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# Students' Experiences Within a Community-Based Orchestral Music Education Program: A Phenomenological Exploration

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education

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STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITHIN A  
COMMUNITY-BASED ORCHESTRAL MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

(Spine Title: Students' Experiences within a Music Education Program)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Leigh Walter

Graduate Program  
in  
Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

**CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION**

|                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                     |
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The thesis by

**Leigh Walter**

entitled:

**Students' Experiences within a Community-Based Orchestral Music Education Program**

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of the thesis Examination Board

## Abstract and Keywords

Phenomenology was used to explore eighteen students' experiences of participating within a community-based orchestral music education program with the aim of gaining understanding of experiences that may enter into the continuance of musical instruction. Interpretive analysis of audiotapes of in-depth interviews revealed three themes which together captured students' holistic experience of being in a community-based orchestral music education program: (1) contextual factors facilitating/impeding progress; (2) enacting progression; and (3) experiencing the process of participating in the program. Findings revealed the importance of instructor feedback, students' perceived necessity of striving, and students' subjective feelings of participating in the program to student progression and continuance in the music education program. These insights suggest the merit of encouraging student participation in music education programs to promote the intellectual, social and emotional growth of students.

**Keywords:** music education, progression, student participation, student engagement

## Epigraph

Music is by far the most wonderful method we have to remind us each day  
of the power of personal accomplishment.

Chris S. Salazar

He who hears music, feels his solitude peopled at once.

Robert Browning

## Dedication

To music, for the opportunities you provide to learn and inspire.

## Acknowledgements

One can only hope for the assistance of others when deciding to take on the task of completing a thesis. I would like to publicly acknowledge the support and encouragement from a number of individuals that I had the great fortune of keeping company with on this journey.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

If complete understanding of any phenomenon is even possible, it is assumed that all efforts are made to explore the phenomenon from all angles and perspectives. The exploration of student experiences within a community-based orchestral music education program should not be an exception. By allowing music students to explain their own experiences, music educators and researchers may have a greater opportunity to further explore and comprehend the phenomenon of a music education program. By delving into the unique and individual experiences of students, the researcher may begin to reveal the fundamental nature of such music education programs and thus present insights to promote and encourage student interest and participation.

### Background and Significance

Music education, whether in a school or community setting, is important to the intellectual, social (Adderley et al., 2003) and emotional growth of students (Winner & Cooper, 2000). As part of an arts program, music education encourages students to express themselves in different ways and can introduce them to new worlds of experiencing their own humanity (Reimer, 1995). In order to better understand how children come to incorporate music education into their lives there are important data to be gathered, relationships to understand, and knowledge to put into practice which can benefit students and promote their involvement in music education (Thomas, 1992).

Students usually begin community-based music education programs as young children and are enrolled by their parents. However many choose to drop out when they are able to do so; others choose to continue. Current research suggests that it is important to understand what influences affect student retention in music programs. Self-concept

and student beliefs (Legette, 1998), parental and peer influences (Sichivitsa, 2003), feelings of satisfaction (Rife et al., 2001), and teacher immediacy and instructional strategies (Allen et al., 2006) have all been identified as factors that affect student retention in music. While the expectation is held that stakeholders in music education such as parents and teachers act to promote student retention in music programs, student perceptions of their own experiences in music are not well understood. A greater understanding of students' own perceptions is needed to provide community music teachers, music education researchers, and parents with critical knowledge and insight to further promote student retention in music education.

Using the methodology of phenomenology, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of one group of students involved in an orchestral music education program with the aim of gaining insights that might be relevant to informing teaching practices, curriculum development, program planning, and student-teacher interactions within the context of musical instruction.

#### Statement of the Thesis Problem

The aim of this investigation was to explore and investigate students' experiences within a community-based orchestral music education program with the intent of gaining in-depth understanding of the experiences encountered by students that may enter into their desire to continue. The proposed research question was: What are the lived experiences of students enrolled within a community-based orchestral music education program?

## Statement of Thesis Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore, through the use of phenomenology, the perspectives of students with regard to their involvement and participation within an orchestral music education program. The ultimate aim was to gain in-depth understanding of experiences that may enter into the continuance of musical instruction from the students' perspective in order to better inform music education researchers and teachers.

## Study Context

Since 1987, the purpose of the Maple Tree School for Talent Education (MTTE)<sup>1</sup> in a mid-sized city in Southern Ontario has been to encourage the enjoyment of music through playing musical instruments and to foster an interest in, and appreciation of, good music, by endeavoring to create an environment in which quality instruction can thrive for children on a regular basis. This community-based music education program brings children and youth together during the regular academic year to work together in group classes and performing ensembles under the direction of competent instructors and conductors. Performing opportunities are created through concerts, recitals, and community events and festivals. Children are instructed privately in violin, viola, cello, bass, guitar, and harp with group instruction in Suzuki-method classes from Pre-Twinkle study through to Book 7 and beyond.<sup>2</sup> The school includes violin ensembles, viola

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<sup>1</sup> Program has been renamed to ensure anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> The Suzuki Method was founded over 50 years ago by the Japanese violinist Dr. Shinichi Suzuki. He observed that young children from all over the world speak their mother tongue naturally and easily by listening to the sounds and rhythms of the language in their environment. He observed that parents encourage and reinforce their children's efforts to learn their language. The Suzuki method applies these same principles to develop the whole child through the study of a musical instrument. The method has been developed for piano, voice and several string instruments, including violin. Young children are exposed to a musical environment at home by listening to recordings of the repertoire to be learned. Children are motivated to learn when they live in an environment where music is present and they see other students their age performing and having lessons. Suzuki teachers are trained to establish a studio environment where children can learn at their own pace. (The Suzuki Method, 2011)

ensemble, cello ensemble, Senior, Intermediate and Junior orchestras, chamber music ensembles such as quartets, and a harp ensemble. The MTTE functions on Saturday mornings as a supplement to the students' private musical studies and is paid for by a combination of fees, donations, and fundraising.

The majority of students in the Saturday group instruction program enter at the suggestion of their private instructor and with the support of parents. Students are placed into playing ensembles by the program director and instructors based on their playing and reading level within the Suzuki-based string curriculum. Depending on the development of skill level and their age, the student progresses through junior, intermediate, and senior ensembles on the recommendation of instructors and conductors. Many of the intermediate and senior level students of similar playing proficiency are grouped into small ensembles such as quartets and quintets in addition to their regular playing ensembles and orchestra. In the majority of cases, the instructors select and group the students for these small ensembles. For several students this means having to meet and work with other students of varied ages with whom they are unfamiliar.

The students within this program tend to begin at a very young age and continue until they are ready to attend university or college after their secondary school years. Most of the students, as well as their families, get to know each other well during these many years and also become very familiar with the structure of the program as well as the instructors. In some cases, where students have continued their study of music at university, students have returned to help coach and become instructors within the program.

Within this community-based music education program, the director and instructors, including quartet coaches, orchestra conductors, and ensemble leaders try to create and provide an excellent opportunity for, and standard of, music instruction to enhance the private education of each student as well as encourage and foster a greater love and appreciation for music. Within this context of music education, however, the students' lived experiences were not well known which motivated the investigation described herein.

### Overview of Chapters

This thesis has been organized in accordance with the monograph format accepted by the University of Western Ontario. Chapter 2 consists of a literature review of relevant research studies on factors related to student experiences and retention in music programs. Chapter 3 discusses the qualitative methodology and methods used in the research investigation in this thesis. Chapter 4 explores students' perceptions of their experiences within a community-based orchestral music education program. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data are described. Chapter 5 summarizes the contributions to the science achieved from this investigation in its entirety and discusses how these findings of student experiences within a community-based orchestral music education program advance our understanding of student experience and retention in music education. The implications for professional practice and further research are discussed.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of relevant research studies on factors related to student experiences and retention in music programs, including (1) self-concept and student beliefs; (2) relevant parental, community, and peer factors; (3) feelings of emotional and cognitive satisfaction; (4) participation, engagement and motivation; and (5) teacher immediacy and instructional strategies. The goal of this review is to describe existing evidence and identify the gaps in the current understanding of students' experiences within community-based music education programs.

### Self-Concept and Student Beliefs Regarding Failure and Success in Music Education Programs

Several studies describe student experiences in music programs specifically in terms of their performance and achievement in these programs. In a descriptive survey consisting of responses from 589 students in the 4th to 12th grade, Asmus (1986) found that students tend to attribute their own success or failure in music education to internal factors such as ability and effort. Asmus found that as students increase in age, they tend to cite effort less frequently as a reason for success than they do ability. In another descriptive survey, Legette (1998) discovered a similar tendency in student attributions to success and failure in music education. He used the Music Attribution Orientation Scale (MAOS) to classify the responses of 1,114 elementary, middle, and high school students. Results indicated that students tend to place more importance on ability and effort as causes for success or failure in music education than any other cause. Klinedinst (1991) investigated the ability of variables such as musical aptitude, math and reading achievement, and self-concept in music to predict performance achievement and retention



of fifth-grade instrumental students (n=205) in music education. Results of a discriminate function analysis indicated that academic achievement, socioeconomic status, and self-concept in music were valid predictors of student retention in music education.

The literature on self-concept and student beliefs regarding success and failure in music education is limited. However, it is relevant and is an area of research that requires further investigation. While the findings from these studies illuminate the reasons students cite for their successes and failures in music, they do not examine *how* they experience and understand their own experiences of music education, particularly specific programs. In order to convey a broader lens through which to look at student success and failure in music education, further investigation into students' own perceptions of their success and failure in music education is needed.

#### Parental, Peer, and Community Factors Related to Students'

#### Experiences in Music Education Programs

Many studies have focused on the parental, peer and community factors related to students' experiences in music education programs. In one descriptive study, Hurley (1995) found that parental support may be one of the mitigating factors affecting student achievement and motivation in music. After interviewing elementary and middle school students at different points of their instruction in a string music program (n=21), Hurley found that considerations such as conflicts with other activities, loss of interest, and parental support can sometimes play a more vital role in students' motivation and achievement in music than positive self-concepts. However, Hurley also stressed that students do not exit programs because of any one single factor. He also found that the majority of continuing string students had a family member who played an instrument.

In a survey study, Zdzinski (1996) examined relationships among parental involvement and outcomes in instrumental music. This study included students from Grade 4 through 12 (n=406) involved in rural band programs of two American states. Zdzinski used already developed measures to measure affective outcomes, cognitive musical achievement and performance achievement as well as an already created Likert-scale to measure parental involvement. The researcher found that parental involvement was significantly related to all outcomes in music with an especially strong correlation to the affective outcomes such as attitudes toward music. Parental involvement was also found to correlate to cognitive outcomes such as music reading and pitch discrimination as well as to performance musical outcomes such as musicality, tone quality, and technique.

In a descriptive qualitative study, Ho and Law (2006) examined the musical values, experiences of music and music learning of adolescent Shanghai students within one school. The researchers collected written assignments from 24 participating students in which the students were asked to express themselves about music and music education. Messages within the students' texts were quantified and analysed. Ho and Law found that students' musical learning and experiences relate to school life and other media however home life played the most influential role in their musical growth.

In a quantitative study, Creech (2010) surveyed 337 parent-pupil-teacher trios with the aim of identifying ways in which parents can be most helpful and supportive of their children's musical development. Participating students were all violin students and ranged in age from 6 to 18. Parental support was defined into three categories: behavioural support such as attending lessons, modeling and participating;

cognitive/intellectual support such as exposure to new activities and challenges; personal support such as help, interest and understanding. The learning outcomes were grouped into five areas: motivation; enjoyment of music; personal satisfaction; self-efficacy; self-esteem. Creech found that all learning outcomes were enhanced when parents communicated with their children about parental involvement and practising, provided a structured home environment conducive for practice, promoted teacher-pupil rapport, communicated with the teacher regarding their child's progress and demonstrated continuous interest as an audience member.

Sichivitsa (2003) conducted a choir participation survey of 154 college students with the purpose of assessing the influence that parental musicianship and support, value of music, academic integration, and social integration had on the students' success in music. The researcher found that the value given to music by a parent was the strongest predictor of student intention to continue on in music education and participation. A lack of such value on behalf of the parent has been reported to have the opposite influence on student retention in music education programs. Sichivitsa found that students with parents who play an instrument tend to continue music participation in the future. The researcher also found that some students reported fellowship with other singers as a reason for future enrollment and participation in the choir. Likewise, in a quantitative study using a survey of 56 teachers, as well as interviews of 35 elementary students and parents of student dropouts, Martignetti (1965) found that many teachers reported parental indifference as the main cause of loss of interest in music on the part of the student.

In a questionnaire survey of grade nine students (n=253), which tapped into student attitudes and attributions for success and failure in music classes, Corenblum and

Marshall (1998) found that students would stay in music programs if they believed they were supported and encouraged by others, namely their parents and teacher.

While parental support is significant to the experiences of students within music education programs, other research studies have also shown that peers and community factors are influential to their experiences. A review of the literature on both peer and community factors that constitute student experiences in music education programs is included in the following section.

Cope (1999) conducted an action research project with the aim of determining whether or not increased participation of children in music-making was possible if instrument learning was not given its usual position as part of the school curriculum but rather intentionally given stronger roots in the community by means of the following: providing instruments for all who could not afford them; avoiding any selection process of students; guiding learners by more experienced players; and encouraging parental participation in as many aspects of the music program as possible. In a small town in central Scotland, children at the primary school level were encouraged to join a traditional fiddling group for which there was no formal tuition and which experienced players were asked to guide. The participation of parents was encouraged in any way possible, for example, by helping to run small practice groups or by learning to play. The results of this project included: a participation rate of 40-50%, which was higher than that of programs with conventional instrument tuition; a significant number of performances involving children at local competitions; continued participation in instrument playing after the action research intervention evidenced by an increase in local community performance groups and the creation of a local 'session' night welcoming the sharing of

local musicians' performances. The authors concluded that informal, community-based settings that did not focus on the overall scholastic and technical approach to learning music may encourage a higher proportion of children to participate in learning to play musical instruments than that of the more formal and structured setting within the regular school system.

In an attempt to offer Venezuelan children from poor neighborhoods an alternative to life on the streets, José Antonia Abreu has been developing youth orchestras and music centers throughout Venezuela since 1975 which offer children in disadvantaged communities opportunities to learn a musical instrument and play in orchestras (Clift, Camic and Daykin, 2010). The focus of this Venezuelan orchestra system, or *El Sistema*, is about togetherness and offering students a place to learn to listen to each other and to respect one another. The integration of the children into a united social structure, in which each individual assumes responsibility and contributes to a commonly achieved result, is central to *El Sistema* (Stodtmeier, 2008). This program in Venezuela has recently gained worldwide attention, in part, due to the 2009 release of the documentary titled *El Sistema* which tells the story of this program but also because of the success of the system model and the power and inspiration it has been able to provide students. In an interview by Vulliamy (2007), one student of *El Sistema* was quoted as saying that his experience of being in the orchestra was like being in a family and that it has opened up his world. In this way, *El Sistema* provides the opportunity for researchers to explore the importance of belonging and group contribution to the continued involvement of students in music education.

In an exploratory qualitative study, Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz (2003) conducted 60 structured interviews of high school band, choir, and orchestra members with the purpose to investigate the world of the high school music classroom. Adderley et al. found that students identified social benefits such as a sense of belonging and friendship as an important influence on their decision to continue being a part of their musical ensembles. The researchers also found that students acknowledged parental and family support as an influencing factor to become and remain involved in music ensembles. In a case study which involved structured and semi-structured interviews of 11 boy choristers from a junior high school, Kennedy (2002) found that the students placed a high value on friendships and the group experience of being in a choir. Students also identified as benefits the development of new associations with others, having the support of the group and working as a team.

These studies present compelling evidence which supports the notion that parental, community, and peer influences affect student retention and motivation in music programs. However, many of these studies were conducted within a quantitative framework, precluding the elaboration of the subjective and intersubjective experiences of the students. Of the studies that involved student interviews, the focus was centered on identifying factors which affect student decisions to continue in music rather than understanding the experiences of the students. Although it is already known that parents, community and peers can influence students' continuance in music programs, a closer look at the lived experiences of students is needed to increase understanding.

## Student Feelings of Emotional and Cognitive Satisfaction in Music Education

Recent research on student feelings of emotional and cognitive satisfaction in music education is focused on student preferences and pleasures within the context of music instruction. Bowles (1998) administered a questionnaire to 2,251 students (264 kindergarteners, 404 first graders, 405 second graders, 401 third graders, 406 fourth graders, 371 fifth graders) regarding music classroom activity preferences and found that instrument playing was the most well-liked music classroom activity among elementary students. Likewise, in a study involving junior high school boy choristers, Kennedy (2002) found that one motivating factor affecting boys' membership in choir was their simple love of singing.

Similarly, Rife, Shnek, Lauby, and Lapidus (2001), in a three-phase study, examined factors related to satisfaction with private music lessons from a student's perspective, and developed a practical measure to assess music lesson satisfaction. The first phase of this study included a student questionnaire which yielded a list of 75 positive and negative statements pertaining to the students' likes and dislikes about their private music lessons. In phase two, music teachers who specialized in musical instrument instruction were asked to identify which of these 75 statements were important to students taking private lessons. This resulted in a 45-item scale containing both positive and negative statements. Phase three included the administering of this scale to a sample of 568 children aged 9 to 12. The findings indicated that pleasure is an important factor to music lesson satisfaction as well as playing their musical instrument.

Rife et al. found that children liked to play their musical instruments while learning about musical concepts and theory.

North, Hargreaves, and O'Neill (2000) administered a questionnaire to 2465 adolescents between 13 and 14 years of age in Year 9 of 22 secondary schools in the North Staffordshire region of England with the aim of determining the importance of music to adolescents and investigating why they listened to and performed music. The results indicated that over 50% of students either currently or previously played an instrument before deciding to give up playing the instrument and that 39.6% of the sample reported listening to music "as often as [they] can". North et al. found that listening to music was preferred by the students to other indoor activities such as visiting with friends, shopping, watching television, and reading books. Additionally, the researcher found that students perceived listening to or playing pop music as having different benefits such as relieving boredom and expressing their feelings and emotions whereas listening to or playing classical music was perceived as trying to please parents and teachers.

Findings from these studies focus on what factors students identify as promoting or discouraging their feelings of satisfaction, however, they do not elucidate understanding of the lived experiences of students. The opportunity for students to express what it is like to experience their emotion and satisfaction within the music education context is not allowed for in these studies. If an understanding of the lived experiences of students is to be explored, there needs to be further investigation that allows for students to provide open-ended responses and extended dialogue which will provide information-rich data beyond that of a questionnaire response.



### Student Motivations, Engagement and Participation in Music Education

Motivation for student participation and student engagement in music education has been the focus of some investigators in trying to determine reasons for continued student involvement. In an empirical qualitative investigation, Pitts (2007) aimed to uncover the motivations of secondary students for participating in a school musical production, how students experience the social, personal and musical elements of being involved in a school musical production, and what a school production contributes to the broader school community. First, Pitts gathered questionnaire responses from Year 7 participants (n=15), Year 7 non-participants (n=95), Year 10 participants (n=20), and Year 10 non-participants (n=68) to uncover students' reasons for participating (or not) in the school musical production. Second, Pitts gave five participating students personal tape recorders in order for them to both record their personal thoughts about their experiences and interview their friends for documentary evidence of the show and rehearsal experiences. Lastly, Pitts observed rehearsals and performances to gain her own sense of the school production in which the students were participants. Pitts found that both the Year 7 and Year 10 students were more motivated to participate in the school production because of the individual development of skills and performing opportunity than the company of friends. Pitts also found that participants experienced difficulties in prioritizing their commitment to the school production over other activities with non-participating friends however experienced a new atmosphere of friendship and sociability throughout their involvement with the school show.

Driscoll (2009) conducted a questionnaire survey study of young students aged 13 to 14 years (n=820) from 33 schools with the aim of determining the motivation for

young people taking up music tuition, and the most influential factors in their decisions to discontinue. Driscoll found that the intrinsic pleasure such as the satisfaction, confidence and sense of achievement that comes from learning to play an instrument, were well expressed by the respondents as key to sustaining intrinsic motivation to continue in music tuition over time. The researcher also found that the social aspect of performing in groups was a significant motivator for young people. The most common reason for discontinuation was found to be boring lessons and a sense of lack of progress.

Countryman (2010) employed aspects of narrative inquiry and critical grounded theory in order to explore what former high school students recall about their school music experiences. The researcher used open-ended interviews to elicit stories and experiences from the participants (n=33) who had graduated anywhere from one to six years prior to data collection and had been involved in their school music programs. Thirty of these participants had not continued in the formal study of music after graduation. Countryman found that themes of self-worth, a sense of belonging and pride and pleasure emerged from the participants' reflections about their high school music experiences however a very strong emergent theme was the importance of community.

Green (2008) conducted a research project involving 13-14 year old pupils in post-primary schools in which she systematically applied key principles of informal music learning in the hope of helping to solve the problem of alienation of students within the music classroom. As a part of this project, the researcher used classroom observation and conducted interviews with students and teachers in order to explore their perspectives and experiences and to uncover the problems associated with engaging young teenagers in music education. Green's pedagogical strategies included allowing

students to choose their own music for study, access to a variety of instruments for which students may have no formal training, peer or self-directed learning opportunities, opportunities to imitate recordings, and opportunities to integrate listening, performing, improvising and composing. By applying her own established key principles of informal music learning, Green claims to have established a new pedagogy which has the potential to engage young people in music education by means of exploration, experimentation, imitation and integration. The importance of peer groups and group cooperation is also uncovered and examined within this project as it pertains to student engagement and learning. As students become more engaged with learning tasks, musicality and leadership qualities of peers become more significant than friendships and peer groups.

Student engagement in the classroom has been a large focus in recent years of education research in determining how it affects academic achievement and the social and cognitive development of students. In a survey study, Klem and Connell (2004) examined initial data from a broad sample of urban elementary (n=1,846) and middle school students (n=2,430) to identify threshold levels of student experiences of teacher support and student engagement. The researchers found that both students and teachers reported that teacher support in the form of creating a caring, well-structured learning environment with high, clear and fair expectations is important to student engagement which, in turn, influences student commitment, attendance, and academic performance.

In another survey study, Zhao and Kuh (2004) examined the relationship between participating in a learning community and student engagement with first year and senior college and university students (n=80,479). Zhao and Kuh found that participating in learning communities may be associated with higher academic performance, higher

levels of academic effort and collaboration with faculty and peers, and student gains in personal and social development.

McGillen (2004) conducted a research project that set out to illuminate the process that secondary adolescent students (n=21) experience when writing and performing their own music. Through the use of interviews, questionnaires, narrative writing tasks and video taping, McGillen found that a profound level of student engagement was experienced as a result of students working together on a task which required collaboration and the creation of something new and original.

These studies uncover an interesting trend in students' motivation and engagement to participate in music education – a sense of belonging, or community. Some of these studies employed the use of questionnaires as part of the data collection which does not allow for varied responses and elaboration on student experiences. Further investigation which allows for students to reflect upon this aspect of their musical education is needed in order to get a clearer picture of how a sense of belonging or being part of a community motivates and engages students to the point where they want to continue in music programs.

#### Teacher Immediacy and Instructional Strategies

The subjective and intersubjective experience of any music education program may also encompass elements of students' experiences of the teacher to student relationships. Most research to date has focused objectively on the teacher's immediacy and instructional strategies. Although much of the research concerning teacher immediacy is not specific to music instruction, many of the findings are relevant within the context of music education programs.

Teacher immediacy was first described and conceptualized by Mehrabian (1967) as the use of communication behaviors that encourage closeness and minimize physical and/or psychological distance between instructors and students. Immediacy may be defined through verbal (Gorham, 1988) and non-verbal behaviors (Andersen, 1979) that teachers exhibit in the classroom. Determining how and to what extent, if any, these teacher behaviors can affect student learning and motivation has been the mission of some researchers.

Frymier (1994) conducted a survey of undergraduate students (n=128) in which the participants' evaluations of their instructor and estimations of the amount learned in class were measured against the verbal and non-verbal immediacies of the instructor. Frymier found that teacher immediacy is linked more directly to student motivation than student learning. More specifically, the verbal and nonverbal immediacy of the teachers had stronger paths with how motivated students felt immediately following a course than with how they felt toward course content and the course instructor. Similar to Frymier's study, Allen, Witt and Wheelless (2006) tested a causal model using eight completed investigations to determine the role of teacher immediacy as a motivational factor in student learning. The causal model suggested that teacher immediacy causes affective learning which, in turn, causes cognitive learning on the part of the student. Allen et al. found that the observed data of the investigations are consistent with the causal model that teacher immediacy behaviors predict or cause a level of affective learning. In turn, the level of affective learning predicts or causes the level of cognitive learning. Allen et al. conclude that the causal model provides a theoretical system where teacher behavior

creates a motivational affective outcome which subsequently contributes to the generation of a cognitive outcome.

In the area of music education, researchers have also explored the relationship between teacher behaviors and student achievement and learning. In a twofold descriptive study, Goolsby (1997) investigated the performance variables that make up the basic component of direct instruction by expert teachers (n=10), novice teachers (n=10), and student teachers (n=10) in music education and also explored the extent to which observation of expert instrumental teachers would alter the behaviors and patterns in teaching episodes by preservice music teachers (n=11). The findings from part one of this study were: the expert teachers stopped rehearsal more frequently and addressed several performance variables during a single stop; expert teachers directed most verbal instruction to specific issues of performance; expert teachers provided the most nonverbal demonstrations and explanations and asked fewer questions whereas the student or novice teachers' questions were many and vague; expert teachers' feedback was specific and the student and novice teachers' used more unspecific positive accolades. In part two of this study, Goolsby found a significant growth in the use of specific instruction patterns and behaviors by preservice music teachers that viewed several videotaped rehearsal segments of expert teachers.

In a case study, Siebenalar (1997) aimed to systematically observe teacher and student behaviors in piano lessons of adults and children and identify elements of effective piano teaching. Participating piano teachers (n=13) were asked to choose one adult student (age 24+) and one child student (age 7-13) for the study. Individual piano lessons were tape recorded and an 8-12 minute segment was selected for detailed analysis

during which the teacher and student worked on a repertoire selection already in progress. Teaching effectiveness was rated by five expert piano pedagogues by observing ten representative excerpts. Siebenalar found that student performance time, or extent of participation, is not directly proportional to achievement or an indicator of student success. Higher student performance ratings were related to teacher behaviors such as playing and talking simultaneously, specific talk about the music, and approval describing a specific aspect of the student's performance behavior. Additionally, effective lessons were judged as including descriptive disapproval by the teacher, brief directives, teacher modeling, and frequent teacher-student interaction.

A more specific investigation of the relationship between teacher behavior and student achievement in music education includes a longitudinal study in which Atlas, Taggart, and Goodell (2004) investigated the ways in which sensitivity to criticism affects the educational experience of music students. Nineteen undergraduate students from music performance classes were recruited and assessed for sensitivity to criticism using the Sensitivity to Criticism Scale (STCS). The students were also given a questionnaire to self-report their level of skill and current motivation towards music performance in the first two weeks of the semester and again during the last three weeks of the semester. The students' sensitivity to criticism scores were correlationally analyzed between the self ratings of motivation and performance at the end of the semester. Atlas et al. found that students with high sensitivity to criticism scores had a diminished perceived importance of skill, lowered rate of enjoyment, and a decreased level of confidence. Additionally, it was found that sensitive students were hurt more by

instructor criticism, communication with the instructor was deemed difficult, and students felt they did not improve as a result of the criticism.

In another experimental study, Duke and Henninger (1998) compared the effects of negative feedback statements and specific directives in music performance instruction. The subjects for this experiment included college undergraduates (n=25) enrolled in music courses for nonmusic majors and fifth- and sixth-grade elementary students (n=25). Each participant was taught by rote to play a specific melody under the condition of being given specific directives or the condition of being given negative feedback. The rates of positive feedback and encouragement were high in both experimental conditions. Duke and Henninger found that most students maintained positive attitudes and achieved quality performance levels regardless of the type of verbal feedback received. In addition, results of this investigation highlight the importance of student performance achievement as a primary factor influencing students' attitudes and perceptions of self-efficacy.

These studies on teacher immediacy present contradictions regarding the effect of teacher feedback and criticism on student performance and motivation which suggest the need for further study and insight into students' experiences of music education, including verbal immediacy. Overall, while teachers' immediacy and instructional strategies have been found to influence student performance, research to date has not explored students' lived experiences of music education, including their experience of teachers' immediacy and instructional approaches.

In summary, research to date has explored the factors that clearly may be a part of lived experiences of students in music education programs, however, many of the investigations have focused on identifying factors that affect student retention and



motivation and have not explored the actual experiences of music students in order to capture the essence of what it is like to be in a music program. By attending to the experiences of students continuing in music instruction, a more holistic understanding of student needs may be achieved. This understanding may help to provide professionals within the field of music education insights on which to base their actions, as well as program and curriculum revisions. However, little research informs teaching practice and curriculum development in this way. Moving in this direction will require greater understanding of how students experience their involvement in music education. This study attempts to fill this gap, focusing specifically on students' real-life experiences of one music education program.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The chosen research design for this study was interpretive phenomenology. The philosophical foundations of this research methodology and its appropriateness for this research study are presented in this chapter. Further explication of the methods for participant recruitment and sampling, data collection and analysis strategies, as well as ethical considerations and issues related to rigor are addressed.

### Heideggerian Phenomenology

Interpretive phenomenology, as developed by Martin Heidegger, was used as the methodology to study the lived experiences of students of the community-based orchestral music education program in order to capture the essence of their everyday experiences of this program. The methodology allowed the researcher to explore the feelings, behaviors, attitudes, needs, and values of the participants (Patton, 2002) in order to gain in-depth understanding of their experience.

Interpretive phenomenology is a methodological approach within the naturalistic paradigm. This approach to phenomenology originated from Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a student who challenged, modified and built upon the work of his teacher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology is ontological in that it focuses on the form and nature of the lived experience of reality and what can be known about it (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Interpretive, or hermeneutic, phenomenology goes further than a mere description of core concepts to look for meanings that are embedded in everyday life practices and experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Hermeneutic inquiry focuses on what humans experience rather than what they consciously know (Solomon, 1987).

A central principle of Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology is that an individual's realities are invariably influenced by the world in which they live (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Heidegger referred to this as an individual's *lifeworld*, or *being-in-the-world*, which, within the interpretive phenomenological tradition, allows the experience of the participant to be placed within its every day, natural context. The cultural, political and historical contexts in which the participants are embedded are an integral component of the inquiry and can help to contextualize rich findings (Van der Mescht, 2004). In this particular study, the context of participants includes their experiences within the community-based orchestral music education program.

Understanding the experience of participants necessitates the researcher to explore the participants' world and how they make sense of their experience (Patton, 2002). Accordingly, the researcher needs to focus on the 'dialogue' of participants with their contexts (McConville, 1978) and question the verbal data for how the participants' 'language' conveys their physical, emotional and intellectual being-in-the-world (Van der Mescht, 2004). For the purpose of this study, I obtained descriptions of the participants' typical routines within the MTTE program, descriptions of their interactions with other students and instructors, relations to others within the program, expectations of work, experiences of the body and experiences of time (Smith, 1987) in order to situate their lived experiences within the context of the community-based orchestral music education program.

The interpretation of the narratives given by the participants in relation to various contexts is foundational (Van der Mescht, 2004) in interpretive phenomenology. The

meanings arrived at by the researcher are a blend of those meanings articulated by both the researcher and the participants within the focus of the study (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This means that the act of interpretation will always be a result of intersecting meanings of both the researcher and participant. There is an “interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest”, where the researcher attempts to “understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples’ experiences” (Kvale, 1996, 1-2). This blending of meanings has been referred to as ‘co-constitutionality’ (Koch, 1995). It is important to comprehend that there is not one true meaning produced by an interpretive phenomenological approach; however, the findings are logical and reflective of the realities of the study participants (Van der Mescht, 2004; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Included in this interpretive approach is the expectation that the researcher will further interpret the meanings of the study to inform educational practices, policy, and research (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

An important philosophical assumption underlying the interpretive phenomenological approach is that the expert knowledge and beliefs of the researcher are worthy of guiding the inquiry and, in fact, can make it a more meaningful endeavor (Heidegger, 1962). The beliefs and expert knowledge on the part of the researcher are valuable guides to inquiry and are useful and necessary in leading the researcher to ideas about how the inquiry needs to proceed in order to produce useful knowledge (Heidegger, 1962). Unlike Husserlian phenomenology, which is built upon the assumption that understanding lived experiences can be grasped only if the biases, personal knowledge and preconceptions of the researcher are neutralized (Lopez & Willis, 2004), Heidegger’s interpretive phenomenology is built upon the assumption that it is impossible for

researchers to rid their minds of the knowledge that has led them to consider the topic of research in the beginning (Koch, 1995). In this particular study, the experiences of being an instructor within the MTTE program has built upon my personal knowledge and has influenced my beliefs surrounding music education and community-based orchestral music education programs. In fact, it is this experience within the community-based orchestral music education program that prompted me to pose the research question for this study.

The interpretive phenomenological approach of studying the lived experiences of students within music education programs is limited in educational research (Bresler, 1995). The majority of the literature does not allow for the students to describe, in-depth, their lived experiences within various contexts, therefore leaving a gap in music education research which requires further exploration. According to Van Manen (1990), teaching requires a phenomenological sensitivity to students' lifeworlds, which encourages the teacher's ability to realize the pedagogic significance of situations and relationships with students. Interpretive phenomenology has been selected with the aim of achieving this goal.

#### Declaration of Self in Front of the Text

As part of the interpretive phenomenological analysis process, the researcher engages to delimit, or at least become aware of, personal bias, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Declaring oneself in front of the text, that is, the data presented to the researcher, enables the researcher to examine the phenomenon from an open viewpoint without prejudgment or imposing meaning too soon (Patton, 2002).

My personal involvement in music education began in the area of private piano instruction at the age of five. Several years of private music instruction afforded me a great deal of exposure to various musical atmospheres and communities. New opportunities for my own participation emerged in such forms as a community-based children's choir, secondary school band, community-based orchestra, and university symphony-orchestra, all of which provided fresh learning environments and experiences.

My professional practice has included being both an elementary music teacher within a public school district and a program instructor and conductor within the MTTE program that is the experiential focus of this study. Seven years of involvement within both of these music education environments has allowed me to explore many teaching practices and has provided me with the opportunity to experience being the instructor. Although my own experiences as a student in various music education settings has helped to inform many of my current teaching practices, I have yet to discover the experiences of the student within a community-based orchestral music education program such as the one chosen for the context of this study.

My position as an instructor and conductor within the MTTE program has led to a strong desire to understand the experiences of students. Working within both this program and the elementary teaching panel has brought to my attention that the experiences of students within music education programs are as multiple and varied as are also their motivations for continuing in music instruction. Over time, I have witnessed the varying levels to which students become, and stay, involved in music instruction and I continue to be interested in exploring students' experiences that may play a part in the continuance of their musical instruction.

My focus on the experiences of students within a community-based orchestral music education program resulted from my gaining increased familiarity with the music classroom as well as from personal motivation. Students aged 14 to 18 from the MTTE program represent a population of students who have been participants of the music program for several years, making them a logical choice for practical reasons. Although my position as an instructor and conductor with the MTTE has remained ongoing, the participants involved in this study were not students under my instruction or direction. The insights gained from this research may have a considerable impact upon teaching practices and program planning and, in turn, a positive impact on students. Additionally, as funding and access to music education programs continue to experience ebbs and flows with economic and educational changes in the public education setting, I believe that understanding the experiences of the students is crucial to improving music education and promoting the development of practical playing and social skills needed to encourage ongoing participation in music. Being cognisant of my own motives and expectations as outlined herein may better prepare me to attend to the experiences of the students within this investigation.

### Methods

The following section presents the method used in this study, including the sampling and recruitment strategy, characteristics of the sample, how the data were collected and analyzed, and how ethical considerations and authenticity were addressed.

#### *Sampling and recruitment*

The interpretive phenomenological approach incorporates the deliberate selection of participants with shared experiences, allowing for in-depth study (Cohen et al., 2007).

The sample for this study included students participating at the senior level within the MTTE program aged 14 to 18 years. These individuals were most likely to have been participants in the MTTE for several years, hence they were likely to have extensive experience to relate to me thus having the potential to provide in-depth data.

Additionally, senior students were more likely to be participants of the MTTE program by choice and are of the age to make more independent decisions which may provide insights into the experiences of students and, in turn, potentially inform others about their retention in music instruction. For the purposes of this study, participants needed to be willing to explore their experiences of being involved in the MTTE program and to be able to articulate their thoughts and emotions in answer to the research question. This purposeful sampling strategy promoted the attainment of the criterion of appropriateness of the sample (Morse, 2000).

Access to the student participants was gained through the established relationship between myself and the Director of the MTTE, and permission to carry out the study and have access to the students was granted by the Director. Copies of the letter of information and consent forms were given to the MTTE faculty to distribute to families of students aged 14 to 18 years participating at the senior level; however, students taught by myself were excluded from this study. A list of the names of eighteen students who were aged 14 to 18 years, were senior students, and were willing to be contacted by the researcher was provided by program faculty. Parents of the students were asked to read the information and either return the consent form or give their contact information to me or other program faculty if they were giving consent for their child to participate in the study.



Participants for this study were purposefully selected from this list of potential participants. Of these eighteen students, the ones involved in all aspects of the program (small ensemble, group class, senior orchestra) were identified as possibilities for being information-rich cases whose experiences might help to answer the questions under study (Patton, 2002) and were invited to participate in the study. Those who indicated willingness to participate were then contacted directly to obtain informed consent and to arrange for an interview. Thirteen students were sampled to achieve maximal variation (Patton) of age, sex, number of years within the MTTE program and private instructor. This maximum variation was undertaken to obtain unique descriptions and perspectives to illuminate student experiences that were commonly shared by this group of students. Sampling continued until the topic was exhausted, that is, when the participants within the MTTE program introduced no new perspectives on the topic and redundancy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was achieved. In this study, redundancy occurred when the participants were unable to provide new information and the articulations of their experiences became repetitive and continued to recur with each new participant.

The final sample was comprised of 9 female students and 4 male students, ranging in age from 14 to 17 and with three to eight years of experience in the program. The students in the sample were taught by 3 private instructors.

#### *Ethical considerations*

Acceptance and ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethical Review Committee of the University of Western Ontario (Appendix A) and all participants received the letter of information. All were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any effect on their enrolment status within the MTTE program.

Participants were assured that all information they provided would be treated as confidential and would be used solely for the purposes of the study. Participants and their parents/guardians signed a consent form before data collection began. All participants were given a copy of their transcribed interview and an opportunity to make changes to their transcript.

All coded transcripts and field notes were locked in filing cabinets and will be destroyed at the end of seven years, in accordance with the ethics review board requirements. Audio taped files were erased after data analysis was complete. In order to guarantee anonymity, identifiable information such as the instrument the participant played or any statements that included specific events or information that might identify the participant specifically were not reported or recorded within the findings.

#### *Data collection*

Data were collected using face-to-face, semi-structured in-depth interviews ranging between 38 minutes and 1 hour and 4 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B) was used in all interviews to assist students in their exploration of insights into their experiences within the MTTE program. The set questions were designed to begin the conversation and to allow conversation to grow out of the discussion starters. Interviews occurred with one participant at a time and took place in the participant's home or in a previously arranged alternative location. In all cases, it was possible to interview participants in the absence of parents and guardians, allowing participants to freely reflect on their unique perspective within the MTTE program without interruption or social/parental pressure to respond in any particular way. The students were also encouraged to share any additional information that they felt was relevant to the study.

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Notes regarding the behaviours of the participants such as body language, tone of voice, posture and overall appearance during the interview, were also documented in order to gather relevant rich descriptive data that might have been missed in transcription.

#### *Data analysis*

An immersion and crystallization analysis strategy, as described by Crabtree and Miller (1999), was used to elicit the findings. This process involved me being immersed in the data, thereby reading and re-reading interview transcripts, field notes and observations, while simultaneously listening to the audio taped interviews. This phase included locating key phrases and statements that spoke directly to the phenomenon in question, interpreting the meanings of these phrases, obtaining the subject's interpretations of these phrases, inspecting these meanings for recurring features of the phenomenon being studied, and offering a tentative category or definition for these essential recurring features. By reducing the data into smaller, more manageable units, data could easily be retrieved and reviewed. As patterns began to emerge, the transcribed data were coded to identify categories and sub-categories within the text. Identified categories and sub-categories were examined further to discover themes. Lastly, themes and their corresponding sub-themes that emerged from the data were crystallized into an integrated, holistic interpretation. Through focusing, self-dialogue, and reflection, a depiction and portrayal of the experience of the individuals who participated in the study emerged.

### *Qualitative Rigor*

The individualistic and subjective nature of interpretive research emphasizes the capturing of in-depth experiences and the gaining of fresh insights (Bresler, 1995), not the generating of theories or the developing of general explanations (Morse & Field, 1995). Authenticity rests in the richness of discussion as well as the applicability and relevance of the findings to others (Morse & Field). However, several triangulation techniques can promote credibility and strengthen confidence in the conclusions (Patton, 2002). Authenticity was established through audio-taping and verbatim transcription of interviews to ensure content accuracy, through expert audit review to encourage coherence, and through member checking during the interview process. Member checking occurred by me pausing the interview to rephrase the responses of the participants in order to ensure that the participant's experiences were accurately captured in my interpretation.

### Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the methodology and methods applied in exploring the experiences of students within the community-based orchestral music education program of MTTE. In chapter four, the findings and insights uncovered are presented and discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY-BASED ORCHESTRAL MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

This chapter presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data. Three themes captured the holistic experience of the students within the community-based music education program, as follows: (1) contextual factors facilitating/impeding progress; (2) enacting progression; (3) experiencing the process of participating in the program. As shown in Table 1, these themes, and each of their sub-themes, are described and discussed in the following sections. The final section of this chapter describes the holistic experience of being in the program.

Students participating in this study described their experience of progressing/not progressing as an interconnected, holistic process. From the students' perspective, progressing/not progressing within the music program involved contextual factors that facilitated or impeded progress which ultimately led students to evaluate their own position on the continuum and make decisions regarding their own efforts to change this position.

### Theme 1: Contextual Factors Facilitating/Impeding Progress

The students experienced several factors that either facilitated or impeded the process progression. These components included: (1) feedback; (2) comparisons/competition; (3) challenges. The following sections outline these three sub-themes.

#### *Feedback*

Participating in the music education program created an opportunity for students to receive information regarding progression from their instructors. This information, or

feedback, came in the form of criticism and praise given as part of their preparation for specific performance showcases. However, some students expressed frustration with instructor criticism. One student stated:

They [the instructors] make you feel guilty because of some mistake you made, and I don't want to feel guilty. ...The way they [the instructors] say it [criticism] sometimes, it makes you feel good or really bad.

Another student expressed frustration when she felt that the instructor's feedback was not specific enough to assist in her performance:

Sometimes the conductors are not giving you what you need. ...Sometimes...we do feel we're not good enough because we did not achieve what he was looking for. ...When we don't reach that goal [of the instructor]...it's very hard. It's hard to be there.

Alternatively, other students perceived instructor criticism in a positive light and expressed their appreciation. One student described how instructor criticism can guide students in new directions that they would not otherwise consider:

They [the instructors] essentially give us some insight on how they see it [the music]. It's really impressed me. ...It makes us [the students] see it [the music] in a different way.

Although most of the student experiences of feedback and criticism involved the instructor, one student commented on how audience feedback can assist the student in knowing how they are progressing:

You can see [whether or not you're doing well] just in the way the audience reacts to you. You can feel the audience, what they do. ...You can feel that the energy kind of dies backwards and you hear the chatter come up again. ...

Students also experienced instructor feedback as praise. One student described how receiving praise helped her to continue working:

We [the students] need that treat [praise from the conductor]. We need to be patted on the head...I think it encourages us.

Similarly, another student described how receiving praise motivated her to work harder:

I like to show people what I'm doing, if I'm proud of it. That's also what makes me practice harder or want to learn it [the music], because I know I'm playing for this friend. They're important to me, I want to make them compliment me, so I'm going to do well. I like getting praise. ...If someone compliments me...it just makes me feel really good.

Another student expressed how receiving instructor praise made her feel more positive about the amount of energy and effort they were putting forth:

It's nice to feel that you've fulfilled [the instructor's expectations]. ...You've put your heart into it and you're getting the energy back that you gave [the conductor]. [The conductor's] giving back to you and you're kind of circulating that energy, you feel happy.

In summary, receiving feedback in this program context was experienced by students as both an encouraging agent to motivate them to work harder and as a frustrating factor that lowered their own confidence in their playing. Additionally, receiving feedback was experienced by students as an opportunity to learn about different perspectives on how a piece of music could be played as well as an opportunity to evaluate their own progression and improvements.

### *Comparison/Competition*

Participating in the music education program created an opportunity for students to experience comparison and competition among themselves and others. Competition in music, in the traditional sense, would include an activity such as a music festival whereby students or groups of students perform in a class with other students or groups. Each student or group is adjudicated and given a mark and a placement such as first, second, third or gold, silver or bronze. In this study, students described a sense of self-competition whereby they experienced competition within themselves – not as a result of an imposed competition. By experiencing comparison and competition within the

program the students judged their own progression and playing skill in relation to others. Students in the study described how they compared themselves to other students within the music program in terms of playing skill or level of progression. One student described how comparing his own level of playing to younger students could be a source of lowered self-esteem:

Sometimes you feel smaller than others. ...When you see those amazing kids you kind of feel a little demeaned, because you've been working so hard at something and it's been so many years, and then you see kids who are younger than you get up there and play amazingly.

Another student stated, "I felt like I was not moving at the pace of everybody else. I felt like I was behind". By comparing themselves to others within the program, some students experienced a sense that they were not keeping up with the level of playing for their age group or that their pace of progression was too slow.

Students also experienced making comparisons to other students as a tool for setting new goals for themselves. As one student commented:

You have people at different levels and it adds – it makes it more interesting. It gives you something to aspire to. ...Knowing that people are more ahead than I am is something to look forward to.

Another student stated:

I keep in mind how well they're [other small ensembles] playing, and then I try to do the same thing. ...

By participating in the music education program, the opportunity for students to be compared by others was present. One student described how being compared by her parents to other students was undesirable and hurtful:

Sometimes I don't like them [parents] comparing me to other people [students in the program], like, 'you could do way better than that person. ...Usually you let them think what they want.



Conversely, another student described how being compared to other students was uplifting:

...When people [peers, parents, instructors within program] do see that you do have the ability, they do compare you to those kids [high achieving students]. You do feel very good about yourself, that you're being compared to those whom you look up to, and it's great to have that feeling of being able to be compared.

Some students described how comparisons created a sense of competition for them within the program. One student described how the distance between his level of playing and that of others became apparent through comparison:

You rank yourself among or compare yourself to other people, especially in orchestra. All you are competing with is friends, so you know where you stand.

The experience of competition was described by several students as being a motivator to work harder. One student stated:

In [violin] ensemble it's always, I guess, the first person to be able to play the whole piece of music, like really well. ... You want to be the best player so I guess we all push ourselves.

Another stated:

I'm a very competitive person, so when I see people who are younger it gives me something to work to, it's a goal.

Another student stated:

Well, if you're jealous and you really want to be able to do what they're [peers] doing, then you'll jump on it, and you'll learn, and you'll do. ... There's healthy competition in ways that people strive against each other and that's a good thing, because that just makes you improve.

In summary, experiencing comparison and competition with other members of the program occasionally had a negative effect on the students' confidence in their own achievements. Alternatively, being compared to other students was also experienced as being a motivator to work harder and a compliment of their level of playing. For most

students, competition was also experienced as being motivation to improve upon playing skills and achieve a higher level of proficiency.

### *Challenge*

Participating students also described the opportunity of being challenged within the community-based music education program as being a motivator for their progression within the program and for meeting their personal goals. As one student stated:

I feel that this program every week gives me something extra to strive for or to look for. You can set personal goals for yourself within this program.

Another student described how the selection of advanced and familiar repertoire inspired students to work harder to achieve the level of playing it required:

...The repertoire that we play might be something I've heard before...and I might have said..., "I'd love to play that some day". ...Then I really strive to sound like that....

Other students described the music program as being more advanced and requiring more skill and dedication than that of their public music school programs. One student said:

I get challenges in music [at program] that I don't at school. ...It's working toward the goals that you really don't get at school.

Another student stated:

If you play at program usually it's harder than playing at school, so it's fun to challenge yourself that way.

To conclude, students experienced challenge as being given the opportunity to strive for higher goals than they would normally feel in music classes at school instruction. This challenge experience could potentially be attributed to the fact that the instruction received within the program is better matched to that of the students' private instruction and proficiency whereas the instructional level offered in the public school setting seems suited more for students not being privately instructed. Within the context

of this program, students also experienced setting new goals for themselves that they had not previously thought of, or considered, in their school classroom.

### Theme II: Enacting Progression

Students engaged in the community-based music education program were aware of their own behaviors that contributed to their progression. Students were also conscious of factors that encouraged their own motivation to progress within the program.

#### *Motivation*

The experience of motivation was described by students as a behavior of striving that resulted in a sense of succeeding and moving forward:

...There's been times where I just can't get the thing [technique or musical effect] I want, but then I get something that has taken a long time to fix and I just feel like I've taken one step up.

Motivation was considered by several students as being necessary to the progression of their playing skills and abilities. One student stated:

I would take something that I'm working on in my [private] lesson like say hand position...and I'll really put that to work and then that will improve faster, which will improve my playing in general.

Another student commented upon how motivation to be the best can help everyone progress:

...you strive to be one of the best violinists in the ensemble, and by doing that you also inspire others, you sort of help each other get better and better.

Other students described their experience of motivation as a necessary behavior in order to gain recognition from others and feel proud of their own accomplishments. One student described how the possibility for recognition inspired his desire to work harder and improve:

I like to show people what I'm doing, if I'm proud of it. That's also what makes

me practice harder or want to learn it [the music or skill], because I know I'm playing for this friend. They're important to me, I want to make them compliment me, so I'm going to do well.

Another student expressed how internal desire to do well encouraged motivation:

I just want to play the best that I can...I can be really competitive so I want to make sure that I know my stuff and that I play well.

Students also conveyed their experience of motivation as a catalyst for leadership among their peers. One student stated:

If I don't practice more I won't be a leader of others, but I can if I do. But knowing that I have more of a role in the orchestra makes me practice more and enjoy it.

Students also described that feeling accountable to other group members encouraged motivation. One student stated, "I really want to do my best because I don't want to let them [quartet members] down". One student described his/her experience of motivation as being a state of mind that s/he naturally adopted while in program:

I'm fairly positive when I get there [to program] because I'm ready to play. I sit down and I start to figure it [the music] out. It's time to figure things out, it's time to sit down and work.

In contrast, another student described her motivation as a struggle and something which did not come naturally:

I don't believe that I'm naturally talented in music, so everything that I've accomplished has been from hard work. Rather than having a bit of talent and a bit of hard work, it's been entirely hard work...

For one student, the experience of motivation was perseverance:

...sometimes you just have to push through...maybe you're just sitting there and you're thinking 'oh, I really don't like this' but I don't think that it should stop you from doing it [playing a piece of music] and find something in it [the music] that you like about it.

To conclude, motivation was described by students as a behavior of striving to progress, and to achieve recognition and success within the program. For some students, their internal motivation seemed to be maintained naturally as a part of their own self-determination. However other students described how their motivation was a struggle and difficult to maintain when they were faced with obstacles such as difficult music or a dislike for the piece of music being studied.

### *Stagnation*

In contrast to the experience of motivation, some students also described their experience of not progressing as one of stagnation. Not progressing was experienced by students as a feeling of cessation of learning or repetition without new direction or focus.

One student stated:

Sometimes it feels like we're not really progressing. We could always keep moving forward instead of going over the same thing again and again.

Another student expressed annoyance with his experience of motivation and being unable to progress:

For me it [achieving something new] does get overwhelming or frustrating. It's like 'why can't I just be better'.

One student described frustration when progression did not occur easily:

It can be frustrating sometimes if you're in the group and you keep working on the same thing and you can't get it right.

Similarly, another student expressed frustration with stagnation in the context of their ensemble:

We [small ensemble] don't seem to be moving right now...moving forward and making progress. It's been a little bit tense. ...I don't think we were fully prepared so we didn't finish our full piece. ...I was really disappointed but there was nothing I could do about it. ...Everybody just wasn't ready.

For some students, the experience of stagnation was perceived as being a result of being one of the oldest in the program and a result of having been in the program for several years. One student expressed:

I don't know if I'm getting a whole lot more out of it [program] in the last year. ...I'm not sure I can go that much further. ...Now that I'm older, it doesn't seem [that I am progressing] as much. ...So that's maybe why I feel it's [the student's learning] not going anywhere.

Another student stated:

...I've sort of done everything this program has to offer. ...[Being in] quartet would be the most valuable thing, but there's no point in only going for one thing. There's less and less [learning] to gain..., it just doesn't come as quickly and I'm not learning as much.

In summary, progressing/not progressing was perceived by students as being a significant part of their overall experience of this music education program. For students, the experience of progressing was perceived as the motivation toward their playing level and overall skill development. Motivation was experienced by students as being both a natural and difficult task which ultimately meant that progressing encompassed recognition and self-satisfaction. Students perceived not progressing as a cessation of learning or stagnation. For some students, not progressing was perceived as being the oldest in the program or having difficulty accomplishing goals within the group or small ensemble context.

### Theme III: Experiencing the Process of Participating in the Program

Students participating in this study described a number of feelings and emotions as a result of studying violin in this community setting. The emotions ranged from support/pressure, connection/loneliness, responsibility/disappointment, to working together/exposure as their experience of the process of participating within the program.

For the students, the process of participating in the program included experiencing emotions along continuums. For example, a student may experience feeling supported within a group playing context and yet move along that same range of emotion to feeling pressure when playing as an individual. The playing and performing contexts of the program are varied and do not remain static. Thus, participating in the program is a process whereby students move in and out of different contexts and therefore experience different ranges of emotions and feelings within these contexts. The nature of the overall experience of the process of participating in the program is conveyed in the following sub-sections.

#### *Feeling Support/Feeling Pressure*

The nature of being in orchestra and group violin classes is such that several students share one part of the music. Alternatively, in smaller ensembles there is commonly one student per part in the music. By participating in large ensembles such as orchestra and group violin classes, the opportunity to feel supported by other members of the music education program was available for the students. However, in smaller ensemble contexts such as quartet, students experienced additional feelings of pressure in addition to feeling supported. The experiences of feeling support and feeling pressure are described below.

Several students experienced relief in having the support of others in their performance group – a sense that they were not alone in the learning and performing processes. One student stated:

...When you're playing with an orchestra, you don't feel that same pressure [as with solo playing]. ... You feel a lot more relief and you can just play. ... There's just a feeling of relief that not all eyes are on you. ... If you mess up one note, there are other people there to back you up.

Another student stated:

When you're in orchestra, you feel like you're not just one with the other parts, but you're one with your own section. Other people are playing the same thing as you so you have more support in that area.

One student described her experience of support as receiving help from others:

With the orchestra there are other people that help you with that line [of music] and that you can listen to and hear from.

For another student, support was experienced as reliance and encouragement among their peers:

When we get it [the music], when one of us gets it, we congratulate one another and then they help the other person. ... We rely on each other [for learning] even though someone's instructing us.

One student described how feeling the support of other students helped him to be more secure in his playing:

If you're in the ensemble, you can be more confident when there are other people playing with you.

Another student described a similar feeling of support:

I get really nervous when I play the violin and it's when I'm playing my own part that no one else is playing. But I'm also part of a group which kind of relaxes me. [Playing violin] has been more enjoyable. I can perform just as much but in a more relaxed way.

One student described how feeling the support from people other than her peers within the program made her feel positive:

They've [parents] really been supportive all the way along. They're always there to help out and do what they need to. I know they've always been a part of the program, helping set up or whatever. ... They've always been there. ... It feels good to have people there that you know support you, like friends and teachers.

In contrast to the experience of feeling support within the large ensembles, students also described their experience of feeling pressure when playing in the smaller



ensembles. One student described how she felt more pressure in the quartet because of their sense of being exposed:

It [quartet] is very high intensity because you don't want to do anything wrong. You're much more exposed in quartet. ...The pressure is more on you because if you mess something up it's more exposed and it's more there.

Another student described how he felt pressure because he was alone in his playing part:

You're playing solo [in quartet] and you have that feeling of just being very alone in your part. If you screw up you have nothing to back you up. Everybody's depending on you. It's a very stressful environment that there's no one to hold you [your musical part] up if something breaks down. ...It's strange when it's just you there and you're not sure if you should come in or not.

Another student described a similar experience of feeling pressure as a result of being alone in their part of the quartet:

[In quartet] you have to be sure and know your part, you can't rely on anybody else for that...you have to be there because there's nobody to take your spot. Attendance, showing up, knowing your stuff, just being able to do it [play the music], period. Everything's on you.

Although most students experienced feeling pressure within the quartet setting, one student described how both their position within the orchestra and chamber ensemble left them feeling pressured:

There's pressure on me [in orchestra] because I sit on the very front desk...if I make a mistake then someone else is going to make the same mistake. There's a lot more pressure in quintet because there's only one part for each person. So, if you make a mistake then people will hear that...

In summary, students experienced both feelings of support and pressure within the large and small ensemble settings. Many students expressed how there was a sense of strength in numbers when it came to performing their own part in large ensembles and a sense of security in knowing that they were not performing by themselves. In contrast,

many students described how having an individual part in small ensembles added pressure and made them feel exposed and alone.

*Feeling Connected With the Program/Feeling Alone*

In several cases, students described both feeling connected to the program and feeling alone within the program as part of their experiences. These feelings of connection and isolation are described herein.

Feeling connected to the program was experienced by students in terms of how they identified and affiliated themselves as part of the program and with the others involved. Students gained feelings of pride, prestige, and a sense of belonging by affiliating and identifying themselves with the program and its members. One student explained how he identified with others in the program as opposed to his regular school and how he felt good about being able to share his experiences with peers:

I feel very much myself when I'm there [at program] because I feel differently when I'm at school with my non-musical friends...music is a very big part of me...It makes me feel proud to say that I'm part of this group [program]...I'd much rather be at program than out partying because it benefits me and I feel at home...It's like they [peers] are a different kind of people...they seem to be a lot more educated in a way...I can have intellectual conversations with them a lot compared to other people at my school where it's not the same conversations. Here [at program] we [the students] always talk about music...and being big music nerds...like being around people that have the same interest as you.

Another student described:

Saturday morning demands more than school...Saturday morning demands more brain power...Saturday morning you're there and you're working for three hours in classes...it's nice to be identified with such a prestigious program.

Likewise, another student described how prestigious it is to be able to participate in and be affiliated with the program:

It's amazing work that we get to play, and it's special to be able to play them and that you *can* play them. Not everyone can just be part of something like that.

Many students described how identifying with others in the program helped them to feel connected to a larger context. One student said:

It feels really good to be one in the group of people that have a like mind and like idea and they have one thing that they're working, like a similar goal and just to be part of that...to be one in there [program].

Another student described:

I think over the years I have become more connected to it [the program] and I'm just building roots in it. I'm part of something bigger.

In a different way, one student described how identifying with others in the ensemble gave her the opportunity to connect as one unit. The student stated:

[Quartet] is a great experience because you're experiencing this great opportunity with your friends that are doing it with you. In chamber music you need to have that intimacy, like all being really connected with each other, and that's something that you get to learn...and I feel that's really important and that connection is really cool...we're all with you, you're on the same page with everyone, and you're just like one instrument.

For another student, identifying with others created a feeling of being understood:

When we're [peers] there [at program] we understand each other and our own personal lives...we understand each other and it's sort of a good relationship that we have...It's a great opportunity to be involved in another community where everyone sort of has the same mind set...

Students also described their acquisition of new relationships as part of their experience of connecting within the program. As one student explained:

We [student and family] connected with those people [other students and families] through the program and sort of got to know them.

Another student described how new friendships made her feel connected to the program:

You get to know the people there better, so that sort of makes it a bit more fun. They're just not the people who sit next to you. I know who they are. They actually become the people, the friends that you can make, the ones that you can say things to. They may become actual friends, the people you like.

Acquiring new relationships within the program also provided students with the opportunity to feel connected to a greater musical community beyond their private instruction. One student explained:

...you gain many relationships with people that you wouldn't know...it gives you, it makes you aware of the musical community and the people in the area...

Similarly, another student described:

It's nice to be able to meet other people besides people in your [private] studio that play and are as involved in music as you are...

In contrast to feeling connected with the program, students also experienced feeling alone. Some students described how being in the program presented the opportunity for them to feel alone when they were not able to keep up with other students. One student described:

It [not being able to read the music that was given for her ensemble] made me feel really insecure and sort of out of place because I felt like I was the only one who couldn't play it.

Another student stated, "You don't want to be bad in front of everyone", in which feeling alone is emphasized as a result of making mistakes among peers.

In summary, feeling connected with the program allowed students to identify with others of like mind, to feel understood and connected with a greater community of musical members, and to experience a sense of pride and a sense of belonging to the music education program. Students also experienced feeling alone and insecure when mistakes were made in front of peers and when the students felt they were unable to achieve the expected playing levels of the group.

*Feeling Responsibility to Others/Feeling Let Down*

As a member of the music education program, students described a feeling of responsibility to others within their playing ensembles. Students also described feeling let down by others within the same contexts. The feelings of responsibility and feeling let down are described herein. Students described, for example, how they felt that their attendance and commitment to their groups were their responsibility. One student described:

I have to be there for my group because I am part of it, I am that other puzzle piece in the whole orchestra. I have to be up for the rest of my orchestra because if we all got there and we didn't feel the need to be there, we didn't feel that we had to be there for other people, we wouldn't have an orchestra.

Another student stated, "I really want to do my best because I don't want to let them [quartet members] down." One student explained how he felt responsible to support the younger students because of how he was once helped himself as a beginner student:

I sort of feel obliged to stay in [program] because it's sort of my duty as a Suzuki kid, it helps the young kids and the older kids did it for me.

In contrast to feeling responsibility to others, one student described the feeling of being let down when she perceived her group members to be irresponsible for their part of the work.

It just feels like some people didn't do their fair share of work and you feel like it's [the music] never going to come together.

To conclude, feelings of responsibility to others contributed to both a sense of helping and supporting others within the program. Feelings of being let down were described by students when they perceived that other members were irresponsible for their share of the work.

*Working Together/Feeling Independent*

All students participating in the study were also a part of a smaller ensemble within the music program such as a quartet. By being a member of the music program in this capacity, students experienced working together with other members and also experienced a feeling of being independent.

Working together within the context of smaller ensembles was experienced in the form of collaboration and compromise. Students described working together with their peers to create successful performances and also how compromising was part of their experience. One student explained:

If we all bring our own ideas then we can create. ...As a part of the ensemble you have your musical ideas and you bring that to the ensemble...with a whole bunch of people's ideas you can create something that's spectacular.

Another student explained:

We [quintet members] have to explain to each other how we [the violinists] feel. ...We try and tell them [viola and cello] what they can improve or what we can improve. We compromise so that we meet at a level in between our standards because their parts are a lot more difficult than our sections. Being in an ensemble you have to be flexible with other people...you have to always listen to their ideas and they'll listen to yours and you always have to compromise because it's something that you're working on together.

In addition to the experience of working together, students also described their experience of feeling independent within the context of having to work and perform with others in the ensembles. One student stated:

I feel as an individual. It's just spent working as a group. So you can still stand alone but it's just...you all work together.

Other students described how their independence within the ensembles allowed them to feel free and yet still supported by the group. One student commented:

What I like about the chamber group is that you're a solo performer yet you're performing as one unit...you're in your own section and you're the only instrument of that section, and I just like the freedom of being able to play by myself, but yet with others.

Another student explained:

It's [playing in quintet] a neat feeling because you're the only one playing that part, and then you have other people in it, so you sort of become one even though you're playing four different parts. It [playing in quintet] makes me feel more individual and free.

Ultimately, working together with others in the program was described by students as being necessary to a collective group performance and achieving a collective goal. Students described the benefit to having the combination of ideas when working in ensemble as opposed to working alone and how it can positively affect the outcome of what the group is working on to create in their performance. In addition, students experienced compromising with their peers in order to collectively agree upon the performance standard for the ensemble or group. In so doing, students described the necessity of breaking away from their own standards as an individual performer for the collective goal of achieving a standard that met the needs and performance level of the group.

Also, students experienced feeling independent with the support of others in the context of performing ensembles. Students explained how playing in the group ensemble allowed them to be an individual while also providing them with a level of safety that comes from performing with others and the knowledge that mistakes will be shared by the group. Students placed high value on the enjoyment and freedom they were able to experience by being able to play as an individual within a group.

### The Holistic Experience of Being in the Music Program

Together, the contextual factors facilitating and impeding progress of *'feedback'*, *'comparison/competition'*, and *'challenge'* along with the enacting progression components of *'motivation'* and *'stagnation'* constituted a large part of the students' holistic experience of being in the music program as it related to progress within the program. In addition, the process of participating in the program was experienced as *'feeling support/feeling pressure'*, *'feeling connected with the program/feeling alone'*, *'feeling responsibility to others/feeling let down'*, *'working together/feeling independent'* (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1

#### *Holistic Experience of the Students*

| Theme                                                       | Sub-themes                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Contextual Factors Facilitating/Impeding Progress        | a) Feedback<br>b) Comparisons/Competitions<br>c) Challenges                                                                                                                                   |
| 2. Enacting Progression                                     | a) Motivation<br>b) Stagnation                                                                                                                                                                |
| 3. Experiencing the Process of Participating in the Program | a) Feeling Support/Feeling Pressure<br>b) Feeling Connected With the Program/Feeling Alone<br>c) Feeling Responsibility to Others/Feeling Let Down<br>d) Working Together/Feeling Independent |

Together, the feedback students received, their own behavior toward progression in the program, and their subjective feelings in relation to this program constituted the students' holistic experience of being in the program.

The findings reported herein provide several valuable insights applicable for administrators, educators and other key stake holders interested in promoting music education. In the following chapter, key findings will be examined within the context of



existing empirical and theoretical literature. Implications for practice and future research will also be discussed.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide many insights into how students experience a community-based music education program and the promotion of their retention in music education. As noted in Chapter Four, three themes together captured students' experience of the community-based music education program, as follows: (1) contextual factors facilitating/impeding progress; (2) enacting progression; (3) experiencing the process of participating in the program. This chapter includes a discussion of these data in the context of the literature review and the methodology as described in Chapter Three. In addition, this chapter includes a discussion of how the findings of this study afford several insights that may be applicable in other music education contexts, particularly to music programs wanting to improve student development, participation and overall success in music education.

### Contextual Factors Facilitating/Impeding Progress

This study identified three important contextual factors that influence the progress of students within the program, namely, feedback, competition/comparison and challenge. Feedback has been identified as being an important factor in the progression of students. For example, Frymier (1994) and Allen, Witt and Wheelless (2006) found that the verbal and non-verbal behaviors of the instructor causes an affective outcome for the students which ultimately helps to generate their motivation. Students within this study said that receiving instructor feedback in the form of praise and criticism could motivate them to work harder. This finding is consistent with that reported in the literature. However, students in this study also expressed that receiving instructor feedback could lower their confidence. This finding has also been previously documented in Atlas,

Taggart, and Goodell (2004) who found that students with sensitivity to criticism experienced a lowered rate of enjoyment, decreased confidence and were less focused on achievement. Although Duke and Henninger (1998) found that most students maintained positive attitudes and achieved quality performance levels regardless of the type of verbal feedback received, the findings from the current study support other previous findings which suggest that students can be affected in both positive and negative ways by receiving feedback from the instructor. Findings from this study also suggest that receiving instructor feedback provides students with opportunities to evaluate their own progression and performance. The ways in which students use instructor feedback to aid their own progression and performance warrants thoughtful consideration. However, teaching effectiveness rather than student experience has been the focus of previous studies (Goolsby, 1997; Siebenalar, 1997). If instructor feedback can provide students with opportunities for reflection and improvement, further research is necessary to gain better understanding of this student experience.

The students in this study perceived their experience of competition with others as motivation to work harder to improve. The majority of competition experienced by students occurred internally; that is, students compared themselves to other students and used the achievements of others as their competition. Investigations into this student experience of self-generated competitiveness is lacking in the literature. Although some has been written on the effects of competitive and non-competitive goal structures on student motivation and achievement in music education (Austin, 1988; Austin, 1991), the focus has been on imposed competition in terms of music contests and rated performances rather than the internal experience of perceiving competition with others.

That being said, Austin (1991) found that competitive goal structures did not produce superior levels of achievement or motivation. The music program for this study did not set out to create a competitive environment and yet, for students, creating a sense of competition with their peers appeared to increase their motivation. The extent to which competition can benefit or impede student motivation may be best determined by considering the context of the music program and the individuality of the student.

Students in this study expressed an appreciation for the challenges provided by the program and perceived them as opportunities to strive for, and set, higher goals and achievements. As Pitts (2007) found, students were more motivated to participate in a school production because of the individual development of skills and performing opportunity. The findings from this study not only emphasize the students' appreciation of challenges but also suggest that students need to be able to see what is possible beyond their current level of performance and skill in order to provide further motivation for improvement.

A study by Atlas, Taggart and Goodell (2004) suggests that personality contributes to the way in which students respond to feedback. The authors found that some students' sensitivity to criticism influenced their motivation. The extent to which personality influenced the findings reported herein warrants further investigation.

#### Enacting Progression

Findings from this study suggest that students perceived their own striving as a necessary behavior if progression and improvement were to ensue. The evidence from other investigations suggests that students understand their own success or failure in music education in terms of their own ability and effort (Asmus, 1986; Legette, 1998). As

Driscoll (2009) observed, students expressed satisfaction and a sense of achievement as being key to sustaining their intrinsic motivation over time. Although it is clear that students can attribute their own success or failure to their own amount of striving, understanding the motivation, or lack thereof, behind their effort still requires further probing and might provide deeper insights for music educators.

The students in this study were specifically focused on their own progression within the program. The findings from this study suggest that students experienced frustration and even annoyance with their peers when stagnation rather than progression occurred. Stagnation came as a result of a lack of preparedness within a group and as a result of being in the program for several years. For many students, their participation in the program exceeded 13 years over which time they progressed into the most senior of ensembles. In some instances, students experienced being in the same ensembles for a long time as discouraging to their feeling of progression even though they may have enjoyed some prestige that came from being in a senior position within the program. As the literature supports, a common reason for discontinuation in music education was from boredom during lessons and a perceived lack of progress on the part of the student (Driscoll, 2009). If the students need to feel as though they are always progressing and improving, further investigation may be necessary to better understand how stagnation can be avoided in programs and schools that are structured around levels, grades, or age categories that could hold students in one place over a number of years.

The students in this investigation shared a strong desire to progress within the community-based music education program in terms of achieving goals and attaining more advanced performance standards. However, this may not be the case for students in

other music education contexts. The personality of students and the traits that relate to the development and maintenance of the internal desire to achieve have not been fully examined within the music education context. Further investigation is required to better understand how personality can influence students' desire to do well and strive for results.

#### Process of Participating in the Program

Findings from this study suggest that students felt supported and secure when performing with other students in large ensembles. Students described feeling strength in numbers within the group which led to them feeling confident. As Kennedy (2002) observed, students identified having the support of the group and working as a team as benefits to participating in a group ensemble.

In contrast, this study also illuminated how students felt pressure when performing individual parts alone and felt insecure when they made mistakes in front of their peers. This finding is consistent with insights obtained from Creech, Gaunt, Hallam and Robertson (2009) and Ryan and Andrews (2009), who found that performing students and choral singers had a fear of performing poorly in front of their peers and experienced pressure when performing difficult music alone. With greater understanding of students' own experience of support and pressure within large and small ensembles, music educators may become more sensitive to what they ask of students in terms of performing, taking into consideration the comfort level and confidence of each student within the ensembles.

The findings from this study also illustrate how students felt that they belonged and were connected because they were able to identify with others of like mind, feel

understood and share a pride for being in the music program. This sense of affiliation may have been furthered by a perceived heightened musical ability attributable to the private instruction that several students within the MTTE program receive beyond their regular school instruction in music. In many cases we know that private instruction can be expensive and exclusive to those that can afford to maintain the financial commitment which, in turn, could support the argument that the socio-economic status of students is a factor in their sense of belonging. However, no socio-economic status information was collected for the purposes of this study. Therefore, whether or not socio-economic homogeneity further influenced this sense of belonging is not known and would require further investigation. Students place high value on the fellowship and sense of community with their peers and report these as reasons they continue to participate in music programs (Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz, 2003; Countryman, 2010; Driscoll, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Pitts, 2007; Sichivitsa, 2003). If feelings of belonging, connection and pride can greatly encourage students' retention in music programs, further investigation into how these experiences can be optimized is warranted.

As well, the findings of this study further our understanding of how students perceived working together with others as being necessary to achieving collective goals and successful performances. This finding is consistent with insights obtained by Conway and Hodgman (2008), who found that members of two separate choirs experienced a heightened performance as a result of their collaboration. At times, students in this study realized that their individual goals needed to be subjugated to the needs of the group to attain a higher level of performance. Realizing how their individual abilities and standards need to be balanced and compromised with the abilities and standards of others

within the group in order to achieve a better outcome was an important experience for students. Students are aware of the experiences that help in their overall success of meeting goals. It is important that music educators and music programs allow for these experiences to occur by providing students with the opportunities to work with others in creative and supportive ways.

#### Expected Findings Not Articulated

For many musicians, music educators and students, part of their musical experience is that of the aesthetics. Humans' need for aesthetics, an appreciation of symmetry, order and beauty, is well documented (Maslow, 1954). As it might be expected, playing and performing music create several opportunities for aesthetic experience in music education. It is worth noting that the findings from this study did not include a focus on the pleasure experienced by students as a result of being in a music education program. Although students described several enjoyable experiences, they did not elaborate on the aesthetic experience of playing and performing music. This suggests that the students' experience of playing and performing may not have been an aesthetic one; the ability of the students to articulate their experience may prevent the uncovering or describing of their aesthetic experience. Furthermore, a lack of interview questioning and probing in this area may have also limited the description of students' aesthetic experience. Much of the literature in music education has focused on student pleasure and students' preferred activities in music with the hope of uncovering some activities or experiences that would encourage continued participation and study in music (Bowles, 1998; Kennedy, 2002; Rife, Shnek, Lauby, and Lapidus, 2001). In the case of this study, students do not describe their preference for playing their instrument nor do they express



their simple love of performing. But, they do express a great deal about what they are able to achieve by playing and performing and what they are able to gain by participating within the program. From the literature it can be concluded that students prefer playing instruments and enjoy performing. Although the same was likely true for the participants in this study, it can only be concluded that the focus of satisfaction for students was not the actual playing and performing of their instrument but what was to be gained and achieved from playing their instruments. In order to move music programming and music education forward, it is suggested that future research have a shifted focus to uncovering how opportunities for student enjoyment, achievement and progress can be encouraged and increased.

The influence of parental support on student retention in music education is well known (Creech, 2010; Cope, 1999; Corenblum and Marshall, 1998; Ho and Law, 2006; Hurley, 1995; Martignetti, 1996; Sichivitsa, 2003; Zdzinski, 1996). Parental support has been found to have an especially strong correlation to students' attitudes toward music (Zdzinski, 1996) as well as positively influencing the musical growth of students (Creech, 2010; Ho and Law, 2006). Based on the evidence of how influential parental support can be on students in music education settings, a similar finding in this study would be expected. However, a particular point of interest from the findings of this study is the glaring and surprising lack of participant description surrounding parental involvement or support. A vast amount of literature suggests that parental involvement is one of the most influencing factors affecting student achievement, motivation, attitude, and continuation in music education (Corenblum and Marshall, 1998; Creech, 2010; Ho and Law, 2006; Hurley, 1995; Martignetti, 1965; Sichivitsa, 2003; Zdzinski, 1996). Although the findings

of previous literature are well-supported, the findings from this study are inconsistent with that of the literature. The students in this study vividly describe their experience of feeling connected to a larger musical community and working with peers however their experience of parental involvement is almost entirely absent from their narrative. In order to avoid leading questions in the interview, students were not directly asked to describe how parental involvement factored into their overall experience. Rather, students were posed open ended questions which allowed for their own identification of persons that entered into their experience within the program. That being said, there is no doubt that parental involvement and support are important factors in these students studying violin. In fact, it is exactly the involvement and support of the parent which the nature of the music program requires through registration, paying fees, and being committed to providing transportation to the facility every weekend. However, it is worth investigating how students perceive their parents' influence in their music education beyond the financial and practical support they provide.

#### Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have several implications for school administrators, school and community music educators and stake holders concerned about promoting music education. The insights uncovered confirm the merit of encouraging student participation in music education programs to promote the intellectual, social (Adderley, C., Kennedy, M., Berz, W., 2003) and emotional growth of students (Winner & Cooper, 2000). Although it may be assumed that the student experience is given consideration in the design of most music programs, emphasis on group structure and instructional strategies does not necessarily constitute a program with

the individual student in mind. It appears that little, if any, regard is given to students' perceptions when employing various instructional methods and assigning placement within the program. Priority needs to be given to understanding the needs of the students in order for them to be motivated, to succeed and remain engaged in their instruction. For example, the students' need to feel connected or a sense of belonging is well documented in the literature as being important to the social development of students (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming and Hawkins, 2004; Georgii-Heming and Westvall, 2010; Green, 2008) in terms of developing their own identity, trusting in others, exploring their environment and developing their capacity to adapt to changes. If the student need for connection and belonging is ignored, the risk of disengaging students in music programs increases. The literature further suggests that student engagement influences student commitment, attendance and academic performance (Klem and Connell, 2004; Zhao and Kuh, 2004) and therefore understanding how students perceive their experiences may help guide program design in which opportunities for students to flourish and remain engaged are maximized.

Music educators may advance the quality of instruction by drawing upon the insights from this study, namely: the influence of instructor feedback, internal competition, and need for challenge on the goal orientation and motivation of students, the students' need for progression and students' own recognition of the necessary behavior of striving, the importance of students' feeling supported and a sense of belonging and how it promotes student confidence and willingness to continue in music instruction. Instructors are in the best position to shape and influence the experiences of students within music programs, and these findings suggest that music educators may

enhance the experiences of students by focusing on the students' need to feel like they are progressing. Instructors may become more aware of the impact of their feedback on students but also become conscious of the need for competition and challenge which can create more opportunities for students to gain intrinsic motivation and, in turn, a greater sense of achievement or progression. Although imposed competition has not always been found to bring about greater performance results (Austin, 1988; Austin, 1991), it still holds value for some students and should not be completely abandoned. Festivals and formal contests can provide a highly structured opportunity for imposed competition however, group projects within a class, performance contests within a school, and individual playing tasks could provide a more informal approach to imposed competition as well. It may be worthwhile for instructors to consider the benefits that competition and challenge can bring about for students and then explore how those experiences can be cultivated naturally within a program.

Additionally, the insights provided by this study serve to inform music educators about the valuable experiences, both negative and positive, that students can have as a result of being and working with other students in a music program. The insights uncovered in this study substantiate the high value that students placed on feeling connected, or a feeling of belonging, to a group (Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz, 2003; Countryman, 2010; Driscoll, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Pitts, 2007; Sichivitsa, 2003). Although most times throughout this study students described feeling supported and secure as a result of being connected and belonging, feelings of pressure and insecurity were also experienced as a result of that same connection. Making mistakes in front of their peers was a very real risk for students (Creech, Gaunt, Hallam and Robertson, 2009;

Ryan and Andrews, 2009) and yet students perceived that working together with others was key to attaining higher performance results. Without regular opportunities for students to engage with others, students may not gain the positive benefits of feeling connected and supported or capitalize on the opportunity to gain confidence within the large ensemble context. The findings of this study together with those of previous investigations (Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz, 2003; Countryman, 2010; Creech et al., 2009; Driscoll, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Pitts, 2007; Sichiivitsa, 2003) may provide information useful to music educators in the formatting of instruction and ensemble playing and guide the development of the social structure within which students are engaged.

#### Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that students' experience of progression within the music program context is relevant to their continuing in music education. For students in this study, experiencing progression was critical to their own motivation to work harder and achieve success. However, further investigation is needed to identify how students perceive the development of their own motivation, and if and how their instructors and program structure can encourage that intrinsic motivation. Such research might explore the development of students' intrinsic motivation and what students perceive as being the keys to promoting and preventing this development. Further research might also investigate the link between students' ability to develop intrinsic motivation and their level of commitment to continuing in music education. Additionally, the findings of this study suggest students' need for feeling a sense of belonging within their music program to maintaining their commitment to music education. However,

these findings raise questions for future research. Although some is known about the factors that may affect students' sense of belonging, there is much that remains unknown from the students' own description of this phenomenon and therefore requires further study. The optimal conditions, amount of time spent with other students, and activities that could encourage working together and facilitate the feeling of belonging are currently unknown and warrants further investigation. In addition, how music stakeholders, including program directors, music educators, family and students, together create a sense of belonging in music education programs remains largely unknown. Further phenomenological studies might illuminate knowledge to inform changes in music education and practice to encourage the experience of belonging on the part of the student. Such research might allow students the opportunity to describe how they perceive their own sense of belonging within their music education program and how they arrived at their own level of connection with others.

The nature of this community-based program requires a financial commitment from students' parents in order for students to participate. The effect of this financial commitment on student participation and motivation also requires further investigation. Such research might help to illuminate how differences in socio-economic status affect the experiences of students within music education programs.

#### Limitations of the Study

The data for this investigation were obtained from students involved in a community-based music education program in Southern Ontario centered on leveled Suzuki-approach instruction and group settings of both small and large ensembles. The findings of this study may be limited by the willingness and capacity of the student

participants to reflect on their experiences as well as their ability to articulate the meanings they attach to their experiences. Also, the study may be limited by my ability to adequately interpret the participants' verbalizations.

The community-based music program used for this investigation requires private funding from participants' parents and predominantly includes students who are also participating in ongoing, paid, private instruction. The financial commitment of the students' families would imply that students share a similar level of socio-economic status. Therefore, the findings from this study are not generalizable to other settings, particularly those within the public sector that do not require financial commitments.

### Conclusion

Overall, the findings of the study illuminate students' experiences within a community-based music education program. One of the strengths of this study was the utilization of an interpretive phenomenological approach to conducting and analyzing research (Lopez and Willis, 2004) which has not been popularly used in music education research. This approach allowed the researcher to openly engage students throughout the interviews to explore their feelings, behaviors, attitudes, needs, and values in order to gain in-depth understanding of their experience (Patton, 2002) within the community-based music education program. As interpretive phenomenology focuses on the form and nature of the lived experience of reality and what can be known about it (Cohen & Omery, 1994), the use of this methodology helped to capture the essence of their everyday experiences of this program (Patton, 2002). While findings of interpretive research are not generalizable, the understandings and insights uncovered may have applicability to music education stakeholders in the community and other music

education contexts. Therefore, these findings may serve to inform the practice and approach to promoting music education.

The students in this phenomenological investigation perceived their being in the community-based music education program as a holistic experience comprised of: *'feedback'*, *'comparison/competition'*, and *'challenge'* along with the enacting progression components of *'motivation'* and *'stagnation'*. Additionally, students experienced the process of participating in the program as including: *'feeling support/feeling pressure'*, *'feeling connected with the program/feeling alone'*, *'feeling responsibility to others/feeling let down'*, and *'working together/feeling independent'*.

Several insights gained from this thesis research advance our knowledge of how students experience progression within music education programs. While instructor feedback has been identified as being an important factor in the progression of the student, assumptions should not be made regarding the influence it may have on students. Insights gained from this investigation suggest that instructor feedback can have both a positive and negative effect on the students' confidence and can also aid in students' self-evaluation and motivation to improve. As this study reveals, the students' experience of instructor feedback is unique and therefore demands, from the instructor, sensitivity to the needs of each student.

Additionally, the inclusion of traditional competition and its effects on student motivation and progression has been debated and questioned in the literature; however, the competition which students create for themselves has not been fully explored. Just as the individuality of the students' needs must be considered in the case of instructor feedback, so too should be the case with the inclusion of competition in the traditional



sense and the encouragement of internal competition. If students are creating competition for themselves to cultivate internal motivation and thus affect their progression, it might benefit music educators to investigate this student need further and further explore how it might be addressed within the context of music education programs.

Furthermore, while a sense of achievement has been identified as key to sustaining students' intrinsic motivation (Driscoll, 2009), it can not be assumed that each student will succeed in experiencing achievement. As discussed in the literature, students understand their own success or failure in music education in terms of their own ability and effort (Asmus, 1986; Legette, 1998). The insights gained from this study strengthen this finding but also raise the question of how the personality of each student may affect their internal drive to achieve and strive for higher standards in success. Further research is needed to gain increased understanding of such a complex issue as self-efficacy for skill development.

Insights gained from this thesis research strengthen our knowledge of how students experience a sense of belonging within the music education context and how such experiences can greatly encourage students' retention in music programs (Adderley, Kennedy, and Berz, 2003; Countryman, 2010; Driscoll, 2009; Kennedy, 2002; Pitts, 2007; Sichivitsa, 2003). Students attributed their sense of belonging to identifying with others of like mind, feeling understood and sharing a pride for being in the music program. Although feelings of support and confidence resulted in several instances, the students' sense of belonging did not fend off feelings of insecurity, loneliness and pressure. Despite experiencing the negative feelings that arise from the fear of making mistakes in front of peers, students perceived the working together with others as a

necessity to achieving collective goals and successful performances. Further research is needed to gain increased understanding of how students arrive at feeling a sense of belonging and how this sense withstands feelings of isolation, lowered self-confidence and pressure.

In summary, the findings of this study have been gleaned from the context of a community-based music education program; however, several of the insights pertaining to student progression, motivation, and a sense of belonging may, in fact, be relevant to contexts outside of music education which are focused on promoting student retention and improving student achievement. The enhanced understanding achieved through this thesis investigation both informs and invites the development of the theory and practice of promoting music education and advancing the quality of instruction throughout all of music education.

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## Appendices

APPENDIX A  
Ethics Review Form



**THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE**

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Review Number: 0811-3  
 Applicant: Leigh Walter  
 Supervisor: Carol Beynon  
 Title: *Students' experiences within a community-based orchestral music education program: A phenomenological exploration*  
 Expiry Date: September 30, 2009  
 Type: M.Ed Thesis  
 Ethics Approval Date: December 19, 2008  
 Revision #:  
 Documents Reviewed &  
 Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information & Consent

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This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

No deviations from, or changes to, the research project as described in this protocol may be initiated without prior written approval, except for minor administrative aspects. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information and consent documentation, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

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Dr. Jason Brown (Chair)

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**2008-2009 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board**

|                                |                                                                  |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dr. Jason Brown</b>         | <b>Faculty (Chair)</b>                                           |
| <b>Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki</b>   | <b>Faculty</b>                                                   |
| <b>Dr. Jacqueline Specht</b>   | <b>Faculty</b>                                                   |
| <b>Dr. John Barnett</b>        | <b>Faculty</b>                                                   |
| <b>Dr. J. Marshall Mangan</b>  | <b>Faculty</b>                                                   |
| <b>Dr. Immaculate Namukasa</b> | <b>Faculty</b>                                                   |
| <b>Dr. Robert Macmillan</b>    | <b>Assoc Dean, Graduate Programs &amp; Research (ex officio)</b> |
| <b>Dr. Jerry Paquette</b>      | <b>UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (ex officio)</b>        |

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|                          |                                                      |
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Copy: Office of Research Ethics

APPENDIX B  
Semi-structured Interview Guide



**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE**  
(Orchestral Music Education Program Students)

Students' experiences within a community-based orchestral music education program: A phenomenological exploration

1. Biographical information:

- How old are you?
- What school do you attend?
- Do you take music at school?
  - What instrument do you play?
  - How long have you been playing?
  - Do you have any brothers or sisters in the program?
  - Are your parents or other family members musicians?
- How did you come to be a student in this program?

2. Music Program Experiences:

1. Tell me about the music program in which you are involved.  
Probes: What classes? groups? ensembles? With whom? When? Where?
2. What is it like to be in the program?  
Probes: What and who makes it like that? How? When? Where?
3. How does it feel to be in the program?  
Probes: what makes it feel like that? who, if anyone, enters into these
4. What are some of the things that help you stay in the music program?  
Probes: behaviours, attitudes, needs, goals, expectations, values, emotions
5. What are some of the things that make you want to quit?  
Probes: behaviours, attitudes, needs, goals, expectations, values, emotions
6. In an ideal world, what would it be like to be in the music program  
How could this ideal be achieved? When? Where?

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