicate balance between parental support, student enjoyment, and curricular rigor. In addition to engaging with students, directors work to justify band as an academic subject in the school curriculum. Blocher, Greenwood and Shellahamer (1997) suggested that middle school band directors spend more time teaching concepts and giving students verbal instructions than high school band directors who spend more time conducting

and giving non-verbal feedback of student performances. They explain this difference as being related to relevant levels of musical competence at the differing grade levels. The confidence directors give the students to believe in their own abilities is a critical factor of motivation to stay in band, as shown in Corenblum and Marshall's (1998) study that determined "The more favorably a band teacher evaluated students' musical competency, the more likely it was students said they would take band next year" (p. 137).

The positive experience of students in their early music ensembles is an important influence of student enjoyment of the musical ensemble. Cooper (2004) explores the importance of students' early experience in a musical ensemble, emphasizing that "beginning class must inspire a sense of progress and value and must be enjoyable" (p. 36). He explains that, in the early stages, music making should be simply fun. However, as students advance, and activities may not be simply fun, the teacher should nevertheless guide students to musical enjoyment. Cooper summarizes his views in these words, "Teenagers do, and continue to do, what they enjoy" (p. 36).

Curricular Relevance

Music curricular choices by the teacher and school administration may have both intended and unintended impacts on student retention in music programs. We see changes in curriculum over the years as teachers try to move with the times and attract student populations to their courses. Back in the nineties, Grashel (1993)

described curriculum in music education as having shifted over several decades from a performance- and skill-acquisition model, to a comprehensive musicianship model that offered an integrated approach to “performance, analysis, and composition” (p. 38). The elementary music curriculum at the time was described as working with this model for longer and with less resistance than the secondary curriculum. Five years later Gleason (1998) conducted a study in an effort to compare a performance-based beginning band class and a comprehensive music-based class, finding that retention in the performance-based class was significantly higher. However, no significant difference was found in an exit questionnaire from the two groups in describing why they left the band class or what they would change about that class. The comprehensive model did not endure the test of time, and band, orchestra and choir in public schools proceeded to retain a strong performance-orientation.

Over more recent decades, there has been increasing awareness of the need for including and retaining broader student populations in school music programs. Corenblum and Marshall (1998) found that music programs had higher retention rates when they were successful in reflecting and being sensitive to the musical traditions of the student racial/ethnic population. While traditional school band programs are generally culture-specific by their nature, such as western classical wind ensembles, jazz bands, etc., there are conscious ways that directors can try to make them more relevant to students of different cultural backgrounds. For example, directors can select repertoire by composers from different cultures, such as African

American or Hispanic cultures, and including arrangements of music from different cultures, where appropriate (Hoffman, 2012; Abril 2006; Williams, 2011; Mixon 2009). Furthermore, it is important that directors are conscious of gender inclusion, avoiding instrument allocations based on gender and selecting musical compositions and arrangements written by women (Warnock, 2009). Online databases such as the *Wind Repertoire Project* have included demographical information to help with issues of representation in the band literature. Additional attention can be given to inclusion of students with special needs, who may need a variety of different instructional approaches (Hammel, 2004).

The drive towards improving inclusion in music ensembles has also focused on the need to reach students who either drop music or never enroll in music programs because curricular offerings do not align with their own cultures and interests. “Fewer students are enrolled in school music programs and the larger student body potentially perceives music programs built on the traditional band/orchestra/choir model to be irrelevant in their own musical needs or interests” (Bowers, 2012, p. 91). Much support exists in the literature for expanding curricular offerings as a key means to broadening student population. Examples have included alternative classes such as guitar, popular music, mariachi, African drumming, steel drum and marimba ensembles, as well as other music areas such as music technology and songwriting (Williams, 2008; Gustafson, 1996; Mixon, 2009; Clements, 2010; Bowers, 2012).

Students who love the music they rehearse and perform would naturally be motivated to stay in band, therefore fostering student enjoyment in the experience of making music is central to the philosophical approach of many teachers (Murray, 2016; Green & Hale, 2011; Hendricks et al., 2014). Aligning with the approach of developing a culture centered around the intrinsic value of music, Werpy (1987) discusses the importance of selecting *quality* music in the education of students, while also making participation in ensembles as relevant as possible. “We don’t need to appease students, but we do need to create motivation through expectancies and values if we want our students to experience meaningful and enthusiastic learning now, and in the future” (Werpy, 1987, p. 52). Many music educators include at least some popular music in their repertoire to encourage student enthusiasm, despite any arguments that this decision may not always be in the best educational interest of teaching students. The repertoire choices are most important to students who are intrinsically motivated, assigning increased value to the music activities themselves. In appealing to those who are more extrinsically motivated, Metz (1984) suggests that teachers might organize activities that boost opportunities for student achievement, such as solo recital opportunities, and public ensemble performances, and accomplishing more difficult music. Metz explained that this might be more difficult for teachers to implement but would provide more meaningful rewards for students.

Conclusion

This review of literature reflects widespread concern pertaining to student retention in school music ensembles. The chapter introduced why retention is important, firstly in terms of the value music programs bring to students, secondly as it pertains to the need for inclusion, and thirdly, the sustainability of such programs in schools. The literature shows a range of positive influences that impact ongoing student participation in school music ensembles. Some of these involve sources of intrinsic motivation such as the music itself, relevancy of the curriculum, and the positive emotions students experience when making music in the group. While emotions can be involved in extrinsic motivation (e.g. fear of being bullied and excitement about possibly winning competition), the core emotions felt in band like enjoyment, calm, joy, etc. are intrinsic motivators. The studies also indicate the impact of parental involvement and the critical influence of the music director on the students' decisions to stay in band. However, the literature also alludes to various challenges to staying in ensembles, such as the financial cost (even though instruments are often heavily subsidized) and the cost of time, with students being less available to mix socially outside of the ensemble.

Studies in this field generally do not claim generalization of results beyond the populations they investigate. Nevertheless, the increasing bank of studies within specific educational ensemble settings continues to inform a broader picture about the types of influences that students might be facing on participation. Therefore, each

individual study adds value towards informing our knowledge on the topic. A gap was perceived in the literature pertaining to the need for more studies exposing student voice on their continued participation in band. This gap has inspired the researcher to facilitate student voice on the topic within his own study. Furthermore, with the lack of socio-economic diversity being a prevalent issue in the school where he teaches, the researcher became more aware of the gap in the literature pertaining to socio-economic factors impacting continued band participation and the need to see if students voice concerns in this area.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This action research involved a descriptive empirical design using survey technique to examine the phenomenon of student attrition in the middle school band program. The purpose of the survey was to determine student-reported factors that contributed to their decision to continue or discontinue participating in their middle school instrumental music program. Through further analysis the researcher hoped to determine if the factors differ between grade levels.

Study population

The sample population was one of convenience. This action research involved seventh and eighth grade band students enrolled at the middle school where the researcher was currently teaching at the time of the study. There were twenty participants in the research. Coincidentally, based on the number of signed consent forms returned, the study population included ten participants who were in seventh grade band (out of nineteen students in seventh grade band) and ten participants who were in eighth grade (out of twenty-three students in eighth grade band). With the total number of surveys equal to twenty, this figure represents over half of all possible band participants. Students who were still registered at the school but had dropped out of band (a total of 95 students) were also recruited to the study. The reason for this number being so high is that Grade 6 students are required to take either band or choir. Therefore, a natural high drop-off rate is expected by Grade 7

when music is no longer a required school course. However, only seven of that group returned signed consent forms. Of those seven, only two students presented themselves on the specified day to complete the survey. One survey was completed incorrectly and needed to be discarded. Having finally only one viable survey from the potential 95 past band students meant not having sufficient data to conduct any potential analysis of trends or disparities. In alignment with the methodological design of the study that permitted design changes based on the experiences encountered during data collection, a decision was made to amend the original design and restrict participants to current band students.

Study design

A qualitative approach was applied to this study involving a descriptive empirical design using survey technique. Qualitative design “seeks “truth” as found in natural settings; uses narrative data collected in the form of observations (Phillips, 2008, p. 7).” The descriptive empirical design provides opportunity for collecting data that would be valuable determining the observations and experiences of middle school band students pertaining to influences on their continued participation in band. This design was chosen to allow the students an opportunity to express their own voice on the topic, reporting the meanings and realities that they individually experienced.

A survey allowed for empirical evidence to be collected by the researcher that would provide a more detailed understanding of the topic, by facilitating the

expression of student voice. The qualitative approach provided more opportunity for students to give detailed answers through the use of open-ended questions.

Instrument

The instrument in this research was a digital survey designed in SurveyMonkey software with open-ended questions. The language of the survey was adapted to be appropriate for students in seventh and eighth grades. In the directions, students were prompted to provide as much detail in their responses as possible to the questions.

For the two initial demographic questions, participants were asked their grade level and the instrument that they play in band class. The instrument question was added only for potentially informing follow-up research or actions by the director to overcome challenges students reported about those instruments. It was not included in order to distinguish if responses varied according to the instrument played in band.

Of the total seventeen questions, only one provided a list of options, including “other” with a place to fill in their own additions. This question pertained to feelings that students experience when participating in band. With the hope of avoiding students restricting their answers to simplistic terms like “happy” or “sad,” more descriptive examples of feelings were provided as options, for which they were encouraged to check as many as were appropriate. These options were provided in sets of opposites, to avoid leading students in any particular direction. These included examples such as belonging and loneliness, happiness and sadness, stress

and calm, and pride and jealousy. To keep a degree of open-endedness, a final “other” option was included to allow students the opportunity to express any emotions that were not on the list, with the hope that any responses would be inspired by the level of depth suggested in the available options.

Questions were designed and rephrased in different ways, in order to learn from students what they believe makes their continued band participation easy or difficult. Through a variety of ways, questions were posed from different angles in an attempt to elicit in-depth and articulate responses from students.

Participant recruitment

The researcher initially recruited two groups of students as participants in the study, including those currently participating in band and those who had discontinued participation in band. He recruited those who had dropped out of the band program by visiting enrichment classes attended by those students with each relevant classroom teacher’s permission. The researcher recruited students currently in the band during their regularly scheduled band class time. In both cases, a recruitment script was used to identify the purpose of the study for participants. Furthermore, students were informed that participation was voluntary and that there would be no penalty or reward for participation. The researcher informed students about the type of questions on the survey. He explained that if they choose to participate, they were being asked to answer honestly to the best of their ability. The researcher explained that surveys would be completely anonymous, that participation

was entirely voluntary, and that withdrawal is permitted any time during the survey. For those students indicating initial willingness to participate, a parental consent form was sent home with the students, along with instructions to return signed hard copies or digital copies.

Data collection

Once student assent and parental consent forms had been obtained, the survey was administered to participants in the school band room. Students completed surveys during enrichment class time on Chromebooks set up on three tables lined along three of the band room walls. Participants were seated behind the tables, with their backs to the wall and Chromebooks in front of them. The Chromebook screens faced the students ensuring that the researcher was not able to see the participants' computer screens. Participants were first reminded of the key points included in the recruitment script. Participants were given advance directions to complete the survey without talking or looking at other students' surveys. Any students not participating in the survey were instructed to complete other homework or reading activity, as this class is primarily used as a study hall. When all were ready to begin, the researcher sent a pre-primed email with the survey link to the set of participants at their school email accounts. Students were then given the instruction to begin the digital survey. On completion of the survey, students were allowed to spend any remaining class time doing homework or reading.

Analysis Procedures

The data analysis involved an emergent methodology in which thematic trends were noted during the process. No categories of analysis were pre-determined. As the researcher examined student responses, he added any new relevant category headings to columns on an excel data spreadsheet. Occasionally, responses covered more than one category and were assigned appropriately to each.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter provides results of the data analysis in a study involving action research with a descriptive empirical design using survey technique. The survey was administered to current band students at the middle school where the researcher was teaching at the time of the study. The survey asked participants for their perspectives on their decision to continue participation in band and on any issues that presented challenges to their continuing in band. The researcher analyzed the collected responses and created emergent thematic categories in the process. Even though participants describe their perspectives in a variety of ways, the researcher attempted to organize them in such a way that would allow a clear picture from which to report a description of the themes and disparities that emerged.

Demographics

Participants were initially asked demographic questions of what grade they were in and what instrument they played in band. These questions provided the context for the researcher to explore possible trends or discrepancies between grade levels. In terms of the instrument, this data was not collected with a comparative rationale, but in order to allow an ability to reference back the anonymous comments about specific instruments and address any concerns about those specific instruments. This information would conceivably allow the researcher to pursue the action that was intended through this critical inquiry framework, that of later making

reforms that would assist in increasing student access to band. With half the participants in Grade 7 and half in Grade 8, results of analysis pertaining to grades are presented within the following sections.

Self and Others Influencing Band Continuation

When asked about any persons influencing their decision to continue in band, 55% of participants said they did so independently of the influence of others. Responses included “No, I really enjoyed playing in band and wanted to do it again”; “I like music”; “No one did, I wanted to try something new, and it turned out that band is really fun.” Of the students who indicated that others influenced their decision, 30% identified a parent, articulating, for example, “My mom encouraged me to stay in band because my family is very musical family and also because I said I enjoyed it”; and “My dad encouraged me to do band. Though going into band was my choice.” Beyond that, 10% identified the band director as influencing their decision. One student expanded further that “Mr. R has definitely encouraged me to continue with band, but in a way that he didn’t like demand or require it.” Minimal students (5%) indicated friends, siblings, or a trusted adult as their influence for continuing in band. These trends are represented in Figure 1 and a comparison by grade level is represented in Figure 2.

Figure 1

Self and Others Influencing Band Participation

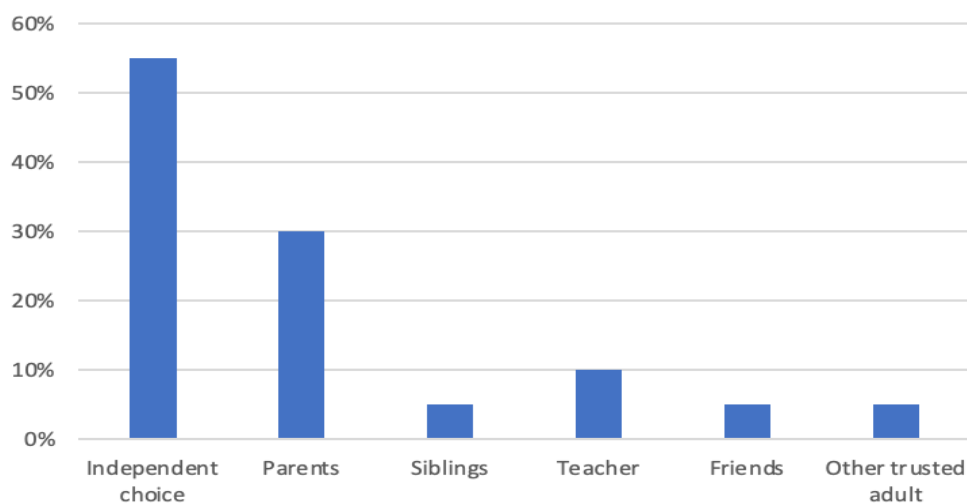
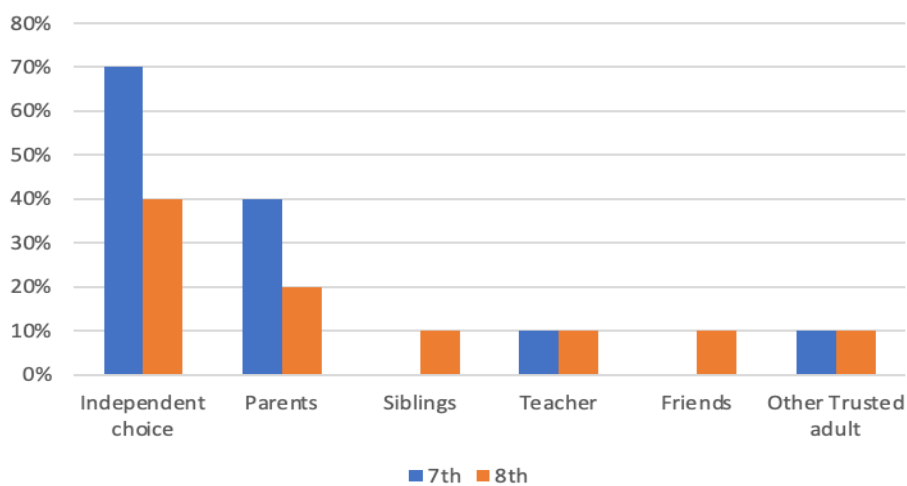


Figure 2

Self and Others Influencing Band Participation Grade Level Comparison



Factors Making Continuing in Band Easy or Difficult

Responses regarding what made remaining in band easy were most frequently identified as the music itself and social interactions. Almost a third (30%)

reported enjoyment of music, using phrases such as “I really like playing music”; “Playing music I’ve heard in movies made it easy and fun”; “Being able to play music motivated me to continue”; “I like the music we play.” At the same frequency, 30% of participants reported social interactions, identifying “I like the people in the class”; “I love the group I was in” and “My friends were going to be in band.” Another 25% reported a sense of accomplishment reporting “being able to play and know the notes I learned” and “I felt I could play my instrument reasonably well.” A further 20% indicated enjoyment of their instrument. A lesser percentage (15%) mentioned positive interactions with the teacher with responses including “Mr. R is really nice”; “I enjoy Mr. R and playing the music.” Similarly, 15% reported that band was a fun class or included activities they enjoyed, stating “My band class was very fun”; “My friend helps me to learn our music”; and “I liked first how it felt like a break from other school things.” Finally, 10% reported that music is a positive family activity that they engage in at home as well as at school. One respondent explained “My dad encouraged me, and my brother plays music with me.” These trends are represented in Figure 3 and a comparison by grade level is represented in Figure 4.

Figure 3

Factors Making Continuing in Band Easy

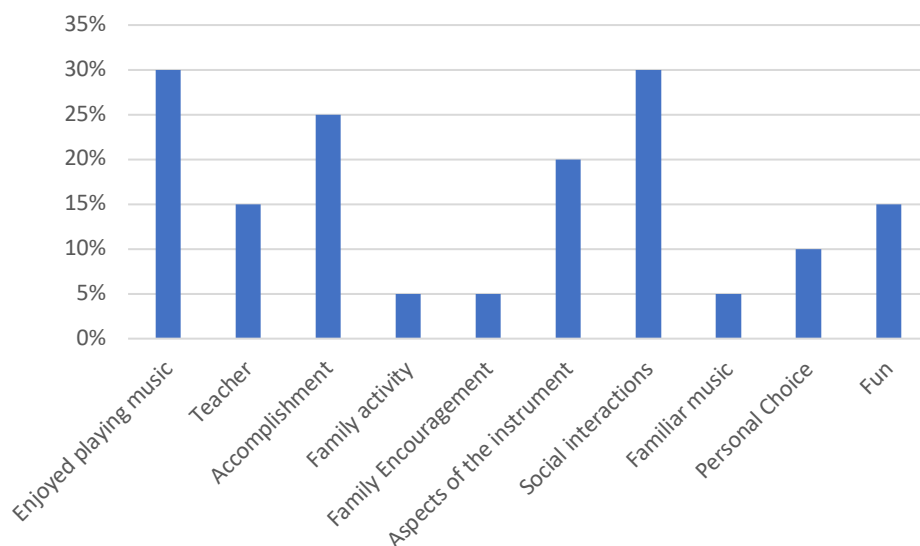
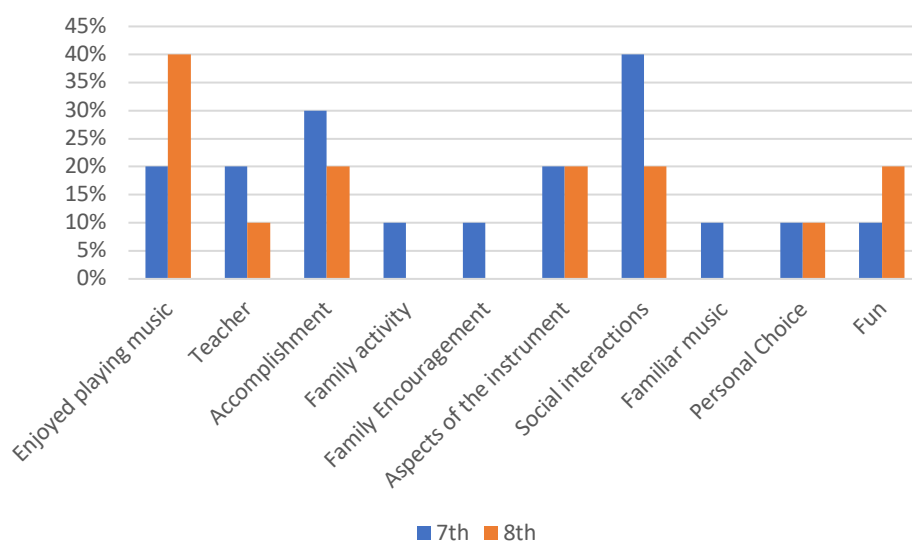


Figure 4

Factors Making Continuing in Band Easy Grade Level Comparison



Participants identified factors that made continued participation in band difficult. 15% reported having had no difficulties in deciding to continue with band. 35% listed challenges related to learning new musical concepts or notes. Responses included “the harder movements made me a little hesitant”; “learning new notes and not being able to play the higher notes”; “getting new music and how scary it looked from a sixth-grade perspective, but it wasn’t that bad”; “some of the music was hard, but I learned a lot; “I joined two weeks late in 7th grade because I tried online school.” A further 20% reported feeling that they were missing out on other elective opportunities. Responses included “I have other things that I might have wanted to do more”; “The only time I almost left was because there were other electives that looked interesting.” A smaller number (10%) of participants mentioned challenges with practicing. Remaining responses pertained to the cost of the instrument (10%), classwork tests (5%), negative aspects of their instrument (5%), and negative interactions with other students (5%), while (5%) reported not enjoying playing in front of peers. These trends are represented in Figure 5 and a grade level comparison represented in figure 6.

Figure 5:

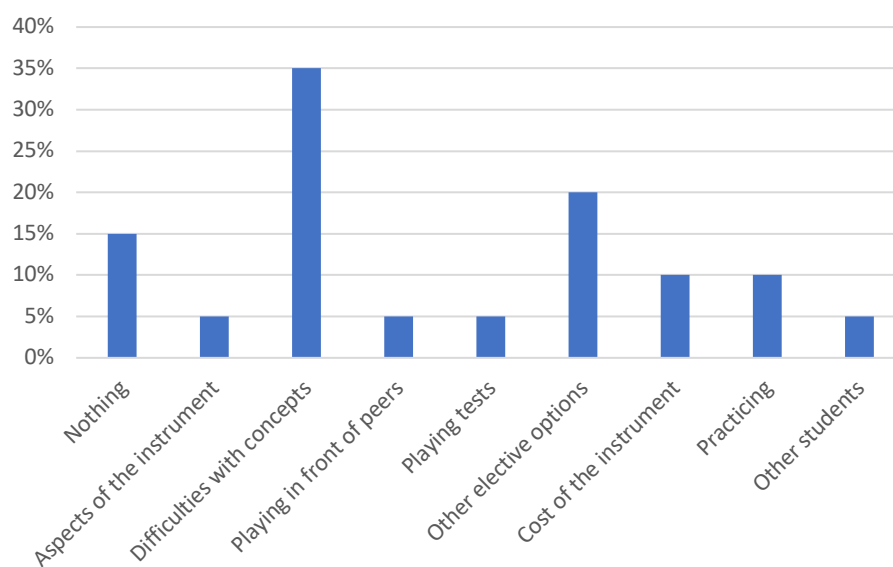
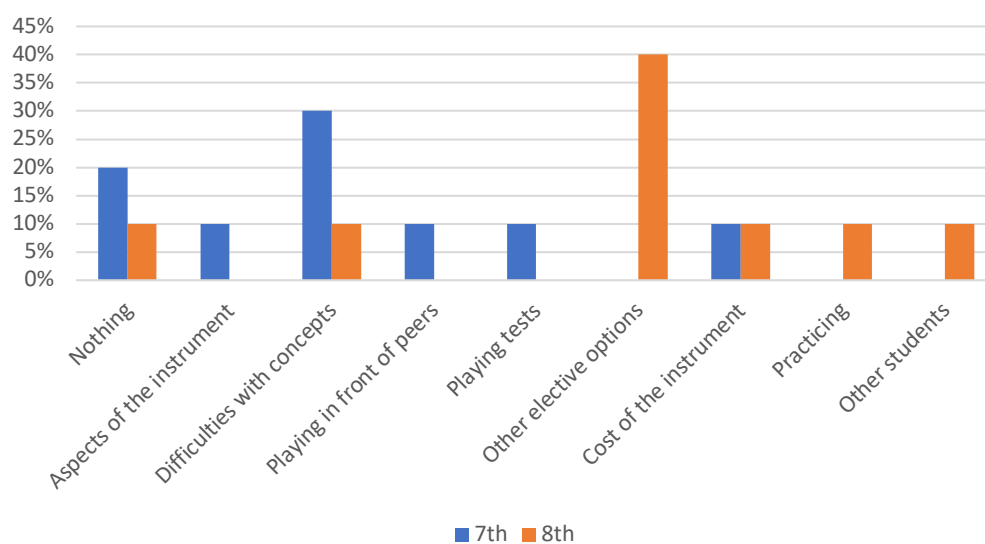
Factors Making Band Difficult for Continued Participation

Figure 6

Factors Making Band Difficult for Continued Participation Grade Level Comparison

Influences “Making” Students Continue in Band

In describing the influences that made them stay in band, a significant number of students (40%) identified peer influences. Responses included: “The people in class made it very fun”; “I stayed in band because the people I got to play music with”; and “I have a lot of friends in band class.” A further 30% mentioned the music performed in band class. In addition, 30% identified the teacher influence, stating “Mr. Renninger is very kind and is willing to help if you need it”; “The one-on-one time with Mr. R, he showed me I belonged and that I was doing good.” Smaller numbers (20%) reported enjoyment of the instrument, referencing to the sound of the instrument, or how it looked. Also, 15% reported a sense of accomplishment, including the feeling of successfully playing a piece of music or playing music that is different from what they are otherwise used to hearing. Finally, 20% indicated fun, 5% a positive classroom environment, and 5% a sense of belonging. These trends are represented in Figure 7 and a grade level comparison in Figure 8.

Figure 7

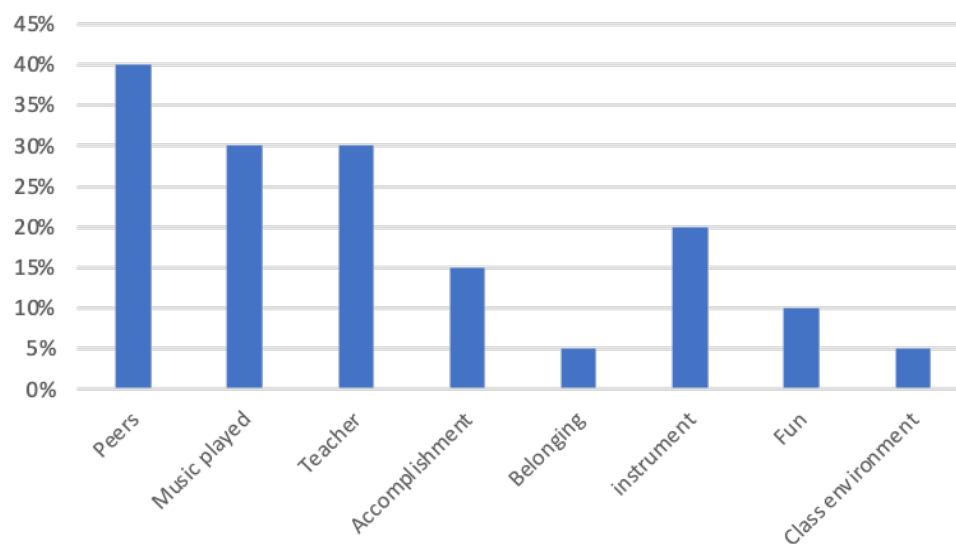
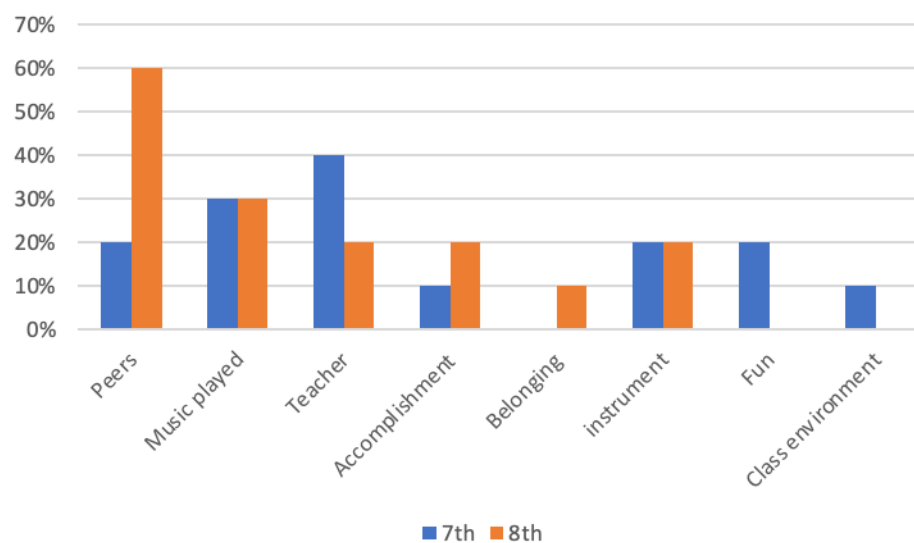
More Factors of Student's Continued Participation in Band

Figure 8

More Factors of Student's Continued Participation in Band Grade Level Comparison

Emotions Students Experience in Band

Participants gauged their emotions while participating in band class. In an attempt to avoid simplistic answers like “happy,” the researcher provided a list of options for these responses, including the ability to fill in their own ideas. Amongst the participants, 95% indicated “happiness”, 80% “proud”, 75% “inspired”, 60% “belonging”, 40% “calm”, and 25% “anticipation.” 15% of participants identified “other.” The “other” emotions were described by respondents as being upset at other instrument groups, wanting more music, and feeling musical. None of the students identified the options of “sadness” or “jealousy.” Only 5% indicated the emotions of “loneliness” and “disillusionment.” Another 15% of participants identified feeling stressed in band class. These trends are represented in Figure 9 and a grade level comparison in Figure 10.

Figure 9:

Emotions Students Experienced in Band

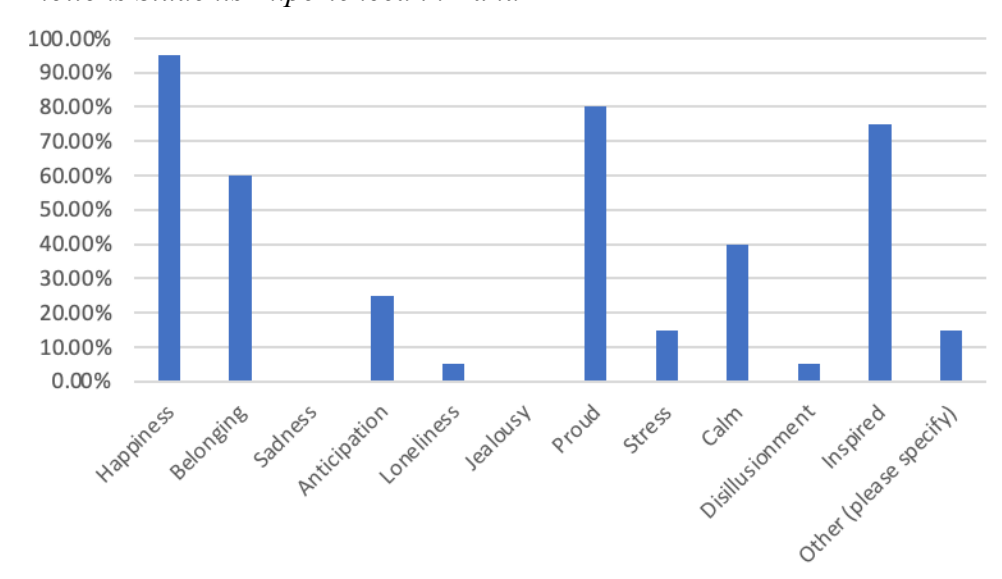
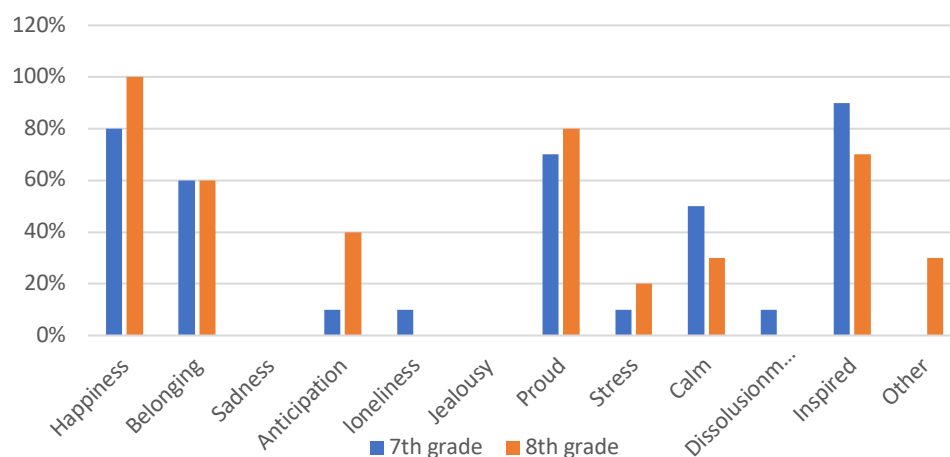


Figure 10

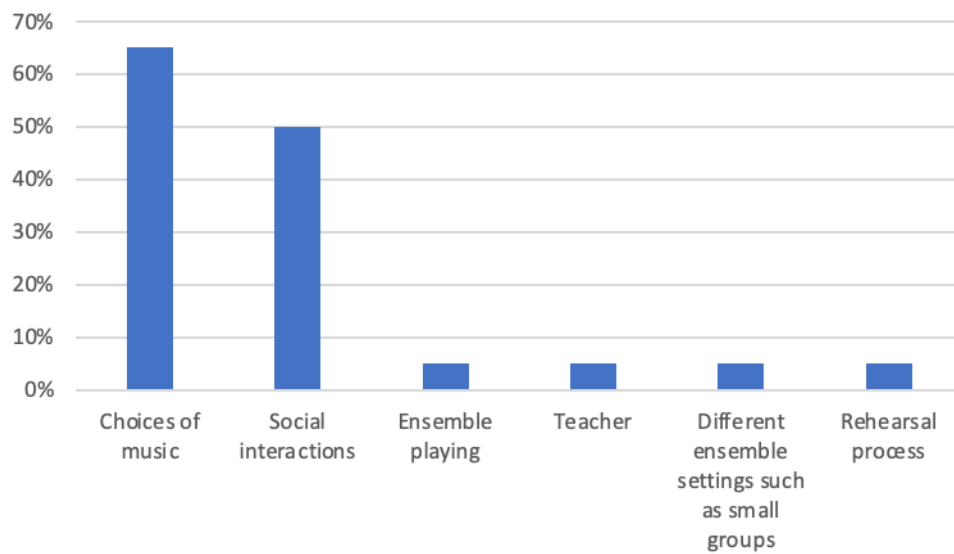
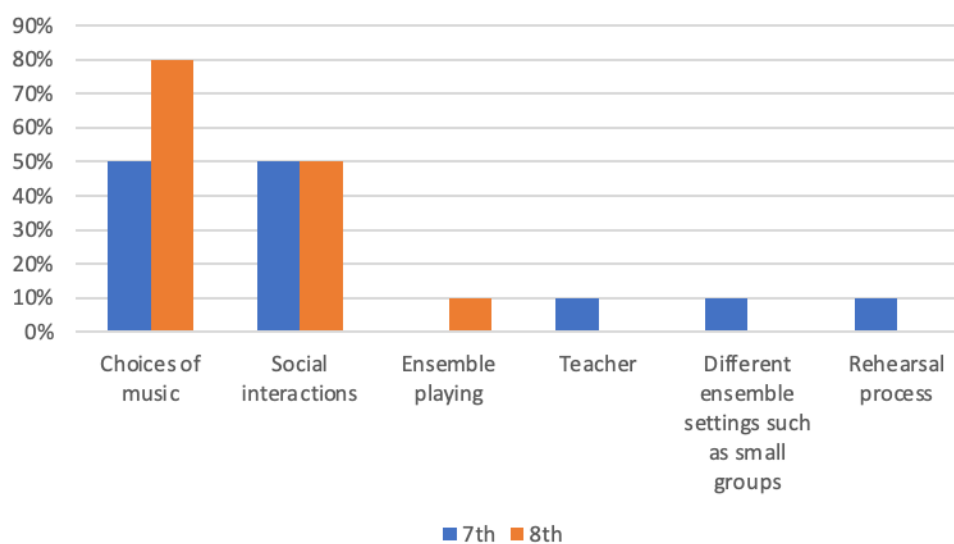
Emotions Students Experienced in Band Grade Level Comparison



Participant Perceptions of Enjoyment or Displeasure in Band

In order to determine possible influences behind those emotions expressed above, participants were asked to provide explanations of what they found more

enjoyable about band and what they found less enjoyable. In describing what participants enjoyed about band, the majority (65%) reported enjoying the choices of music. These responses included examples of liking the music that was similar to movie music, enjoying music that featured their instrument, and liking the variety of musical styles played in band. 50% reported positive social interactions with responses indicating they enjoyed classes with friends. 5% listed playing as an ensemble, responses being about the relationship of how instruments work together to create music and playing music with others. 5% expressed positive interactions with the music teacher. 5% stated they enjoy playing music with small groups such as class activities involving small ensembles, or sectional activities. 5% mentioned they enjoyed the rehearsal process of refining music for performance with responses including “I enjoy how no matter what, we will end up fixing the mistakes in our music to make it sound better.” These trends are represented in Figure 11 and a grade level comparison in Figure 12.

*Figure 11**Perceptions of Enjoyment in Band**Figure 12**Perceptions of Enjoyment in Band*

Conversely, when referring to the aspects of band participation that were not enjoyable, 35% of participants reported having negative interaction with peers. Responses included moments when the class is not focused, when different sections are not as advanced as others, or when peers were negative towards a student who is having difficulties understanding concepts. 10% reported difficulty comprehending the music performed in band class. 10% reported test anxiety with participants commenting “The only thing I don’t enjoy is maybe the playing tests they make me stressed, and I feel like I might screw up.” 5% indicated lack of their instrument ability to match the level of chosen music, 5% completing worksheets, and 5% stalled progress, while 5% reported the inability to participate in other elective opportunities. These trends are represented in Figure 13 and a grade level comparison in Figure 14.

Figure 13

Perceptions of Displeasure in Band Participation

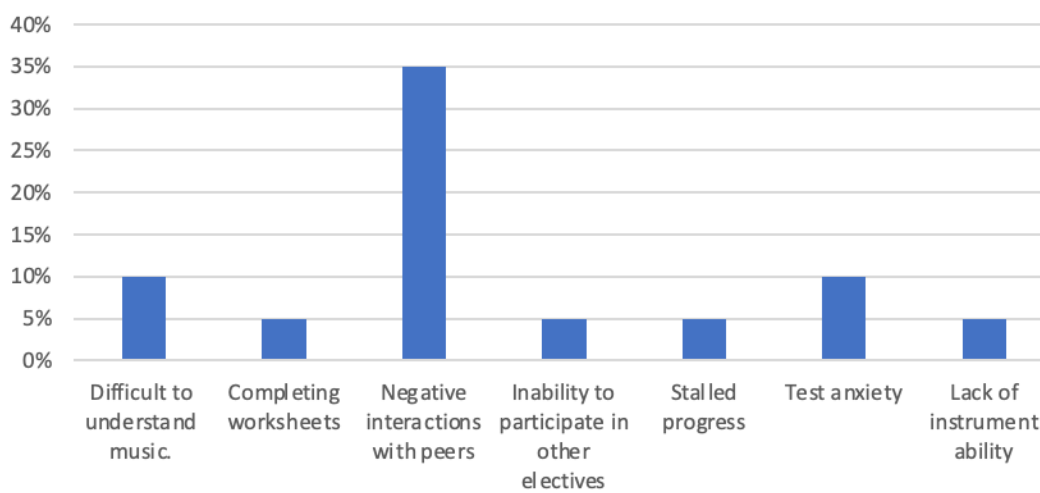
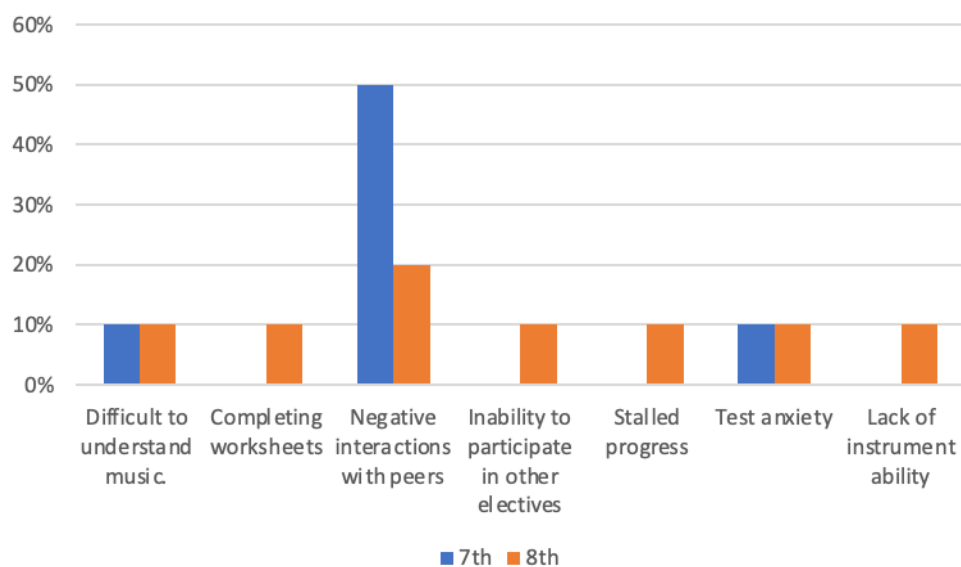


Figure 14

Perceptions of Displeasure in Band Participation Grade Level Comparison

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Student Perception of Their Band Instrument

Further factors impacting student experience in band were described by participants as relating to their instrument. Of the reports, 45% of participants stated that they enjoyed the sound the instruments made, reporting that they found the range of the instrument pleasurable or the volume capabilities. A further 30% enjoyed the mechanics of how the instrument functioned. Statements included “I love the pressing valves, not sure why” and “I like the feel of rolls on the snare drum.” Other reports mentioned how the instrument felt or that the mechanism for making sound in preferred to other instruments they have tried. A smaller group, 25% enjoy the appearance of the instrument, while 10% reported they considered their instrument easy to learn and 10% stated that the instrument is fun to play. These

trends are represented in Figure 15 and grade level comparison provided in Figure 16.

Figure 15

Participant Enjoyment of Their Instrument

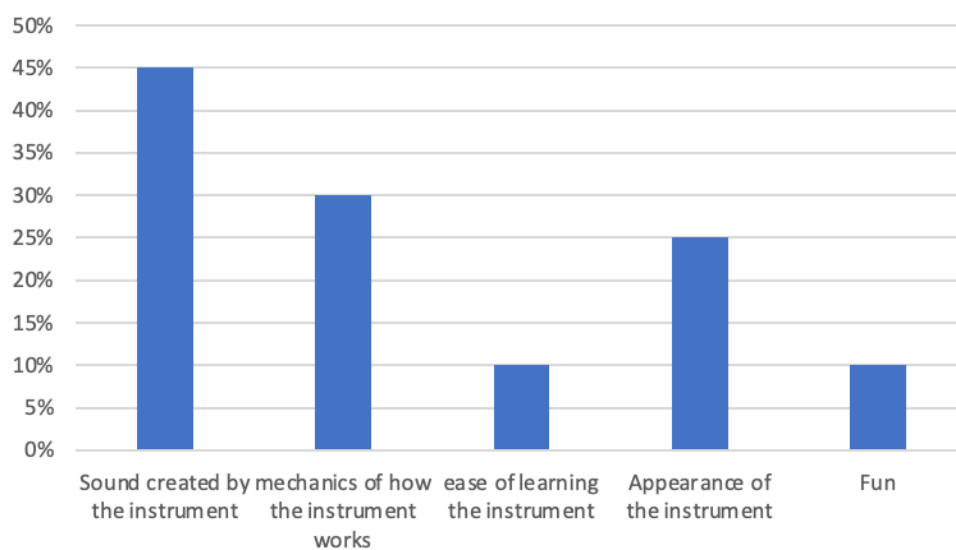
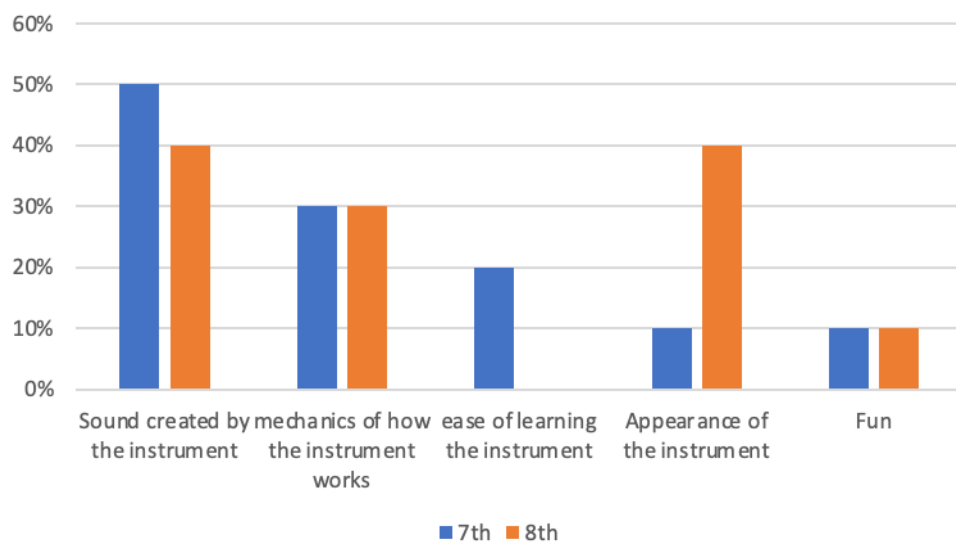


Figure 16

Participant Enjoyment of Their Instrument



Participants also described details of what they did not like about their instruments, with 35% of participants noting how the mechanics of the instrument work. Explanations included “I don’t like how when you change one note you have to change all your fingers”; “I don’t like crossing the break on the clarinet and sometimes since crossing the break doesn’t result in just a raise in octave it can be confusing”; and “The slide sometimes slip off.” 30% reported physical effects of the instrument including being tired after holding the instrument for long periods of time, or the weight of the instrument in general. While 10% indicated they were disappointed in how the instrument looked or that the instrument is dented, another 10% mentioned repair issues including stuck valves, broken reeds, and bent keys. 5% indicated issues with their instrument cases, and 15% indicated that there was nothing they did not like about their instrument. These trends are represented in Figure 17 and a grade level comparison in Figure 18.

Figure 17

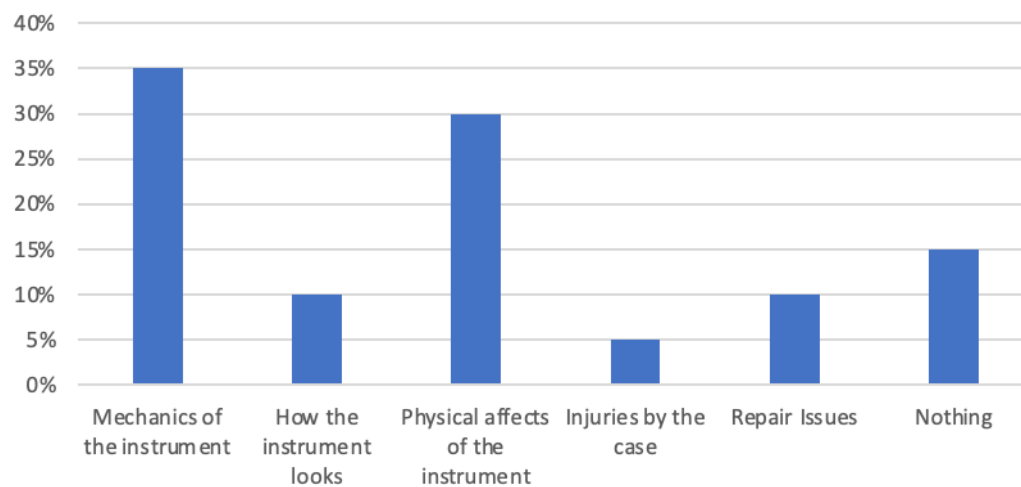
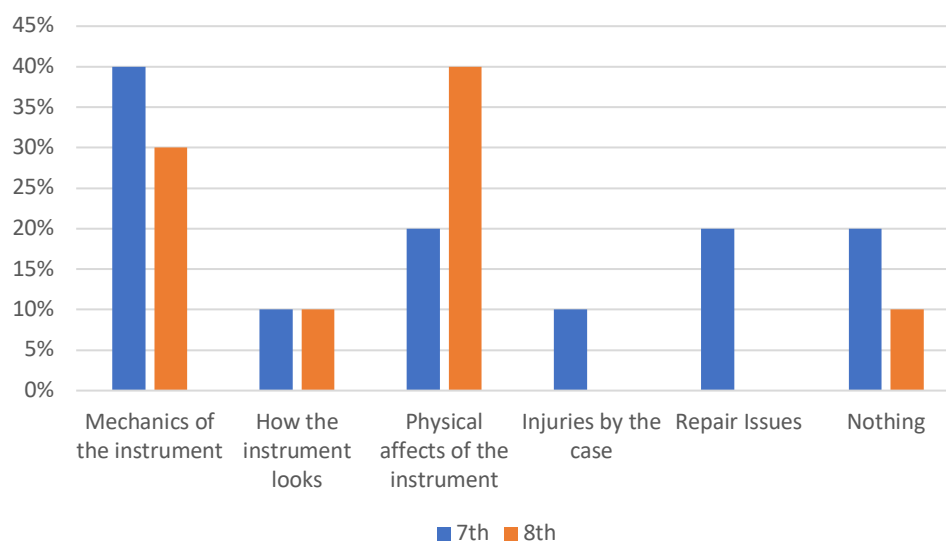
Participant Displeasure of Their Instrument

Figure 18

Participant Displeasure of Their Instrument**Financial Obligations of the Instrument**

Financial obligations were reported as challenges to band participation by participants in this study, with 50% of them responding that their instrument was

expensive, but worth the investment. A further 25% reported good rental programs from local music businesses. Statements included “The cost of the instrument is currently \$20 per month, but it would cost \$1500”; “We rented to buy so if I don’t want to be in band anymore, we didn’t spend thousands on an instrument.” Only 5% reported that costs of instrument repairs were a negative while deciding to continue in band. 10% reported that the instrument was provided to them by a family member. These reports included “My mom already had a clarinet, so we didn’t really need to pay for anything except minor repairs that were no problem getting an instrument”; “It was free because it was my grandfathers.” 15% indicated that nothing about the cost of the instrument was an issue in deciding to continue in band. These trends are represented in Figure 19 and a grade level comparison provided in Figure 20.

Figure 19

Factors of Financial Obligations

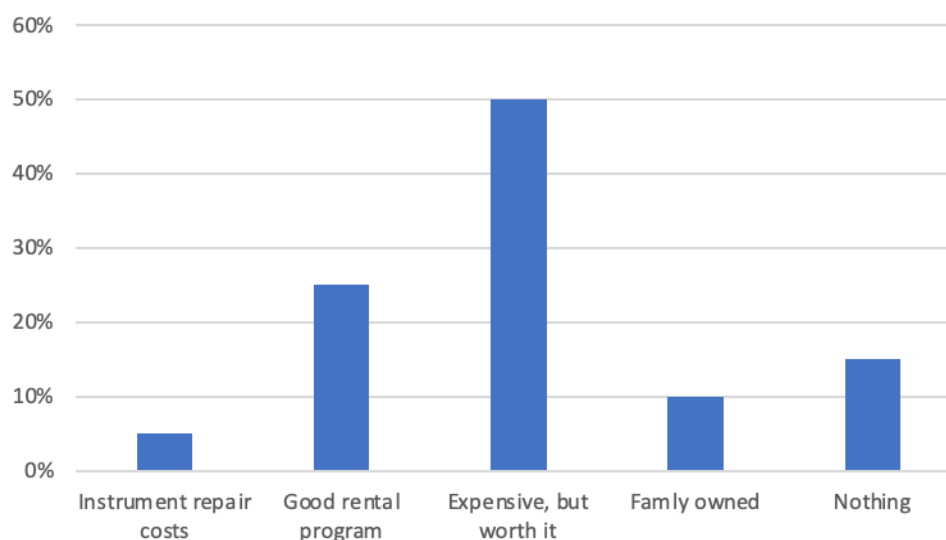
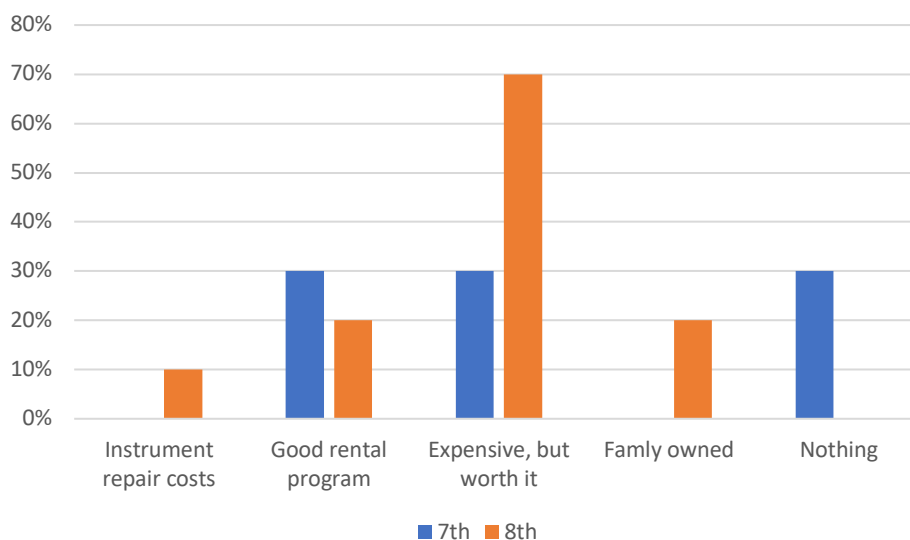


Figure 20

Factors of Financial Obligations Grade Level Comparison**Students Practicing Habits**

Students were asked to describe their practicing habits in order to provide background information on the extent to which time spent outside of class might be influencing their decision to continue in band, whether they had mentioned that factor elsewhere or not. Analysis of results determined that 25% of the participants reported their frequency of practicing as rare; 20% described not practicing at all; 20% indicated that they practice mostly in the band room before school starts. Furthermore, 15% explained that they do not practice but want to, stating “I try to practice at least once a week, but sometimes I don’t because sometimes my dad is sleeping when I would practice”; and “I don’t, I wish I could.” Analysis further indicated that 10% of the participants report their practice habits as emerging, explaining that they work hard to learn the music that is more difficult. However,

10% reported that their practicing habits are receding reporting that they practiced more in previous years and are practicing less as the music gets easier. These trends are represented in Figure 21 and a grade level comparison provided in Figure 22.

Figure 21

Frequency of Practicing

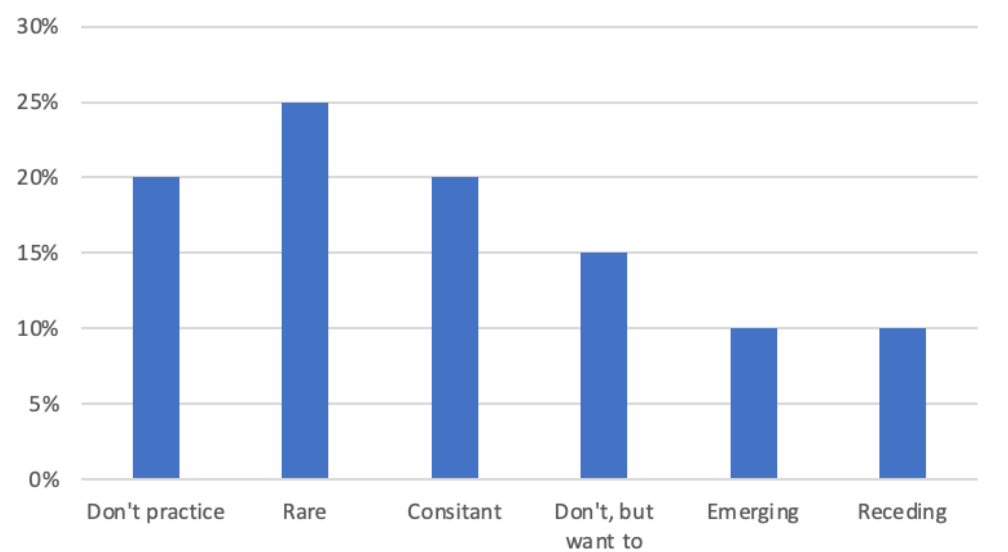
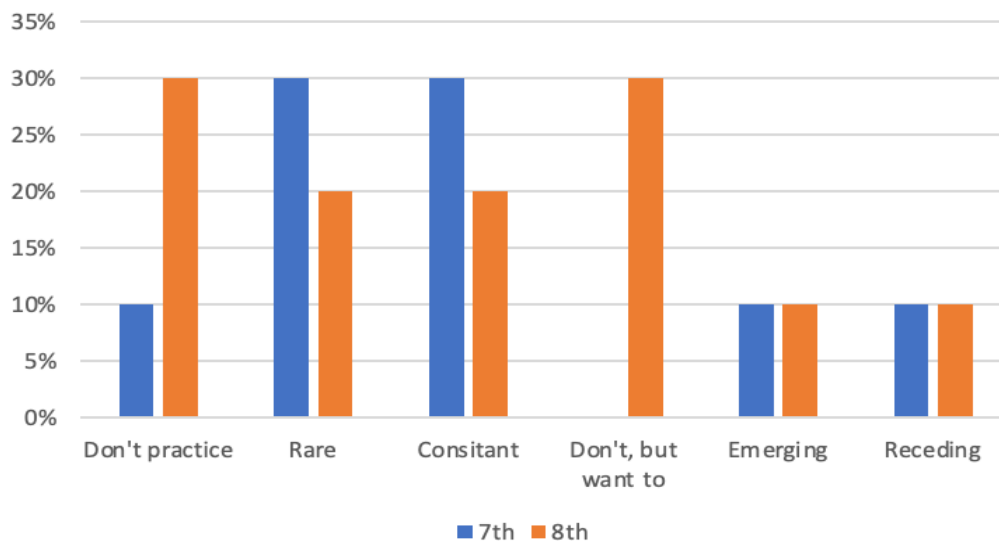


Figure 22

Frequency of Practicing Grade Level Comparison

Students were asked to give more detail on what supports their ability to practice outside of band. In responding, 25% of participants reported having space to practice. Explanations included “If I do practice it helps to have a quiet environment with no one around”; having “free time and a good stand”; and “having a music room in my house that I can practice in.” 15% reported being able to focus on individual skills necessary for playing the music. 10% reported that being bored with other activities allowed them motivation to practice. 5% of the participants mentioned they enjoyed playing music with family, explaining “My older brother will find the music piece for his instrument and play it with me.” 5% enjoyed playing music along with recordings. 5% reported that a small sized instrument made it easy for them to practice. 25% reported nothing made it easy for them to practice. These

trends are represented in Figure 23 and a grade level comparison provided in Figure 24.

Figure 23

Factors of Access to Practice

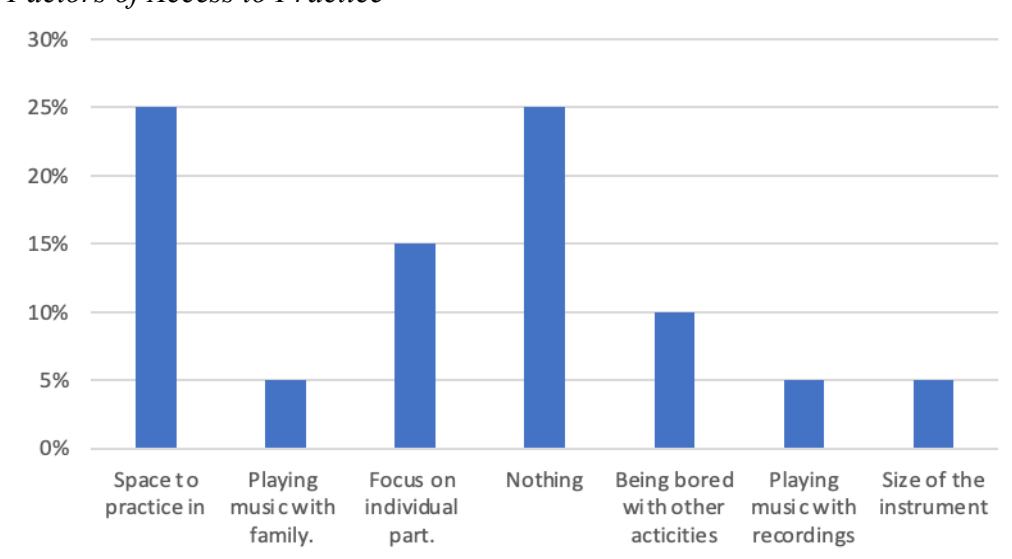
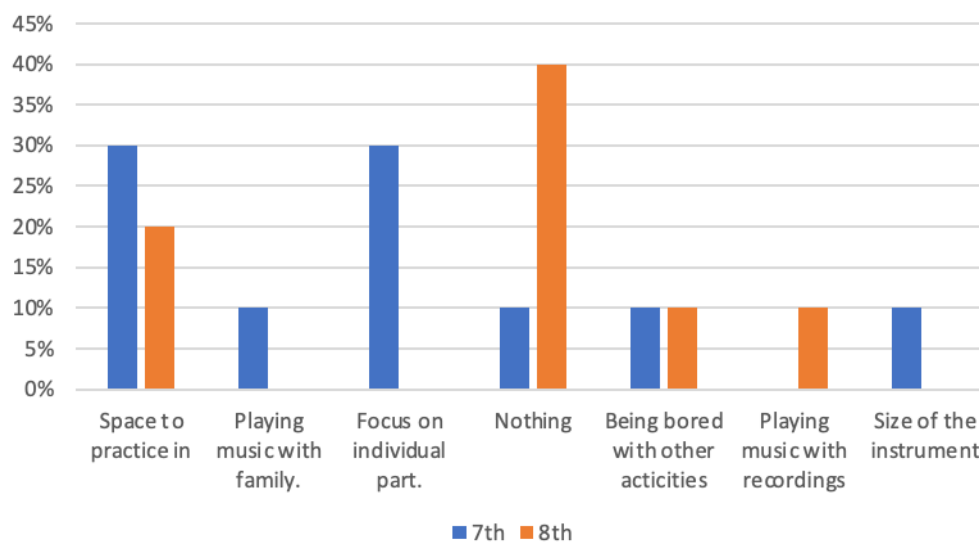


Figure 24

Factors of Access to Practice Grade Level Comparison



Conversely, when asked about what barriers students face to practicing outside of class time, 15% of participants listed other schoolwork, explaining “I have a busy life, and the homework that other teachers give me doesn't help.” 10% reported the instrument being too big or their having difficulty in instrument transportation. 15% reported having extra activities outside of school that took up time in the evenings. 25% indicated that difficulties at home made practicing difficult. Explanations included “It makes it difficult to practice outside of school because my dad's schedule is unpredictable, and he may be sleeping when I would practice”; “What makes it difficult is that I have a younger sister who tries to take my stuff. Whenever I practice [sic] she is either yelling or trying to grab the papers”; “My little brother telling me to stop because I'm annoying.” 10% indicated that they forget to practice, 10% reported a preference for playing in a large ensemble, 5% indicated they had other instruments they were learning in addition to their band instrument. These trends are represented in Figure 25 and a grade level comparison provided in Figure 26.

Figure 25

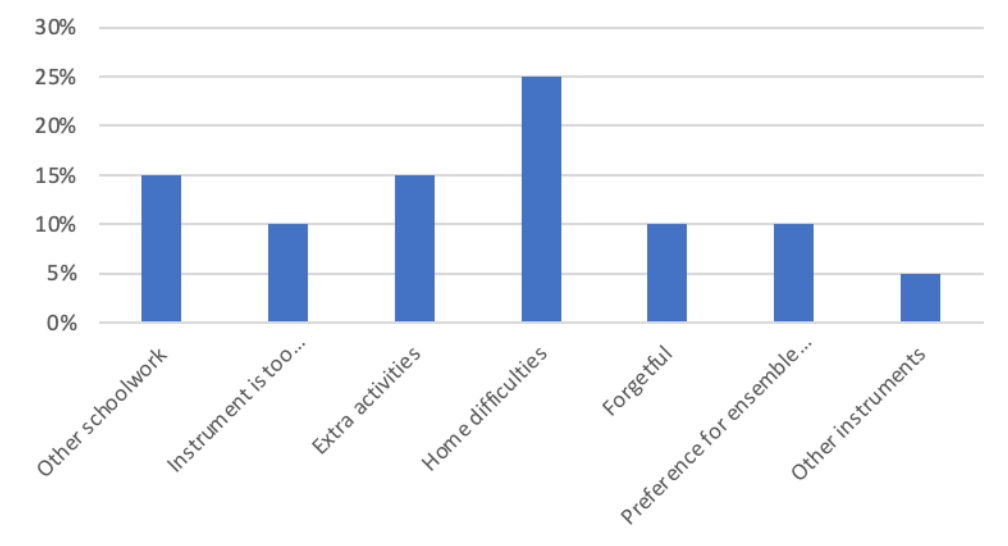
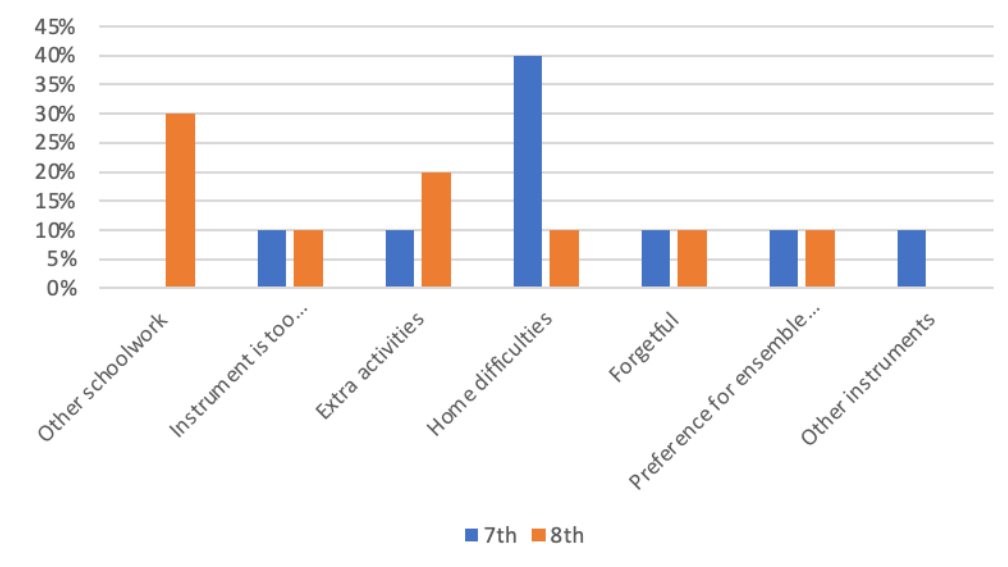
Factors of Difficulty in Practicing Outside of School

Figure 26

Factors of Difficulty in Practicing Outside of School Grade Level Comparison

Summary of Results

This chapter provided results of the data analysis in a study involving action research with a descriptive empirical design using survey technique. Considering the importance of student retention, the researcher's intention was to determine student voice on their reasoning for having continued in band during the current year and of any challenges they faced. Results were expected to inform decisions to address any issues raised. In a sample of convenience, the survey was administered to band students at the middle school where the researcher was currently teaching, ten in Grade 7 and ten in Grade 8. An attempt to recruit students who had dropped out of band was unsuccessful.

Through a style of open-ended questions, the survey asked participants for the perspectives on their decision to continue participation in band. The researcher analyzed the student responses, assigning them to various categories as different themes emerged. The results were presented in a descriptive style, along with examples of quotations. In addition, tables were created to illustrate percentages of responses falling within specific themes and to differentiate those themes between grade levels. The figures helped to represent the prevalence of issues raised by students. However, the richness of the data was exposed through the narrative descriptions and terminology used by students.

Results of data analysis indicate that students mostly made their decisions independently, while some were influenced by parents and peers. The most

prominent influences on continuing in band were reported as enjoyment of the music itself, qualities of their instrument, social interactions with peers, the teacher, sense of accomplishment, and positive emotional experiences in band. Challenges to continuing in band were indicated by few to include missing other electives, the appearance (condition) and mechanics of certain instruments, learning new music, financial obligations of the instrument, and reports of negative interactions with peers. Many students reported being unable to practice outside of band, however few mentioned inability to practice as a challenge to staying in band.

Chapter 5 Summary, Discussion, and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of results, followed by discussion thereof and a conclusion. Annually, the director notices some band students not returning from the previous year. Considering the importance of student retention, the researcher's aim was to provide opportunity for student voice on influences impacting their continued participation in band and any aspects that might impact a potential decision to discontinue band. In this action research, the intention was to obtain results that would inform the director in being able to reinforce positive influences towards staying in band and address challenges that students express as making ongoing participation difficult. In a sample aimed at the student population served by the researcher, the survey was administered to band students at the middle school where the researcher was currently teaching. Of the total 43 band students recruited, 20 agreed to participate with, coincidentally, ten being in Grade 8 and ten in Grade 7. Recruiting students who had dropped out of band for this research was unsuccessful.

The survey with open-ended questions asked participants to identify influences on their continued participation in band and to identify anything they found encouraging or discouraging towards future continuation. The researcher analyzed the data, and assigned each response to one of various categories, as different themes emerged. The results were presented in a descriptive style, including

examples of students' own words. In addition, figures were created to illustrate trends, providing percentages of responses falling within specific themes and contrasting those themes between grade levels. These figures helped to represent the prevalence of issues raised by students, and to determine if answers varied based on grade level experience. However, the richness of the data was found in the narrative descriptions of terminology used by students.

Summary of results

Based on student self-reporting, results of data analysis indicate that most students made their decisions to stay in band independently. Lesser numbers were influenced by parents and peers. The most common influences on continuing band participation were reported as their enjoyment or appreciation of the music itself, the qualities of their instrument, their social interactions with peers, the teacher, a sense of accomplishment, and positive emotional experiences in band. Mentions of challenges to staying in band were far less frequent than positive influences and included missing other electives, the appearance (condition) and mechanics of certain instruments, learning new music, financial obligations of the instrument, and reports of negative interactions with peers. A substantial number of students reported being unable to practice outside of band, however few mentioned this as a challenge to staying in band.

Discussion of Results

This section provides a discussion of the results of the survey. This research follows the suggestion of Hagner (1985) who suggests the teacher listen to the student concerns and to positively work through those issues. This section explores student responses and possible implications that the researcher may address at a later stage, based on student reports.

Influences of Self and Others

The results of this study align with several sources in the literature that also indicate influences of parents, teachers, sibling, or other adults on students' decisions to continue in music ensembles (Hagner, 1985; Dell et al., 2014). When asked about people influencing their decision, the greatest norm was students reporting having made their decision independently. This trend towards independence is different from results indicated by other researchers, such as Hagner (1985) and Dell et al. (2014) who described parental influences as the major factor of continued band participation. However, the results are similar in that the next highest frequency of responses was found in the mention of influence by parents and following that, the teacher, with occasional mention of peers, siblings, or another trusted adult.

These results are encouraging for the director and likely also for the students currently in band, as they indicate that students are largely making the decision because of what the class means to them, not because of the influence of another person. It shows that these students are mostly motivated intrinsically to continue in

band class. It was interesting to the researcher that more of the seventh-grade participants made the choice to stay in band independently of the encouragement of others than that of the eighth grade participants. It is understandable that the parental influence would be next in line, as it would be natural for parents to express opinions on student curricular choices, especially as they get older. Numerous authors promote parental involvement as important to furthering band participation (Hagner, 1985; Stewart, 2005; Briscoe, 2016), therefore leading to the question of how many students might have dropped band because of either lack of any parental influence on the matter or a negative parental influence. Either way, the indication that only a quarter of participants were influenced by parents to stay in band suggests that music student retention may have been higher if more parents had more actively encouraged their children to continue in band. The band program currently does not have any band booster or parent group. While the band director acknowledges the valuable parental support that can be gained through establishing such a group, this aspect has not flourished at his school. This situation may have been augmented recently due to the restrictions on public activities that showcase student work. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school was not able to host the usual public performances in the spring prior to this survey. The social pressure of performances, as explained by Reimer (2003), is felt by the researcher in student, parent, and administration discussions and creates a strong motivator for band achievement. The researcher is hopeful that future performance opportunities will be restored once

pandemic restrictions have been lifted. These performances provide opportunities for students to experience a strong sense of self-worth through praise of others (Sinn, 2011). In future situations, the band director hopes to build parental support for performance opportunities through field trip volunteers, fundraising duties, and any other support role that might be filled by parents. Including parents in their child's music education may help the band director to build a program that is representative of the students.

While there was a strong inclination towards students identifying peers elsewhere on the survey as making it easy for them to stay in band, this factor was not strong enough to be reported as a direct influence on the students' decisions to continue their music engagement through band.

Factors Making Continuing in Band Easy or Difficult

There was a clear tendency in the results towards indication of students appreciating and enjoying the music itself, with two thirds of students expressing positive comments about the choices of music being played. Curricular choices are made for a variety of stylistic, technical, cultural, and skill-appropriate reasons, amongst others. If enjoyment of the music playing in band is seldom experienced by students, however laudable those reasons may be, students will not likely remain in band. Therefore, teachers usually aim to be sensitive towards what music students tangibly enjoy and ensure a good selection of those in the repertoire. The band director's choices in curricular materials, such as the music students are preparing, or

method book choice, were reported by participants as factors in their decision to continue in band. Unlike a Math or English curriculum with set materials, the band director may choose from many different works that are appropriate for the musical concepts being learned. Several resources are available to help band directors choose quality literature for their programs, such as Richard Miles' (1996) collection *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band*.

Participants in both seventh and eighth grade reported that playing familiar music was an influence on their decision to stay in band. While students may enjoy this aspect of music making, it has been cautioned in the literature that student choice of repertoire is not always be in the best interest of educational outcomes (Werpy, 1987, p. 52). The researcher always incorporates some music that is familiar to students for the purposes of recruitment and tries to balance that with music of the traditional canon of western Classical music. It is up to the band director to find music that will be both familiar and fun for students while being educationally significant. This choice in curriculum may be worked into the format of the curriculum.

There was mention in both grade levels of positive interactions with the band director as a factor in their decision to stay in band, with none indicating this as a negative challenge. Understandably, comments regarding the director is one area where students might have been more reticent to express their thoughts because of the power imbalance between researcher and participants. However, students had

been encouraged beforehand to be honest and reminded that their surveys were anonymous. The band director's personal philosophy of music education informs his teaching practices that aim towards positive interactions with students. In the process theory of motivation referred to by Criss (2011), equity is defined as the environment where all students are respected and trusted. The band director hopes to continue and expand on providing a safe space for students, towards being a positive influence on student retention.

Eighth grade participants reported with a higher frequency than seventh graders that the music itself was a factor influencing their decision to continue in band. This discrepancy is a possible indicator that the more advanced students in band are more intrinsically motivated by the desire to engage with music. According to Metz (1984), students who are intrinsically motivated assign higher values to that activity. With many opportunities for students to participate in other activities, it is encouraging that students find enjoyment in the music chosen in class.

A quarter of students identified a sense of accomplishment in playing the music as an enjoyable aspect of band participation. Respondents referenced enjoying the aspect of being able to do something that was different from their non-music peers. Students develop a sense of pride through successful completion of a performance (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Schmidt, 2005). Traditionally at the research site, students in seventh and eighth grade are given four opportunities for public performance in an academic year. As mentioned previously, this

opportunity for public performance was diminished for over an entire year prior to this study, due to COVID restrictions on gathering.

Emotions felt in band class.

Understanding that emotions play an important role in any human activity and would potentially have a strong impact on any student's decision to continue in band, participants were asked to identify the emotions they feel when being in band. Those identified were mostly positive, with almost all students mentioning happiness, followed closely by reports of feeling pride and inspiration, and almost two thirds mentioning belonging, aligning largely with results found in the study by Fredrickson (2004) that indicated emotions such as happiness, joy, and accomplishment. This sense of enjoyment is critical to retention in a band, especially when the program is not compulsory. On a broader philosophical level, it is also essential to nurture in students a lifelong enjoyment of musical engagement (Reimer, 2009; Elliott & Silverman, 2015). Enjoyment, or happiness, is seen as central to the human drive for existence: "Although it seems to occur episodically, we seek happiness for our lives as a whole" (Noddings, 2003, p. 38). Student positive emotions experienced in band contributes to the students' overall well-being, and connection to life values. The abundance of positive emotions stated by students indicate that the majority of students have developed a sense of belonging and esteem needs as described by Maslow (2019). The one student who went so far as to indicate a feeling of "loneliness" is a reminder to the researcher that every student

should feel an essential part of the group and that all the band members should constantly be working toward that goal. Of the other occasional negative emotions reported by participants, most seem to be related to stress from a form of stage fright, or fear of failure. Fear of failure is a common concern among music students articulated in the literature (Schmidt, 2005). As the teacher, continued effort is made to develop a culture building upon student safety and belonging (Morrison, 2001; Laird, 2015; Adderley et al., 2003; Hendricks et al., 2014). Overall, student well-being is impacted through the experience of music that enhances the human experience (Reimer, 2009; Elliott & Silverman, 2015).

Participant Perceptions of Enjoyment or Displeasure in Band

The majority of participants reported enjoying the choices of music played in band class. The researcher believes that enjoyment of the music is reflected in the quality of music that is chosen by the band director for the students and in occasionally allowing students to vote from a pre-approved list that reflects their ability and the group's instrumentation. The researcher has found a challenge in repertoire planning in regard to lack of full instrumentation.

Another large portion of participants reported having positive social interactions with peers. The influence of peers on student enjoyment is reflected in the literature (MacIntyre, Potter, & Burns, 2012) and is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

In contrast to the statements of students describing what they enjoyed about being in band, participants identified several areas they find challenging. More students in seventh grade than eighth grade reported that having difficulties understanding concepts from class, which made band difficult to continue. The researcher chooses literature that correlates with progress that students make through the chosen curriculum. Scott & Wilkins (2014) list that students falling behind their classmates is a factor in students' decisions to discontinue in band. This information is helpful to the director in considering that the pace of curriculum this year might have been too fast for the Grade 7 students who reported this answer on the survey. It is a challenging task to find music for a diversely skilled group of learners. When student ability levels have been vastly different, the researcher has considered providing more opportunities for solo or small ensembles. However, doing so goes against students' expressions of preferring the large ensemble settings. Conversely to providing a sufficient level of challenge, if the director chooses music that is too easy, students may also leave due to boredom. This delicate balance is an ongoing concern (Cooper, 2014; Scott, 2014; Pike, 2011).

A higher percentage of students in eighth grade than seventh grade reported that missing out on other electives made band difficult to continue. Every activity in which students participate costs them in time and other activities, as explored in Bruenger (2009). At the school site, band is one of the few full-year elective offerings. Other elective offerings at the site are offered either quarterly or for a full

semester. Therefore, students who sign up for band are not able to take other elective offerings throughout the school year. By the time students sign up for eighth grade band, they no longer have the options to take any of the other electives offered in middle school. The researcher acknowledges that students have diverse interests and that their elective choices allow them to explore those interests. Often the students will discuss their desire to explore other options with the band director. It is the director's intention through the conversations with students to assure them that options in high school are far more extensive, and to inform them that future participation in band is unlikely once students discontinue (Sandene, 1994).

Student Perceptions of Their Band Instrument

Participants described perspectives of what they enjoyed or did not enjoy regarding their band instrument. It was encouraging to observe that the highest factor of enjoyment by participants in both seventh and eighth grade was identified as enjoying the sound of the instrument. The second highest frequency of reporting was found in student enjoyment of the mechanics of how their instrument works. These results align with Scott's (2014) suggestions that students continue to enjoy band if they have a pleasurable experience with their instrument. He describes a scenario regarding a process of music aptitude tests, student interviews, and mouthpiece testing in an effort to assist students in finding the instrument that will offer the most success (p. 32-34). These are all aspects that the director would continue to consider in the important process of allocating band instruments.

A discrepancy between grade levels regarding the participant's enjoyment of their instrument was present in responses relating to students liking the appearance of their instrument. The participants did not elaborate, but it is assumed this relates to the visual condition of the instruments not being dented, scratched, or damaged. That importance of visual appeal to students may be a consideration in assessing the value of the school's inventory and ensuring repairs or replacements being attended to as often as possible. The researcher examined the school instrument inventory and there was only one school-owned instrument in use for the eighth-grade band at the time of the survey (excluding percussion). Almost half of the eighth-grade participants reported they enjoyed the appearance of the instrument. By comparison, only a tenth of seventh-grade participants reported enjoying the appearance of their instrument. Instrument inventory records showed that eight students in seventh grade band were borrowing school-owned instruments (excluding percussion). While it is not possible to determine from the survey if school-owned instruments were the ones to which these responses referred, it might be worth considering the appearance (visual condition) of these instruments in determining needs for repair or replacement.

When asked what they did not like about their instruments, similar numbers of participants from both grade levels referred to the mechanics of how the instrument functioned. However, approximately the same number of participants reported that same issue of instrument function as being an aspect about the instrument they enjoyed. Almost half of eighth grade participants reported that the

physical effects of playing their instruments were aspects they did not enjoy. The researcher considered this possibly to be a result of the broader selection of larger instruments available to the eighth-grade band members that generally take some time for the students to build stamina for more air capacity and strength. On tracing these specific comments back to the demographic question on the instrument concerned, this impression regarding the larger instruments was confirmed. These instruments include tuba, bass clarinet, and baritone saxophone. One response from an eight-grade participant mentions the amount of air required for the tuba as a factor of instrument difficulty. Considering that reports on instrument function occurred at about two-thirds of those referring to enjoying the sound of the instrument, it appears that the enjoyable sound is likely considered worth the cost of dealing with how the instrument functions.

Socio-economic Influences

At the start of this research, the researcher was interested in any socio-economic concerns that may have been reported. Participants were asked two questions on the survey regarding socio-economic factors. One question related to the cost of the instrument was an issue for their continued participation in band. A quarter of participants referenced local rental programs helping their families to afford an instrument. These businesses offer monthly rentals for varying fees, dependent upon the instrument. Most of the band instruments that a young musician would use are approximately \$20 per month. Half of participants noted that the cost

of the instrument was expensive, but that they felt the cost was worth it to continue in band. They appear to have determined that their interest in continued band participation outweighs the cost of the instrument. The researcher understands that the participants are below the age of employment and that parents may have shared financial concerns when discussing instrument options with students. Unfortunately, the researcher did not manage to include the perspectives of participants who were no longer part of the school's band program as the cost of an instrument may have been a critical factor for those students who left the band program. Other researchers have also suggested that some families may not be able to support the additional cost of either instrument purchase, rental, or maintenance (Corenblum & Marshall, 1998; Shaw, 2017; Bates, 2012).

The other question regarding socio-economic issues asked participants to describe their practicing habits outside of the classroom. Many participants reported that home situations prevented them from practicing. Not having adequate space or having family members that have varied work schedules were reported as not being conducive to practice. Difficulties at home were reported predominantly by seventh-grade participants.

While the number of participants who reported consistent practice was low, the circumstances and structure of band class does not make this reality a critical concern for the band director. The reason for not being concerned is that the current schedule includes fifty minutes per day of band practice, which is a reasonable

amount of daily practice for students at this level. The consistency of instructional opportunity allows for reliable student progression in their skills, despite lack of consistent practice at home. In the circumstance that band class might have been only once or twice per week, the lack of home practice would have been of more serious concern to the band director.

Determining percentages of low SES students who are participating in band may usually be accessed by cross referencing band students with those students approved for the free and reduced lunch program. Doing so was not possible during the year in which this survey was conducted. Due to Covid 19, the free lunch program was provided for all students therefore students did not need to apply for the free lunch program.

Peer Influences

Results of peer interactions are compared with the findings of MacIntyre, Potter, and Burns (2012) who closely examined peer influences on students' decision-making. They found that peer influences can be stronger influences on students' retention than teachers or parents. While this study conversely found a higher reporting rate pertaining to parental influence than that of peers, nevertheless, peer and social influences were reported at high levels in other mentions of what students enjoyed about band. Positive interactions with peers are suggested to support a classroom environment allowing students to learn without restriction (Hendricks, Smith, & Stanuch, 2014). Ensemble settings allow students to work as a

group to reach musical goals, with the potential for fostering positive or negative peer social interaction. Fewer number of students in the study reported negative peer influences. Developing a classroom environment where all students feel valued is a priority for the band director. The only indications of detail pertained to frustrations at the progress of specific groups, primarily the brass sections. This frustration may be an issue of the director's lack of direct knowledge of brass instruments. The director is proficient in demonstrating advanced woodwind concepts for students but lacks skills to demonstrate more advanced brass techniques. In the past, the band director has invited guests to demonstrate those skills for students. Once again, due to COVID 19 protocols, the school did not allow visitors for over a year prior to this survey being conducted. Even with bringing in guests, the director admits he needs to build up his brass technique. While the frequency of these reports was mentioned in only one fifth of seventh-grade students, half of the eighth-grade students identified negative peer interaction. As students are playing at higher levels, the frustration at those students not keeping up with the more advanced ones, appears to increase.

Music ensemble may provide a safe space for students who do not succeed in other academic areas. However, students who struggle academically are also less likely to continue in ensemble participation (Shaw, 2017; Hoffman 2013). The music teacher works closely with the school counselors and support staff to seek out the best opportunities for students to receive support in academic areas without

hindering their ability to participate in the school music ensemble. While student problems with academics did not present as an area of concern on the survey, it is possible that the students who dropped out of band might have faced such challenges.

Discussion on procedures

This section discusses the various aspects of the research process that were difficult or would be adjusted on future similar research attempts. The researcher acknowledges that various elements of this research were not within the direct control of the researcher. The methodological assumption to the study allowed for changes to the design based on experiences encountered during the course of the research.

COVID-19-related Challenges

While completing this research, many normal operations were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes to normal operations pertained to the research site, parent communication, and the process of obtaining research approvals. The research site's operating level underwent several modifications after meetings of the school board throughout the year. The frequency of these changes made it difficult for the researcher to predict how to best administer the survey, or what part of the day would be acceptable for students to take the survey. Several possible research subjects were not doing in-person learning at the time of the survey being conducted. The students in the online setting were sent the recruitment video and follow-up

emails. However, no communication was returned from those students. Furthermore, the school administration increased its own level of data collection during the pandemic, by asking students and parents to complete numerous surveys to gauge effectiveness of school activities, level of operation, and online materials. When approached by the researcher, many potential participants mentioned they were tired of filling out surveys.

COVID-19 safety protocols, as established by the school district were followed during the collection of surveys at the research site. Participants were seated six feet apart, and surfaces were sanitized before and after the survey. Face coverings were encouraged, but not required while participants were taking the survey. The researcher was a distance greater than six feet from the participants, and wearing a face covering.

The time taken for human subject research approval to be granted by the university was far beyond previous norms, compounded by the added layer of approvals needed by an additional committee handling COVID-19-related procedures. These delays impacted the time available for extending recruiting efforts.

Additional challenges

In conducting this research, additional challenges were encountered in the recruitment of participants. With the potential middle-school participants being in a variety of different classrooms, the initial recruitment of all past band students was

achieved with considerable effort. However, there were additional difficulties in connecting with them for repeated follow-ups to remind them about returning consent forms and to announce final survey information. In the future, it might be beneficial to adjust the timing of a similar survey to the end of the academic year when students have selected their classes for the following year. Participants for the survey would then only be recruited from the band classes and would refer to their intentions for the following year. This timing would allow for more consistent contact with the participants. Furthermore, the participants' reporting of their experiences would probably be more accurate, as the decision to sign up or not sign up for band the following year would have just been made.

Limitations of the research.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this action research gives insight into the experiences only of students currently in the music program at the school where the researcher was employed at the time of the study. The results are not generalizable beyond this population. While the researcher hopes to address any concerns related to on-going participation in band voiced by the participants, he acknowledges that not all areas of concern may have been articulated by the students in the first place. In the second place, having now completed the report, not all concerns raised would be in his power to address. For example, while he may be able to take action to alleviate certain challenges and foster positive influences, some of these issues might

have evolved through personal matters related to the specific student, that would be beyond his control. Sandene (1994) suggests that,

Despite the best efforts of all concerned, some conflicts between individual music teachers and students simply cannot be alleviated. Presence of students with poor attitudes and a lack of interest can negatively affect the atmosphere of an entire classroom. In such cases it may be best for music teachers to advise disinterested students to leave a given program or to pursue other alternatives within music. (p. 34)

However, the researcher would do his best to repair any conflicts, to encourage positive attitudes and inspire student interest in band, acknowledging that there are ways in which he may endeavor to improve in his position as band director.

Implications for Music Education

Based on the critical inquiry framework for this study, the results of this action research will directly inform ameliorative steps to be taken by the researcher in his role as band director at this specific middle school. The results provide valuable indicators of key areas to be addressed in improving retention. While results of this action research should not be generalized beyond this population, other music educators might find this information illuminating when considering their own band populations. The results might be informative in the design of similar surveys to be conducted in their own schools aimed at determining influences impacting their own students' continuation in music ensemble programs. Like other studies conducted in limited populations, the results provide valuable information for the continued development of the relevant school music band program (Gamin, 2005; Werpy, 1987; Stewart, 2005). The researcher's experience of achieving deeper insights

through allowing students the opportunity to voice their perspectives may inspire other ensemble directors to do the same.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further study of influences on retention in public school ensemble programs is recommended within different geographical locations. The researcher suggests that these studies might be repeated within a school after specific time increments, when ever-changing student demographics may impact results, based on any changes to overall community population growth, socioeconomic trends, and numerous other factors. Furthermore, in efforts to keep music programs relevant to students, music educators may find value in periodically gaining the perspectives of students.

A valuable follow-up survey for this specific study would be to gain parent perspectives on their thoughts of what impacted their children's continued or discontinued participation in the music program. A survey asking similar questions of the parent may help educators to determine the possible need for courses of action in gaining parent support and involvement in the school music program, and also to address other student needs that may be relevant. Furthermore, this survey was restricted to current band students and could lead to further studies of responses from students who had discontinued band. It could also be administered to students across the entire school district. Clearly, any challenges to continuing in band were ultimately overcome by the current band students. Seeking perspectives of former band students would allow for more in-depth information. It could also lead to a

study of students who had never signed up for band, in order to learn any reasons why they might have been prevented access or have chosen not to join.

Furthermore, music educators wishing to do similar surveys with their programs may also consider adding more questions regarding the behaviors of the band director. As discussed by Blocher, Greenwood and Shellahamer (1997) and Scott and Wilkinson (2014), the attitudes and practices of a band director can impact student decision to continue in band. Relevant changes might allow for more student access in participation in band programs. Listening to student voice may also be valuable in other types of music ensembles and in settings outside of the public school.

Conclusion

In this action research, soliciting student voice on decisions to continue band participation resulted in determining valuable information on which the researcher will be able to act in broadening student access to band. In his capacity as band director, he will foster positive influences reported by students, such as parental and social influences, and take specific action on negative influences, such as financial challenges and difficulties with the mechanics and weight of larger instruments. Areas that are being considered include promoting parent education on the value of band programs, forming a parent support group, and developing a classroom environment to avoid small groups of peers being targeted due to lack of sufficient progress. The band director will also continue to encourage positive interactions

between students. The overwhelmingly positive emotions experienced by participants encourage the director to continue typical band activities. Other positive areas included student appreciation for the music being played and appreciation for the look and feel of their instruments. Conversely, negative expressions by others regarding the look (condition) of their instruments and feel of the mechanics of their instruments have encouraged the director to examine the condition of instruments needing repair, maintenance, or replacement. In wanting to address the very few negative emotions reported by students, the director is inspired to provide additional assistance towards ensuring feelings of success and avoiding peer criticism of those who progress at a slower rate. Despite most students reporting a sense of belonging, even having one student reporting feeling lonely is considered too many. Thus, the director will work with students to develop a greater awareness of inclusion and collaboration with all. Seeing how many students encountered obstacles to practicing at home, offering practical advice to parents, and giving students the opportunity to practice in the band room outside of rehearsal time might help to alleviate these issues for some students.

This study indicated key influences on band retention pertaining to parental, peer, and teacher influences. Furthermore, it demonstrated positive influences in students' enjoyment of the music itself, appreciation for their instrument, social and emotional satisfaction, and sense of accomplishment. Negative influences included students' disappointment in condition of their instruments, unhappiness with certain

peer interactions, financial costs, challenges in learning new music, and missing out on other electives. The researcher found that giving students the opportunity to voice their perspectives provided him with a wealth of valuable information regarding actions he might take to improve retention in the middle school band program.

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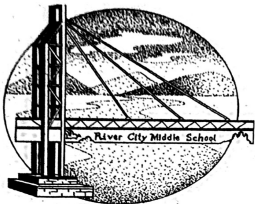
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Appendix A:
Site Permission Letter




River City Middle School
1505 N. Fir Street
Post Falls, Idaho 83877
208-457-0933

To Whom It May Concern:

Site permission is given for survey research "Examining Factors of Student Retention in Middle School Band" pending approval by IRB, and Post Falls School District Superintendent.

Sincerely,


Andy Preiss, Principal

Appendix B:

Parental Consent Form

Factors of student retention in a middle school band program survey

Principal Investigator: Tyler Renninger
Eastern Washington University Masters Candidate
Phone: 208-819-0090
Email: trenninger@eagles.ewu.edu

Project Advisor and Responsible Project Investigator: Dr. Sheila Woodward
Email: swoodward1@ewu.edu

The purpose of this investigation is to give voice to students regarding the factors that contribute to their decision to continue or discontinue in their middle school band program between grade levels in middle school. The researcher hopes to gain knowledge of equity and access in the band program. This research fulfills the researcher's requirements for a Master's Thesis project at Eastern Washington University.

Procedures

Once permission forms have been collected, participants will be asked to complete a survey about fourteen questions in length. Students who are no longer currently in the school's band program will complete the survey in the band room during a study hall period. Students who are still in the band program will complete the survey during their normal band time in the band room. All COVID precaution protocols regarding social distancing, masks, etc. being used at River City Middle School will apply to this project. Any student completing the survey at home should arrange for a place conducive to privacy.

Questions on the survey are designed to get student responses on influences of their decision to continue or discontinue in band class. Below are a few sample questions.

- Describe what you like about your band instrument.
- Describe your practicing habits outside of the classroom as a member of the band (please be honest and don't feel bad if it is not much, it just helps to know).
- Explain if anything about the cost of the instrument influence your decision and why.

Risk, Stress or Discomfort

The risk level for participation in this survey does not exceed that one would normally expect in typical daily activities. The decision to participate or not participate will have no impact on a student's academics or enrollment at River City Middle School. All surveys are to be completed anonymously. Current COVID protocols will be in place during this project.

Other Information

Survey answers are completely anonymous. Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time during the survey without penalty. There will be no reward or incentives of any kind for participation and no penalty for non-participation.

Signature of Principal Investigator:

Date

The study has been explained to me, and I give consent for my child to participate in this survey. I have had an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher. I understand that by signing this form I am not waiving my legal rights. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

Signature of Parent:

Date

If you have any concerns about your child's rights as a participant in this research or any complaints you wish to make, you may contact Charlene Alspach, Executive Director, Grant & Research Development, at (509) 359-2517 or calspach@ewu.edu.

Appendix C:

Participant Recruitment Script

Hello ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Renninger here. Let me start by saying thank you for listening to this presentation today. I am working on a research project as part of my master's thesis, and I need your input. This research is focused on current and past band students. My research involves examining student reasons for either staying in band or leaving band. I would like to know your perspectives on the subject, such as, what you have liked or not liked about your instrument, about the choice of music we played, or what your feelings have been about band in general. This information will not only help my research, but also inform how we structure our band class to represent the students at River City Middle School and to help improve access of all students to participation in band. Your participation will make a big difference and I would appreciate your help in doing this survey very much.

All surveys turned in will be completely anonymous. This means that you can feel safe giving honest answers on the survey, no matter what your reasons have been for staying in or leaving band. The fifteen-question survey will be filled out on the computer using the survey monkey program that is programmed to be completely anonymous. You can stop the survey at any time with no penalty.

If you would like to join in this research, we will need a few things to take care of. As part of the research process, we need to make sure we get your parent or guardians' permission. Copies of the permission forms are available now from your enrichment teacher, or you can visit me in the band room. If a digital copy is preferred, I can send an email with the permission forms. Please have these returned by Thursday next week.

Once the permission forms have been returned, the survey will be sent to your email the following week. You can complete the survey at home, or at school during your enrichment class as worked out with your teacher.

In order for me to complete this research I need as many of you current and former band students as possible to participate in this survey. The more students who join in, the better I can understand how to structure our band class and try to improve student access to band.

Thank you for listening to this presentation. I hope you will consider joining us in this survey. I look forward to hearing from you.

Vita

Author: Tyler Renninger

Place of Birth: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Undergraduate Schools Attended: University of Idaho

Degrees Awarded: Bachelor of Music, 2013

Professional Experience:

Music Teacher, Post Falls School District, Post Falls, ID 2014.