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Los Angeles

These Are My People:

Music Teacher Instructional Practice and School Connectedness

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Johanna Sumiko Gamboa-Kroesen

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

These Are My People:

Music Teacher Instructional Practice and School Connectedness

by

Johanna Sumiko Gamboa-Kroesen

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Kathryn M. Anderson, Co-Chair

Professor Mark P. Hansen, Co-Chair

School connectedness, or the sense of belonging at school, is an integral factor in a child's mental health and overall academic success. Prior research in music education indicates that, among other benefits, music classrooms may provide an environment where students feel they belong. Using 190 student survey responses and reflective writings, five teacher interviews, and nine classroom observations, this study examined the relationship between 7th and 8th-grade student-reported levels of connectedness within their school-based music ensemble and teacher instructional practice. The study found that students reported high levels of school connectedness within their school-based orchestra ensemble and experienced a positive change in an emotional

or mental state of mind during music instruction. Teacher instructional practice that de-emphasized competition was found to strengthen self-efficacy, relational value, and form a collective identity within the ensemble. The findings offer important implications for future music teacher instruction to create environments of inclusion, strengthen student-teacher relationships, and promote strategies that enhance student connection to school.

This dissertation of Johanna Sumiko Gamboa-Kroesen is approved.

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2019

DEDICATION

For my son, Elliot, who gives me a sense of belonging now and always.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

School connectedness, or the sense of belonging at school, is a critical factor in adolescent health, academic achievement, and socioemotional well-being. Research indicates that students who feel connected and cared for a school are less likely to drop out (Klem & Connell, 2004; Wehlage, 1989; Wentzel, 1998), engage in risk behaviors such as drug use, bullying, and violence (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Resnick et al., 1997) and exhibit emotional distress (Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague et al., 2006). Students who experience school connectedness feel like they belong in the school environment, believe their teachers care about them and their learning and believe that education matters.

In educational research, the construct of the psychological sense of school membership is often referred to as school engagement, school bonding, or school attachment (Shochet et al., 2006). The American Psychological Association defines school connectedness as “the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). The feeling of being accepted and included at school factors critically in student emotional well-being (Furlong et al., 2003; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Research has found that increased school connectedness is associated with positive socioemotional development and students who feel a sense of belonging in school have more developed self-esteem, internal regulation, and motivation to succeed (Osterman, 2000).

Developed self-esteem and the ability to express and manage emotion significantly affect a child’s ability to persist when faced with challenging activities, seek help when needed, and participate in and benefit from relationships with family, school, and community (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Raver & Knitzer (2002) further suggest that social and emotional competence is

a substantial predictor of a child's future academic success and predictive of their positive attitudes about schooling. Students who feel positively about education, feel a sense of belonging in the school environment, and are able to make and maintain positive relationships at school are more likely to have several positive health and academic outcomes (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). While current research recognizes school connectedness as integral to a child's mental health and academic success, many schools have yet to develop adequate interventions to promote a child's overall sense of belonging at school.

However, research in music education indicates that, among other benefits, music classrooms provide an environment where students feel they belong (Adderely et al., 2003; Campbell, Connell, & Beegle, 2007; Morrison, 2001). Morrison (2001) attributes the inclusive feeling of a music classroom to the shared music experiences that create a sense of unity for all students. Historically, music ensembles such as band, orchestra, and choir have played an important role in American society (Abril, 2013; Humphreys, 2012; Vance, 2014). Music education courses are often included as curricular courses in American schools, ranging from marching band, symphonic orchestra, show choir, to guitar and keyboard class with participation being typically in group ensembles rather than an individual experience. In such a group environment, students often feel connected to one another because of shared musical interests and the number of rehearsal hours shared outside of the school day (Adderely et al., 2003). Adderely et al. (2003) reported that students often feel that their music ensemble is a "home away from home" (p.190), making the school music learning environment of particular interest to study.

Furthermore, research indicates that along with feeling a sense of belonging at school, the experience of music learning has additional positive contributions to student socioemotional

development. Hallam (2010) suggests that children with developed musicianship are better able to express their emotional state, regulate their emotional actions, and decrease developing stress and anxiety. Music training may also enhance various cognitive functions, including speech and language processing (Moreno, Bialystok, & Barac, 2009), verbal and non-verbal reasoning (Forgeard, Winner, Norton, & Schlaug, 2008), and attention and processing speed (Roden et al., 2014).

While research indicates that music learning environments, specifically perform ensemble learning environments, instill a sense of school connectedness and, more broadly, contribute to a students' socioemotional development, there is inadequate research on how the actions of music teachers contribute to this phenomenon. Current research has yet to outline instructional practices that foster a student's sense of belonging at school from both the music teacher and music student perspective. Descriptive research is needed to explore how music teachers use their instructional practices to promote school connectedness. Furthermore, an inquiry about perceptions of inclusivity with music student populations is needed to understand further how music learning contributes to student emotional and social development from inside the music classroom.

To further explore the background behind the phenomenon, I examined the relevance of connectedness, socioemotional development in adolescents, and the current state of teacher instructional practice in schools.

Background

The emotional consequences of connectedness have been well-studied. Bonds with other people can be the cause of happiness, and supportive social networks can act as buffers against stress and depression. As research has outlined, this sense of connectedness is especially true for

adolescents during a school day. Students spend a significant amount of time with their teachers and peers in school, and the quality of their relationships is a critical influence on their social, emotional, and academic development (Wentzel, 2003). Adolescents who feel they receive emotional support and are positively connected their school experience are more likely to be motivated to learn (Cornelius-White, 2007), have increased attendance (Blum, 2005), perform better on tests (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), and have less internalized problems such as depression (Reddy, Rhodes, & Mulhall, 2003). Students who have strong connections to school are less likely to develop substance abuse, engage in early sexual activity, and engage in weapon-use violence (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004).

Despite the documented benefits of teacher and peer relationship-building during the school day, most middle and high schools are structured in ways that make this problematic (Jackson, 2000). Most secondary schools have routines and structures such as switching teachers and peer groups every hour and large classroom sizes that translate to diminished opportunity for sustained personal contact between teachers and peers (Hill & Chao, 2009; Way et al., 2007). It may be that the overall school structure inhibits some students from feeling attached to their school experience and, as a result, places roadblocks in front of students' social and emotional development.

The domains of socioemotional development include the human ability to express and manage emotions and to sustain positive engagement with peers. Emotional development includes emotion regulation, emotion expressiveness, and communication. Social development is the broader category of interpersonal social skills such as developing peer relations, sharing, and respecting others. Considered by some to be the foundation of learning, socioemotional skills are significantly related to the development of cognitive abilities (Denham, 2006).

In 2000, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine stated that elements of early intervention programs that enhance social and emotional development are just as essential as elements that focus on cognitive competence (Schonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Mental health-related issues are a growing concern for students of all ages throughout the P-20 schooling structure. In 2016, the Center for Collegiate Mental Health indicated that stress, anxiety, and depression are a significant cause for concern in today's schools. One in five students in the United States will have a mental health issue that results in needing treatment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). In 2013, one-third of undergraduate college students had difficulty functioning due to stress, depression, and anxiety (American College Health Association, 2014). The student mental health problem is grave in its consequences. Thirty percent of students who seek mental health services report that they have seriously considered attempting suicide at some point in their lives (National College Health Assessment, 2013). According to the American College Health Association 2015 assessment, two-thirds of students who are struggling with mental health do not seek treatment.

The ability to cope with stressful situations, express and manage emotional experiences, and feel supported in a school environment is critical in American schools today. Research confirms that integrating music learning into a young child's school day leads to an increase in social skills, including social cooperation, social interaction, and social independence (Ritblatt et al., 2013). Ritblatt and colleagues (2013) maintain that the social skills that are developed in some preschool music programs positively increase school-readiness and a child's transition to kindergarten. Music learning environments seem to play a role in the emotional and social aspects of adolescent identity development. Several studies indicate that school music experiences provide a safe and positive environment where students feel they belong (Adderely

et al., 2003; Campbell et al., 2007; Morrison, 2001). The social aspect of participating in music ensembles is a significant draw to students, and the social climate they experience in such a music subculture is something they may not find in the larger school setting (Adderely et al., 2003). The inclusion of music instruction in students' school experience has the potential to impact their social development, emotional health, and overall sense of belonging at school.

Biag (2016) found that most studies examining school connectedness have focused exclusively on student outcomes and experiences. Few studies have documented how school connectedness develops and sustains on a school campus. While research suggests that music learning may contribute to a child's socioemotional competence and sense of belonging at school, there is a lack of information as to how music teachers use instructional practices to promote such positive growth.

Recent studies examining educational research have found a shortcoming in instructional practice-based teacher education as a whole (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Grossman, 2011; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Hiebert & Morris, 2012). Grossman and McDonald (2008) found that in the past two decades, most of the research on teaching has focused on teachers' knowledge of specific subject matter and teachers' belief systems. While it is acknowledged that these are critical aspects of teaching, Grossman and McDonald (2008) further maintain that teaching is an interactive practice that requires not just knowledge, but a focus on craft and skill. Recent paradigms for good teaching are almost exclusively cognitive, emphasizing beliefs and ideas over the actual skills required when teaching (Ball & Forzani, 2009). Hiebert and Morris (2012) refer to this as "an emphasis on teachers, rather than teaching" (p. 98). While effective teachers must possess mastery in their content area and a set of core values or beliefs to guide their

professional purpose, the selection and execution of appropriate instructional practices are essential to a student's success in the classroom.

Instructional practices that deliver curriculum are research-based and have the potential to improve student achievement are referred to as *core practices* (Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009). Examples of core practices include class discussions, engaging students in response and promoting critical thinking. Though there is limited research in music education that uses the term, "core practice", there is research on best practices in music education (Juchniewicz, Kelly & Acklin, 2014; Kelly, 2008), music teacher behaviors (Cavitt, 2003; Silvey, 2014), and teaching strategies in instrumental music teaching (Abril, 2009; Allsup, 2003; Allsup & Benedict, 2008; Hoffman & Carter, 2013). These studies, however, fail to highlight what core instructional practices in music education benefit a student's socioemotional competence and connectedness to school.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between school connectedness and music learning environments with middle school students enrolled in a school-based music ensemble. In addition, it is the goal of this study to provide a descriptive analysis of the instructional practices that music teachers use to promote an inclusive environment in their classrooms and an overall sense of belonging in their students.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent do middle school orchestra students report a sense of school connectedness within their school-based performing ensemble?
2. In what ways, if at all, does membership in orchestra impact a student's experience in middle school?

3. In what ways do music teachers use instructional practices to build positive prosocial skills between peers and relationships with teachers?
4. In what ways do music teachers use instructional practices to motivate student learning and build inclusivity in the music classroom?

Overview of the Research Design

The goal of this study was to both learn how participation in orchestra impacts student perceptions of connectedness to their school-based performing ensemble and understand how music teachers use instructional practices to build communities of inclusion. This study used a mixed methods design that incorporated student surveys, student reflective writing samples, teacher observations, and teacher interviews.

During the first phase of the study, student survey data and student reflective writing samples were gathered from five middle schools in a district with a reputation for a comprehensive music education program. The survey measured student perceptions of school connectedness within their school-based orchestra ensemble, including feeling socially connected to peers and their music teacher, feeling engaged during music learning, and feeling that they belong in their school music ensemble. The student reflective writings inquired why students chose to participate in music, how performing with others made them feel during music class, and if membership in their school orchestra impacted their overall experience in middle school. The survey served two purposes: a) to compare data within the target school district with existing research on the school connectedness and the sense of belonging in the music learning environment and b) identify school sites where students report the strongest levels of connectedness. The reflective writing sought to explain and further understand student experiences in middle school music.

After student surveys and reflective writings were analyzed, three participating school sites were selected for further study. The first site was selected because the site reported the highest level of positive connectedness scores from the survey. The second site was selected because it reported the lowest connectedness score and most significant deviation in student answers. Finally, the third site was selected for its high connectedness scores and highly descriptive student reflective writings. During this second phase of the study, a qualitative approach was further utilized. The five participating teachers were interviewed about their teaching philosophies, instructional practices, and experience with building engaged and inclusive music learning environments. Data were collected from the three selected sites based on classroom observations. The goal of this data collection was to identify how music teachers use instructional practices to create and foster inclusive learning environments.

Significance of the Study

While current research indicates that a student's sense of belonging at school and socioemotional competence are predictive of academic success and adolescent health (Furlong et al., 2003; Maddox and Prinz, 2003), schools may fail to provide an environment to strengthen such skills. Music education provides children a positive environment to explore, manage emotions, and engage in healthy social interactions. I hope this study will add to existing data on the benefit of music learning and create new advocacy for school music programs. In addition, the information of this study will be disseminated to music educators and music education teaching programs. By highlighting how specific instructional practices in the music classroom promote school connectedness, there may be beneficial changes in best teaching practices and positive student outcomes.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last decade, there has been an increased interest in positive psychology, the scientific study of positive emotions, and the human ability to sustain a full and meaningful life (Cohen, 2006). While Noddings (2003) points out that positive psychology is rarely a topic of conversation in educational circles, the ability for children to maintain healthy emotional well-being is a significant predictor of academic achievement (Denham, 2006). Within the social construct of schooling, belongingness is central to a child's emotional experience as a student.

The need to belong refers to a human emotional need to affiliate and be accepted by members of a group. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), only physiological and safety needs are viewed as more fundamental than love and happiness. This need to belong involves more than simply being acquainted or surrounded by other people. Belongingness is gaining acceptance, attention, and support from members of a group and reciprocating these actions to others. Being part of a group signifies being part of something that expands beyond the boundaries of one's self (Lambert et al., 2013). The need to belong in school is particularly significant in early adolescence, as students explore aspects of personal identity separate from families and rely more on friendships and outside relationships for support and direction (Nicholes, 2008). Feeling a sense of connection or belonging to an environment or social setting is a significant contributor to emotional well-being.

The environment of a music classroom has the potential to create inclusive spaces for students and contribute to a child's emotional well-being. Children who engage in music learning activities tend to score higher on skills of expression, risk-taking, cooperative learning and emotion management (Burton et al., 2000; Hallam, 2004; Labbe, Schmidt, Babin, & Pharr,

2004). Students also report a sense of belonging to their school music ensemble that functions as a family unit away from home (Adderely, 2009).

To address the relationship between school connectedness and music education, I first examine the benefit of emotional well-being and social skill development in the academic environment through the lens of positive psychology. Second, I explore how the atmosphere of a music education learning environment might contribute to a student's sense of belonging and socioemotional development, taking into account an emphasis on peer-oriented learning, positive engagement, and the building of inclusive environments. Finally, I explore instructional practices in music education, including rehearsing large ensembles, facilitating small groups, selecting appropriate repertoire, providing students feedback to improve practice, engaging students in creative and critical thinking, and incorporating students' musical and cultural identities. Research has found that music educators use such instructional practices during instruction to promote positive learning environments.

Emotional Well-Being and Schooling

Throughout history, educational institutions have grappled with a simple question, "How do children learn best?" While challenge and struggle may be an essential part of the academic journey, Noddings (2003) states that children and adults learn best when they are happy. While educators may agree that happy environments are more agreeable for schooling (Cohen et al., 2009; Furlong et al., 2014; Guilman et al., 2008; Noddings, 2003), happiness itself is rarely discussed in the school setting and few educational theorists have connected schooling to the field of positive psychology.

The Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania defines positive psychology as "the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to

thrive” (Positive Psychology Center, 2018). Seligman et al. (2005) writes that the field of positive psychology is about valued experiences: well-being, contentment, hope, optimism, and happiness. At the individual level, positive psychology is about the capacity for love and vocation, interpersonal skills, courage, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, talent, and fulfillment. At the group level, it is about civic virtues: responsibility, altruism, civility, tolerance, and work ethic (Seligman et al., 2000). It can be argued that the pursuit of finding “what makes life worth living” is considerably connected to students’ educational aims and goals.

Connecting Positive Psychology to Educational Settings

Students who experience positive school involvement also report higher levels of mental and physical health as adults (Reynolds & Ou, 2010). Furthermore, the school setting may be crucial when addressing issues of adolescent depression. Adolescents with mental health problems are a serious public health concern in the United States (Kessler, 1997; Wang & Beydoun, 2007; Wickrama et al., 2008). Around 15% of K-12 school-age children report high levels of depressive symptoms and 8% to suffer from major depression, which may result in suicide (Center for Mental College Mental Health, 2017). Also, school context has a unique impact on the developmental course of adolescent depressive symptoms, especially when accounting for unfair experiences based on racial prejudice, discrimination based on socioeconomic status (Wickrama & Vazsonui, 2011). Students who have negative experiences in school often become disengaged in schooling and further suffer from both physical and mental health problems (Henry & Slater, 2007). Henry & Slater (2007) further emphasize that low attachment and disengagement in schooling is associated with more significant health-risk behaviors, such as smoking and drinking alcohol, and indicate mental health issues. Identifying

inclusive school environments, concerned with student happiness, instill a sense of belonging, and promote positive engagement may contribute greatly the emotional well-being of students and their success later in life.

Emotional Well-Being

The ability to recognize, manage, and express emotions are crucial for a student's academic success (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). The Mental Health Foundation (2012) defines emotional well-being as the "positive sense of well-being, which enables an individual to be able to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life." Carolyn Saarni's (2000, 2007, 2014) work in emotional well-being outlines a theoretical model of emotional competence that emphasizes the skills of self-efficacy, adaptation, and coping. Saarni (1999) outlines three categories of emotional competence: emotion expression, emotion understanding, and emotion regulation. Emotion expression includes verbal and nonverbal emotions of communication. Emotion understanding is the knowledge one has about experiences, requiring the development of an emotional lexicon. Finally, emotion regulation is the managing of emotion to allow oneself to engage with others, endure challenges, and modify behavior in social settings. An understanding of emotional well-being may have a meaningful impact on the classroom setting. For example, if a child successfully reduces the intensity of an emotional reaction, that child is more likely to engage in problem-solving strategies as opposed to attempting to avoid the situation in the future. Furthermore, children who manage their feelings and maintain a positive engagement in schooling are better able to manage impulses, make informed decisions, and persist in pursuing goals (Buckley & Saarni, 2014).

Adolescents who show signs of poor emotional regulation suffer from mood and anxiety disorders (Esbjorn et al., 2012; Tortella-Feliu et al., 2010; Werner et al., 2011). Likewise, healthy

emotional expression and regulation are associated with positive social development and school engagement (Chang et al., 2012; Denham, 2006; Monopoli & Kingston, 2012). A recent meta-analysis found that students exposed to social and emotional learning show an 11 percentage point gain in achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Durlak et al. (2011) further indicate that social and emotional skills can be developed within a school setting through a developmentally appropriate, comprehensive, and supported intervention. Buckley and Saarni (2014) contend that any discussion of emotional well-being must include both social and emotional learning, as the impact of peer esteem and social skill development impact a student's experience during the school day.

Social Skill Development

The ability to engage in social settings, exhibit prosocial behaviors, and demonstrate empathy is an integral part of child development. Furthermore, a child's prosocial behavior and understanding of empathy significantly contribute to their academic functioning (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2014). Spinrad & Eisenberg (2014) report that children who are prosocial and empathic are likely to cooperate in class, exhibit appropriate behavior, and may be well-liked by teachers. Social skill development has been linked to broad success in elementary school, as Miles & Stipek (2006) found a positive relationship between kindergarten and first-grade teachers' ratings of children's social behavior and literacy achievement tracing to fifth grade. At the secondary level, social skill development may predict a student's grade point average and other school achievements (Bandura et al., 2001; Caprara, Barbaranella, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000; Wentzel, 2003).

Several school programs with a focus on social skills have been implemented as a response to such literature on social skill development. Using a positive engagement approach,

Solomon et al. (2000) developed a program to promote empathy and social behaviors. Teachers were trained in child-centered and collaborative activities and engaged in different roles around the classroom. Teachers promoted social understanding, social values, and activities that required the children to be helpful to others. For example, children enrolled in Head Start preschool programs often participate in empathy-training and are reported to be more tolerant, social, and cooperative than children enrolled in academic programs that receive no element of emotion or empathy training (Chaing et al., 2007).

Given that research shows prosocial behaviors heavily influence a child's academic success, and emotional well-being, educational institutions should seek to identify environments that foster such growth. Ritblatt et al. (2013) identify music learning environments as successfully contributing to various social skills, such as social cooperation, social interaction, and social independence. Music learning environments provide a safe and inclusive environment to foster creativity, school engagement, and social skill development. Music learning may also further contribute to student emotional well-being.

Music Learning Environments

While music learning may have an impact on the social skill development and emotional well-being of students, a productive learning environment is what enables students to benefit from such a musical experience. Educational learning environments represent a collection of factors that influences a child's school experience and may include the school curriculum, teacher guidance, and instruction design, fellow learners, and learning materials. Research has often turned first to the individual teacher when assessing how learning occurs. The effectiveness of learning environments depends heavily on teaching style, instructional techniques, and the

personal attributes of teachers. However, defining what constitutes effective teaching is challenging (Madsen, Standley, & Cassidy, 1989).

The 1970s and 1980s saw a wave of research on the personal attributes of teachers, including facial expressions and posture (Clifford & Wallster, 1973), enthusiasm and sense of humor (Fox & Beamish, 1989), and eye contact (Madsen, Standley & Cassidy, 1989). Other teaching variables were studied, including delivery style, pace, and creativity (Fox & Beamish, 1989) and proximity to students (Madsen, Standley, & Cassidy, 1989). What is most interesting is that studies of effective teaching show similar results and conclusions with studies of effective music teaching. This suggests that there are commonalities between all subject areas concerning the perception of the quality of instruction and effective teacher traits. However, it is crucial to consider the factors that make the music classroom different than other classrooms. It may be that music learning environments are uniquely inclusive, peer-oriented, and focus on active participation and engagement with the subject matter.

For example, in the United States, instrumental music learning in the schools is almost exclusively in the form of large group instruction. Student musicians are tasked with playing in ensembles with other peers and developing the following skills: matching one's articulation according to style, genre and context to the rest of the group, adjusting volume (dynamics) of one's instrument to account for balance and blend, holding eye contact with the conductor or other ensemble members, and adjusting intonation (pitch variation) to match with others. Additionally, when a music ensemble rehearses or performs, every student in the ensemble is actively engaged. Students perform on their instrument with peers and even when the music instructs the student performer not to play or "rest," the musician is actively counting beats of silence until they rejoin the ensemble.

Performing on an instrument or singing is a physically active exertion that requires correct posture and position of the body. When a student participates in music, it is immediately evident through visual cues of posture and body position and aural cues of sound production. Even if a student encounters difficulty playing their instrument, a teacher can assess large groups of students at a time for active participation. While not all students may positively engage during music instruction, the environment of music learning allows the music teacher to continually assess participation and peer interaction and adjust best teaching practices to include all learners.

Additionally, the traditions and values of school music ensembles differ in other ways from other academic settings. In 1973, Cusiak studied the social nature of school institutions and found that “music cliques” were particular instances of close-knit social networks. Students are typically organized into sections within a large ensemble, grouped often by instrument or instrument family, such as the percussion section, brass section, woodwinds section, and string section. These sections function as connected social groups within the larger ensemble. Also, most music ensemble classes are unique compared with other academic courses in the amount of time required outside of the traditional school day. Additional rehearsals, auditions, and performances are normative in the music setting. Most secondary schools participate in music competitions or adjudicated events that highlight the team or group-identity of the ensemble (Morrison, 2001).

The inclusivity and collaborative nature of performing ensembles encourage prosocial behaviors and contribute to a peer-oriented environment that may have substantial benefits to student emotional well-being. The unique elements of music learning may contribute to a sense of belonging for students within the ensemble atmosphere and provide a valuable psychological connection to a student’s school experience.

Peer-Oriented Learning

Ethnomusicologists and anthropologists have long acknowledged the positive effects of music on social bonding (Dissanayak, 2006). Whether listening to concerts in large group settings, singing patriotic songs at sporting events, gathering for hymns at church, humming familiar jingles from advertisements, or discussing favorite music in conversations, music serves a definite social purpose (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2006). The socializing nature of music may even contribute to the development of collective identities (Tarrant, 2002). Tarrant (2002) identified music preferences as a predictor of “in-group” and “out-group” membership for 14- and 15-year-old girls and boys. As children mature, music preferences and listening become an important topic in adolescent life. Boer and Akubakar (2014) found that music listening in families and peer groups contributes to family and peer cohesion. Furthermore, this study found that individuals who regularly engaged in music listening with family and peers are more positive in their emotional well-being. Boer and Akubakar (2014) suggest “music serves as an important vehicle for communication and relationship maintenance.”

Music listening is a significant part of the music classroom. Students often engage in listening to professional ensembles through audio examples, giving feedback to group or individual performances, and listening as part of performing in an ensemble. A key component of musicianship is the ability to listen to and adapt one’s sound or tone quality to create blend and balance within a larger ensemble. Students are often tasked with recognizing minute differences in articulation, pitch variation, and rhythmic accuracy through listening. Both detailed music listening as a form of adept musicianship and more social music listening are common and frequent practices in the music learning environment. Such activities in music

learning environments benefit the social cooperation and social cohesion of peers (Ritblatt et al., 2013).

While music learning can be associated with individual lessons between one student and one teacher, group instruction that focuses on ensemble learning has powerful implications for social bonding within the school day. Conway and Borst (2001) found that participating in musical performance within school choral ensembles had many non-musical benefits for students. Singing and performing for social reasons was a significant finding in this action research study, resulting in Conway and Borst (2001) recommending that social opportunities be expanded in middle school and high school music departments.

Participating in music performing ensembles may be more than a social experience. Kenny (2016) suggests that membership in a performing group may lead to creating a community of practice. Defined by Wenger in 1999, a community of practice is a group of people who share a concern or passion and strengthen their learning due to regular interaction within the group setting. Mainly based on the idea that human learning is fundamentally social in nature, it identifies “the domain” as the bringing together of members by their shared need or motivation, “the community” as the bond that is formed during collective learning over time, and finally, “the practice” as the interactions that result from the collective ensemble. Kenny (2016) suggests that music ensembles are distinct communities through traditions, rules, membership, identities, and collective musical experiences. Participation in school-based music ensembles may not only motivate student participation and promote prosocial behaviors with peers; it may form a collective identity or community of practice within the ensemble.

Positive Engagement in School Through Music

A 2016 Gallup survey of almost a million students in grades 5-12 found that only half of the adolescents feel engaged in school. More alarmingly, 29% of students report feeling not engaged, and 21% are actively disengaged. Engagement levels decrease as students age because students tend to feel less cared for by adults and report less value in their student work. Only 23% of students say that at school, they get to do what they do best every day. This finding suggests that schools are not providing opportunities to help students find and develop their strengths. Engagement decreases steadily from fifth grade through junior high and high school, before reaching the lowest point in the junior year. In fifth grade, 75% of students feel involved and enthusiastic about school; however, by 11th grade, the same is true for only 32% of students. Motivating students to attend school, be engaged in their school culture, and take pride in their work is a significant concern for today's educational institutions. Music classrooms have the potential to provide such a motivating experience for students.

Kokotsati (2015) identifies music learning environments as stimulating experiences for students who can be actively involved in interactive work. In the music learning environment, students are not only cognitively and emotionally engaged by music listening but are also physically engaged by singing or performing on instruments. In early childhood, musical training on instruments improves attentiveness through visual focus, active listening, and staying on task (Neville, Andersson, Bagdade, Bell, Currin, Fanning, & Paulsen, 2008). The very nature of music encourages students to stay on task. When a performing ensemble plays a piece of music, the music transpires in real time, according to the specified tempo. It becomes immediately evident, through visual and aural identifiers, when a student has become off task or unfocused. Such a situation allows the music educator to intervene or, more importantly, allows the student

to self-correct, persevere through a mistake, and re-engage with their peers. Music learning develops and strengthens the ability to persist towards goals even when presented with obstacles (Scott, 1992).

It may be that the stimulating environment of a music classroom, combined with a strong sense of social connection contributes to a student's overall sense of belonging. Further research concerning the importance of peer-oriented learning and active engagement is needed to identify additional factors that may influence a child's positive experience in the music classroom.

Instructional Practices in Music Education

In the early part of the 20th century, teaching practices were influenced by the factory management model of an authoritarian, product-focused philosophy (Allsup, 2007). Teachers were directors of a systematic, well-ordered environment, and students were expected to work hard, respect authority, and be highly disciplined. Likewise, music education in the United States was influenced by a robust military band paradigm, due to the influx of war veterans and other musicians with limited teaching experience entering the workforce (Hendricks, 2018). This model persisted for decades, with band directors instilling both fear and respect from the podium. String orchestra programs rose to prominence in school music over the past century, with orchestra directors modeling themselves after the maestros of symphonic professional traditions. Such autocratic models of instruction created the image of a music director as an authoritative figure on a pedestal and less like the Freire-inspired teaching paradigm that was embraced by much of the educational community.

However, the progression into the 21st century saw music educators adopting a more holistic, culturally diverse, and compassionate philosophy of music learning. Modern school music programs still foster the traditional ensemble programs of orchestra and marching band,

but now include popular music, international music, technology, and community music (Hendricks, 2018). As this global view of music education emerges, teachers are balancing the role of maestro and facilitator, as students are being afforded an equal voice in the learning process (Allsup, 2003).

Teaching pedagogies span from didactic or direct teaching, usually in the form of a lecture, to dialogic or indirect teaching, often referred to as the Socratic technique of questions and thought provocations. Research indicates that teachers should embrace a wide variety of strategies to meet the needs of all learners, including the teacher- and student-centered activities, direct instruction, practice, and problem-solving (Allsup, 2003). Abramo (2016) suggests that music teachers may call upon various traditions of teaching pedagogies. Music teachers use direct teaching strategies when providing feedback to students, selecting appropriate repertoires, and structuring efficient and effective pace and sequence of rehearsals. Likewise, music teachers are often called to use a more “transformative” tradition when connecting music learning to culturally relevant curriculum and student-centered rehearsal techniques. Abramo (2016) further outlines a set of core instructional practices based on instrumental music teaching literature: rehearsal of large ensembles, facilitation of small groups; providing feedback to improve practice in a variety of ways; engaging students in creative musical thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry; incorporating students’ musical and cultural identities into the classroom, and selecting appropriate repertoires and materials. These six core practices guide the pedagogy of music instruction. How these six core practices may contribute to a students’ sense of belonging is of interest for further study.

Rehearse Large Ensembles

Instrumental music teachers are often tasked with having large performing ensembles, sometimes ranging between 20 and 80 students at a time, that meet within a class period each day. Instructional guidance includes both verbal and nonverbal communication with students, creating a unique environment for learning to occur. The expressivity of the teacher, or conductor, contributes significantly to the success of learning (Silvey, 2014).

Eye contact is often identified as a necessary tool for music teachers to engage their student performers and, somewhat not surprisingly, musicians prefer conductors who make lots of eye contact during a rehearsal (Fredrickson, 1994; Byo & Austin, 1994). Also, eye contact between teacher and students increases on-task behavior during instruction and may contribute to the level of engagement a student experiences during music learning. While not all students may engage in frequent eye contact while performing on their instrument, “looking at the conductor” is a skill set taught by music teachers during ensemble rehearsals and is generally considered a vital part aspect of musicianship. Silvey (2014) suggests that students may improve this practice by marking the music to indicate select passages where the ensemble and conductor make eye contact. Over time, looking at the teacher during a musical performance becomes routine, and students look at each other for greater communication while playing. Such behavior may be a reflection of peer-oriented learning and positive engagement in the music classroom.

Body language such as eye contact, gesturing, facial expression are essential to conducting, a skill set that all music educators study as part of teaching training programs and implement in everyday teaching. Reducing the amount of talking by teachers is a recommended practice for music educators. Novice teachers tend to talk too much and may miss out on the benefits of non-verbal communication. Expert conductors have been shown to spend more than

50% of their rehearsal time with the students performing on their instruments, indicating that non-verbal communication through music performance is sometimes more effective than lecture-based teaching (Goolsby, 1999). Napoles (2006) found that high school music students paid more considerable attention during class when teacher talk was limited. The traditions of varying teaching styles frequently in the music classroom from direct instruction to “transformative” styles account for an environment that may differ from other academic settings.

Facilitate Small Groups

While there is a tradition of large performing ensembles in American music education programs (Mark & Gary, 2007), recent methodologies encourage multi-faceted music programs that emphasize and provide a regular opportunity for students to engage in creative musical activities, including small group rehearsals (Whitener, 2016). Theory-based cooperative learning emphasizes that students work within a framework of vested interest in their achievement as well as the achievement of those with whom they cooperate. Whitener (2016) suggests that music teachers incorporate cooperative learning by breaking apart large performing ensembles into small chamber ensembles and empowering students not only to be responsible for their parts but also take control over their learning strategies. Small ensembles foster individual musical growth and responsibility, remove competition, and emphasize artistic understanding and appreciation.

Select Appropriate Repertoire and Materials

Music teachers are tasked with the unique curricular decision of selecting appropriate musical literature for their classes. The selection of appropriate repertoires is often thought to be the most critical task that music teachers face before meeting their students (Apfelstadt, 2000). Given the curricular goals, music teachers select music that reflects what their students require for musical growth, will provide challenge and interest for students over a lengthy learning

period, and may be enjoyable for an audience during the performance. Finding music literature that is both engaging and meaningful for students is a core instructional practice for music educators.

Provide Students Feedback to Improve Practice

Whether it is about techniques of body placement, breath control, and muscle movement, or advanced musical concepts of articulation, phrasing, and musicality, the primary role of a music educator is to provide feedback. The problem that most music teachers face, however, is how to provide specific feedback that promotes student improvement and engages the student to want to improve. The use and balance of positive and negative feedback are of particular interest in music teaching pedagogy.

For teachers who work with beginning musicians, one of the essential qualities needed is warmth (Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody 2007). Beginning students thrive when teacher personalities are friendly and encouraging. However, as students mature and skill level increases, critical feedback seems to be more effective. More experienced student musicians seem to prefer more critical and even negative feedback to advance their skill level, which, in turn, makes participation in high-level music ensembles more rewarding. Research in high school band classrooms has found that older adolescents understand and welcome criticism as a necessary step in their musical improvement (Duke & Henniger, 2002; Whitaker, 2011). It may be that providing students feedback, either negative or positive, is integral to engaging and motivating young musicians in school music ensembles.

Engage Students in Creative and Critical Thinking

Music learning environments provide “infinite opportunities” for the development of measurable critical thinking skills (Garrett, 2013). A recent review of the literature concludes

that teachers consider critical thinking an essential aspect of developing independent musicianship (Garrett, 2013). Critical thinking in music learning includes analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of musical content and performance. Effective teaching encourages student analysis of musical literature and one's performance. Students can be measured in their critical thinking through performance assessment, written assessment, and formal or informal class discussion.

Small group ensembles further provide a platform to engage in critical thinking and inquiry in a uniquely peer-oriented environment. Each group member brings special qualities that enhance musical work for greater shared enjoyment (Allsup, 2003). For example, the medium of jazz provides opportunities for students to creatively navigate music motifs in a way that also incorporates a sense of community.

Incorporate Students' Musical and Cultural Identities into the Classroom

A shift in demographics and educational philosophy has resulted in a dramatic change to the population of students that may enter a teacher's classroom. This change calls into question the appropriateness of Western-based traditions of school curriculum. With the growth of minority populations, greater stratification of economic wealth, inclusion of learners with learning differences, and rising number of youth who identify as LGBTQ, schools are challenged to provide environments where all feel welcome.

Musical traditions can be found across the globe, and increasingly music teachers embrace the different musical traditions of their students. A core content standard of the National Standards for Music Education includes, "performing a varied repertoire of music representing diverse genres and styles." Music teachers can create culturally inclusive environments by incorporating music styles from around the globe and reflective of their community of students. School music programs, unlike private music schools, provide the students with instruments and

materials, thereby leveling the playing field for students who may otherwise be deterred from the cost of music lessons. Music ensembles are constructed with the layering of different parts or “melodic lines” of varying difficulty. In orchestra, there are “1st violin” and “2nd violin” parts that may be appropriate for students based on their level of experience or learning ability. Music compositions are inherently examples of modified instruction since learners with various strengths can all participate.

Music allows for individuals to experience their creative expression and blend their music-making with others. Almost every culture around the world uses music as a community-gathering activity. Scholars have studied the phenomenon of belonging in places such as families, businesses, religions, and countries. In psychology, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs identified love and belonging as basic human needs, following such needs as food and physical safety. Music education programs have tremendous potential to provide a place of belonging for both students and teacher (Hendricks, 2018). Music programs often serve students for several years, and the music teacher is often a constant in a student’s life, sometimes seeing students every day for four years of high school. Music programs are an example of an environment where students and teachers regularly interact and over several years may find a place of belonging.

Gaps in the Literature

School connectedness and student socioemotional health not only contribute to a child’s academic success; they are predictors of positive life skills and mental habits. Schools must provide students an inclusive environment that values emotional well-being as part of the fabric of education. It should be the goal of every educational institution to maintain programs that are rich in collaboration and peer cohesion and free from stress and anxiety. Using the positive

psychology framework, students should also be taught methods to manage and regulate their emotions and sustain happiness beyond their adolescent years. The music learning environment has the potential to be such a space for students

Research shows that students who engage in music training during the school day may be engaging in health-promoting activities. However, recent studies in school connectedness seem to focus solely on the outcome of students' sense of belonging a school. There is limited descriptive research in music education on the process of creating inclusive environments. Recent studies have yet to indicate what types of activities music educators engage in or should engage in to fully maximize the potential of the music learning environment. The goal of my research was to identify how instructional practices are used by music teachers to foster inclusion and community. By understanding the possible connection between instructional pedagogies that capitalize on the socioemotional strengths of music education, music teachers will be able to implement additional best practices to curriculum standards and empower arts advocates to sustain music as a part of every child's school day.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Prior research in music education suggests that, among other benefits, music learning environments are uniquely inclusive environments for students and, more broadly, contribute to the socioemotional competence of young children. Music learning environments may contribute to a student's sense of belonging in the school community, the ability to interact with peers constructively, and promote positive engagement. Music teachers structure learning through a variety of instructional practices that may create unique environments to foster such socioemotional growth.

As explained in Chapter 1, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent do middle school orchestra students report a sense of school connectedness within their school-based performing ensemble?
2. In what ways, if at all, does membership in orchestra impact a student's experience in middle school?
3. In what ways do music teachers use instructional practices to build positive prosocial skills between peers and relationships with teachers?
4. In what ways do music teachers use instructional practices to motivate student learning and build inclusivity in the music classroom?

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between school connectedness and music learning environments among middle school students enrolled in a school-based music ensemble. In addition, it was the goal of this study to provide a descriptive analysis of the instructional practices that music teachers use to promote an inclusive environment in their classrooms and an overall sense of belonging in their students. I hypothesized that participation

in a school-based music ensemble promotes a sense of belongingness. I further hypothesized that the particular characteristics of school music classes, including inclusive instructional practices, positive relationship building between students and teachers, and peer-oriented learning helped to strengthen overall school connectedness. To investigate such music learning environments, a mixed methods study was appropriate. A research design that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods provides a deeper understanding of the problem than a single type of data (Creswell, 2014).

This study was conducted in two phases. The first phase incorporated both quantitative and qualitative design elements and allowed the attitudes and perceptions of a large group of students to be measured and evaluated. Students from five middle schools in a medium-sized public school district were administered a survey measuring their sense of belonging, or school connectedness, a member of their middle school orchestra. School connectedness within their school-based orchestra ensemble was measured using items from Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale. This survey served two purposes: the primary purpose was to collect student data relevant to Research Question One, and the second was to use to help identify school sites of interest for further study.

Using a student questionnaire was both appropriate and necessary during the first phase as it provided an efficient method for gathering perspectives from all music ensemble students across five schools. Furthermore, the extensive data set from the administered survey allowed for a comparative analysis between schools and classes that informed the selection of classrooms for further study. The survey was disseminated during music instruction, and students were asked to complete the survey at home. After the survey, the students were further asked to answer three reflective writing questions and complete a short linguistic map. Analysis of these reflective

writings helped to elaborate on the findings of the survey data for Research Question One. Such reflective writing samples allowed students to identify and express the impact of music instruction in their own words and provided valuable language or descriptions from which to greater understand the music learning environment.

The second phase of the study utilized additional qualitative methods of interviews and observations to gain a more thorough understanding of how music teachers use instructional practices to foster inclusive learning environments. Qualitative methods were appropriate and necessary as they allowed for a more descriptive emphasis on the processes and qualities of how teachers and students make sense of their reality. In this study, qualitative research helped to capture the language and imagery of student perception and provided information that quantitative survey research did not anticipate, including specific behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, or relationships beyond the scope of only quantitative methods (Merriam, 2009). The student questionnaire, including the closed-answer questions and the writing samples, provided insights into student attitudes and experiences, but did not address what teachers were doing that may affect the student experience. Furthermore, quantitative research alone could not answer why teachers were making instructional choices in their classroom. Observations and interviews helped to uncover the rationale and teacher mindset when implementing instructional practices. Qualitative research was of significant value in this study, as the aim was to examine the socially constructed nature of the music learning environment, the relationships between peers and teachers, and the situational constraints of belongingness. The very nature of school connectedness is the social experience of schooling and, as such, qualitative forms of inquiry allowed the study to examine how social experiences in music learning are created and given meaning.

Two methods of qualitative data collection, teacher interviews, and classroom observations, helped to answer Research Questions Two, Three, and Four. The purpose of observations is to produce firsthand data of the instructional practices utilized by each participating music teacher in the natural setting of music instruction (Merriam, 2009). Observations provided an opportunity to gather information on how each music educator implemented unique instructional practices during class. In my observations, I specifically examined ways in which teachers implemented and utilized six typical instructional practices: rehearsal of large ensembles, facilitation of small groups, providing feedback to improve practice, engaging students in creative musical thinking, incorporating students' musical and cultural identities into the classroom, and selecting appropriate repertoire and materials.

Semi-structured interviews with music teachers provided valuable insight into the teaching philosophies that were reflected in the classroom observations. Participating teachers were asked how their students acquire new skills in class, how their class responds when mistakes are made, how the experience in a music classroom may differ than what their students experience the rest of the school day, and what they considered engagement to mean in a music learning environment. Interview protocols provided a framework for collecting music teacher perceptions of their instructional practices (see Appendix C). The various forms of qualitative inquiry were necessary to examine both the teacher and student perspective of their experiences in school-based music ensembles.

Strategies of Inquiry

Site and Population. I choose to study middle school music programs in the Fallwood Unified School District (pseudonym), which is located in Southern California. The district has a population of 33,400 students, of whom 14 percent are low income, and 19 percent are English

Language Learners. This district hosts music programs with strong community support and a comprehensive music curriculum. The district has been recognized numerous times by the NAMM Foundation as a “Best Community for Music Education.” My intention was that using a district with a history of successful music programs and high student participation would allow my study to explore better how a comprehensive music education program fully impacts students.

Students in the district receive compulsory music education from kindergarten through sixth grade, with primary music classes that meet bimonthly for 25-minute lessons for transitional kindergarten and kindergarten and 40-minute lessons for first through third grades. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades time allocated to music increases to twice-weekly lessons for 40-minute sessions. Once students enter the upper-grade music program, they enter what Fallwood USD refers to as “block music.” In fourth grade, students choose between playing a string instrument (violin, viola or cello) or singing in a vocal music class; in fifth grade, students continue their string instrument, begin a wind instrument (flute, clarinet, saxophone, trumpet, trombone or baritone), or sing in vocal music; and, in sixth grade, students choose between continuing their instrumental music choice or singing in vocal music. All classes are performance-based with two concerts a year.

A unique feature of the elementary music program in Fallwood is that students receive an academic or “letter” grade as well as an effort grade, which affects placement on the Honor Roll and other academic distinctions. Another unique aspect of Fallwood’s elementary music program is that all music teachers are specialists in their field, with professional training on the instruments they teach.

When students transition to middle school, they may choose music performing ensembles as an elective. Music classes are no longer based on grade level; rather the school music teacher determines the placement of students based on years of instrument experience and skill level. Depending on the popularity of music chosen as an elective, the music department at each middle school level offers up to three orchestras (for string instruments), two bands (for woodwind, brass and percussion instruments), a full orchestra (for strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion), choir, musical theater, and jazz band. Such classes are performance-based ensembles which give three or four after-school concerts a year.

Transitioning to high school, three of the five high schools in Fallwood USD are designated “Grammy Signature Schools” and offer a robust selection of music classes and performance opportunities. Each high school has four orchestras, four bands, a marching band, musical theater, four choirs, multiple jazz bands, and AP Music Theory class. Also, the district offers a yearly “Honors Concert,” a Solo Ensemble Festival, and a Jazz Festival.

The school district has six middle schools and three K-8 schools. The schools are located in the middle- to upper-middle-class community, and each school site has one to three orchestras, one to three bands, and one to two jazz bands. Participants were seventh and eighth-grade students currently enrolled in the least one music ensemble in their school music program. K-8 schools, including my K-8 music program, were excluded from participating. In the Fallwood School District, the three K-8 schools classify sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students as middle school, whereas the six other middle schools classify only seventh and eighth-grade students as middle school. For continuity, the student participants were limited to instrumental ensembles, as not all sites in the district offer vocal performance opportunities.

During the first phase of the study, one orchestra classes from each of the five participating middle school music programs were surveyed, and the students answered three short prompts in the form of reflective writings. This survey targeted between 120-220 students and received 190 student responses. During the second phase of the study, three sites were selected for observations and interviews. These three sites were selected based on the survey results of school connectedness.

The middle schools. Though a unified school district, Fallwood Unified School District and its employees are quick to mention that the district is decentralized. Individual school sites have considerable latitude to set their bell schedule, decide their calendar of minimum days, and make individual curricular decisions such as offering blended online learning, zero period classes, and diverse elective offerings. The result of such decentralization is a remarkably different environment at each of the district's schools. Some of the middle schools operate on a block schedule, while other middle schools have a more traditional six-period class day. While each middle school offers some "tutorial" the mandatory nature of tutorial and amount it is offered depends on the school site. Also, the number of days students meet with their advisor is different at each school site.

Oak View Middle School is located in a newly developed part of the city. Its campus includes a one-level building surrounded by a nearby open space trail, a shopping center, and residential units. Consistent with most of the city, the streets are lined with manicured trees and lush grass parkways. The parking lot is adorned with large solar panels, and district facilities share the parking lot with the middle school. The school is only in its sixth academic year and the instrumental music teacher, Dennis, was one of the founding teachers and part of the leadership team. The music room is a relatively small classroom with no windows, located off a

large multipurpose room and stage. From the parking lot, signs for “Instrumental Music” and “Vocal Music” mark exterior entrances to the performing arts area of the school, making the music rooms highly visible to campus visitors. Dennis teaches three orchestras and two bands. Oak View is one of the larger middle schools in the district, with a student population of 1169.

Crawford Middle School is located in a central and older part of the city and has been operating as a middle school for over 40 years. This Title I school is two stories high and houses several programs for the district and county, including the English Language Learner “Newcomer” Program, Gifted and Talented Education Program, Special Education, and the county’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program. The building is well-maintained, though noticeably older than its counterpart middle schools in the district. The music teacher, Cameron, remarked that the school would be undergoing “modernization” in the next few years to update facilities. The music room is located towards the middle part of campus and has exterior doors to the outside quad and lunch area. It has a multi-level carpeted floor with small steps and ramps and is connected to a very small stage. Although the room seems intended for performances, its small size makes it unsuitable for public performances with audiences of any size. The room has three small storage rooms for instruments and a very small office for the music teacher. Cameron teaches two orchestras, two bands, a jazz band, and a choir. Crawford Middle School is noticeably smaller than other schools in the district, with a student population of 577.

Sage Canyon Middle School is located in an older area of the city, surrounded by both newly developed and older homes. Sage Canyon MS is the oldest middle school in the district and has recently undergone modernization with support from a local funding measure. The music space is located in a newly renovated location that used to be the cafeteria. When asked about the new music facilities, the music teacher, Patrick, reported that the music classes had simply

outgrown the old space. The new music room is large, has hardwood floors, and is lined wall-to-wall with instrument storage lockers. The facility includes practice rooms, a music library room, and a small office for the music teacher. Patrick teaches three bands and three orchestras at Sage Canyon MS. Sage Canyon has a student population of approximately 833.

John Reid Middle School is located in a central part of the city and has been open for over 40 years. This Title I school is nested deep within a residential area, surrounded by large houses and a local city park. The performing arts building is the tallest building on campus, and the first building one encounters when entering the school. Inside, the room is a multi-level carpeted maze of handicap access ramps, instrument storage rooms, connecting small stage, high ceilings, and a small office for the music teacher, Joshua. Joshua teaches two bands, two orchestras, and one choir. John Reid MS has a student population of 744.

Finally, Rose Park Middle School is located in the northern part of the city and has been open for over 35 years. Its hexagonal design includes a large central building surrounded by six classroom buildings. The central building includes the administration office, a meeting space, and a library. The music rooms are in one of the six satellite buildings in front of the school. The main instrumental room is an awkwardly-shaped space of sharp angles and small floor space, covered in instrument storage. Up to a flight of outdoor steps, there is a small adjoining room for jazz band practice. The music teacher, Charles, has an incredibly small office tucked around one of the corners of the main instrumental room. Chairs, music stands, and instruments make it difficult to maneuver around, and it is clear that the music program needs have outgrown this dated facility. Charles is over the contract in instruction hours, teaching three bands, three orchestras, and a jazz band. Rose Park Middle School has a total student population of 920.

Site access. Gaining access to my research sites was two-fold. First, I made contact with the Coordinator of Visual and Performing Arts for the school district to discuss various research possibilities. Throughout the process, he continued to help navigate potential concerns. The Coordinator expressed great interest in this research focus and has subsequently shared various articles and stories which have furthered my understanding of the topic.

Second, I have a professional relationship as a colleague with the music teachers at all schools. For ethical and validity concerns, I excluded my K-8 middle school music program and students from the research. The district's other two K-8 schools were excluded as well. I presented research material (surveys, reflective writing prompts, consent forms) at the Fallwood USD middle school professional learning community meeting to deliver instruction and timelines. By presenting to all participating teachers at once, I hoped to encourage continuity in the research process. All music teachers were encouraged to participate in the first phase of the study. Initially, all six teachers expressed an interest in participating, with five teachers following through with data collection. During the second phase, I approached three teachers whose sites indicated particularly interesting levels of connectedness. I immersed myself in their classroom on three separate days with the class that was surveyed. Finally, I conducted interviews with each of the five teachers. I initially intended to interview the three teachers at the observed sites. However, during the first phase of data collection, all five teachers expressed an interest in being interviewed. After completing the five interviews, it was apparent that incorporating more interviews gave a richness and further understanding of the research phenomenon as a whole.

Data Collection Methods

Mixed methods. The core significance of mixed methods research is that by gathering and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, a more thorough understanding of a

research problem can be provided (Creswell, 2014). This study used both quantitative data (student survey responses) and qualitative data (classroom observations, student reflective writing examples, and teacher interviews).

This study used sequential data collection, incorporating data collection into two stages. In the first stage, quantitative data were collected through student surveys with a short qualitative component (student reflective writing samples). The questionnaire responses were analyzed to identify the classrooms for follow-up observations. During this second stage, further qualitative data were collected through observations and interviews. Sequential data collection is suitable to a mixed methods design, as one form of data may be given priority as determined by the research questions.

Phase One. The quantitative design component featured a survey (Appendix A). The student questionnaire included modified questions from the Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale. The 18-item PSSM scale has good internal reliability with both urban and suburban students and has demonstrated to substantially correlate psychological school membership with self-reported school motivation and, to a lesser degree, grades and teacher-rated effort (Goodenow, 1993).

The PSSM was first used in White suburban and multiethnic urban middle schools. The PSSM uses a 5-point Likert-type format, with response options ranging from 1=Not at all true to 5=Completely true. Reverse scoring is necessary on items 3, 6, 9, 12, and 16. The individual item scores are summed into a total score. The PSSM includes questions that involve personal acceptance and inclusion, but also respect and encouragement for participation. Examples of the 18-item questions include: "I feel like a real part of (name of school)," "People here notice when I'm good at something," "I am included in lots of activities at (name of school)," and "I can

really be myself at this school.” The survey was altered to reflect the school-based ensemble class.

Recent studies reported Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficients of 0.72 (Stevens, Hamman and Olivarez, 2007), 0.88 (McMahon, Parens, Keys and Viola, 2008), 0.81 (Uwah, McMahon and Furlow, 2008), and 0.80 (Nichols, 2008). The scale has since been adapted into Spanish, Chinese and Turkish.

The survey and attached reflective writing questions were disseminated during music instruction at each of the five participating middle school music programs in the targeted district. In all, 190 students responses were collected. The survey and reflective writing were taken home to complete, and teachers collected returned surveys sealed in business envelopes. When returning the survey and reflective writings, all 190 student participants included signed parental consent forms, as well as adolescent assent forms approved by both the IRB of Fallwood USD and the University of California, Los Angeles. It was my original intention to administer the survey and reflective writing during music instruction; however, the participating school district strictly prohibited such action. Fallwood USD stipulated that no instructional time was to be impacted by the research student and students must complete the survey and reflective writing in the privacy of their own home. The district further specified that online assistance to gather information from students was prohibited, and students should complete the work with pencil and paper.

The survey and reflective writing reflected students’ overall experiences in music learning and membership within their school orchestra. The survey tested if music classrooms were an environment in which students felt connected to their learning and that they belonged there.

The reflective writing prompt that accompanied the survey (Appendix B) featured two “sentence frames” to help direct writing focus and a “free-write” prompt. Sentence frames are a method of scaffolding that is particularly helpful for students who struggle with writing and for English Language Learners (Carrier & Tatum, 2006). The sentence frames were, “When I play my instrument with other students, I feel....” and “I choose to participate in a music class because....” While sentence frames may assist writing, they may be too restrictive and may not allow for creativity. Thus, in addition to the two-sentence frames, the reflective writing prompt included the following open-ended free write: “Does being a member of your school orchestra make your experience in middle school better, worse, or it has no impact? Why do you think that is?”

Phase Two. The qualitative design component featured classroom observations and teacher interviews. From the results of Phase One, three teachers were identified for further study. The selected teachers had classes that scored the highest and lowest connectedness scores and represented the closest and most extensive standard deviation of answers. At each of the three sites, teachers were observed three times during the classes that participated in the survey and reflective writing. Throughout three observations, I spent approximately 140-160 minutes in each classroom. Observations guided by an observation protocol (Appendix C) produced first-hand data of the instructional practices utilized by each participating music teacher in the natural setting of music instruction (Merriam, 2009). Interviews with music teachers were guided by a protocol (Appendix D) that allowed for a descriptive narrative giving insight into the teaching philosophy and intended or unintended outcomes of instructional practices.

Data Collection and Analysis

Mixed methods. Given the sequential nature of data collection, the first phase of the study gathered and analyzed the quantitative survey data and qualitative data from student reflective writings. The data collection of the first stage was critical for informing the data collection for the second stage. The results analyzed in the first phase determined the sites selected for the second phase of the study.

Phase One. Using SPSS software, I performed descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the survey responses. I computed an internal consistency index to evaluate the reliability of the connectedness score. I examined frequency distributions and generated boxplots of the connectedness score for the full sample of the participants and each site sample. I would later use this information to determine the sites to observe for Phase Two of my research study. Finally, I ran an ANOVA to determine if the participating sites differed in their mean connectedness score.

I used survey data to answer Research Question One and confirm existing research concerning the inclusive environments of music classrooms. The survey measured the psychological membership or school connectedness at the individual level of each music student and the class as a collective. Both personal traits and situational factors influence the construct of school connectedness. Goodenow (1993) suggests that this survey is a valid indicator for a sense of belonging at the organizational level, and, as such, sites with high levels of connectedness may prove examples for future intervention planning.

To answer Research Question Two, I analyzed the student reflective writings for themes and found data not indicated in the survey material. Data were analyzed using a constant

comparative method. The findings in the reflective writings helped to inform the data collection of Phase Two.

Using the results of Phase One, I identified school sites that demonstrated high levels of student connectedness, the lowest levels of student connectedness and the most significant standard deviation between student schools. Also, the reflective writings helped to identify specific instructional practices that may influence the overall inclusivity of a music classroom. For example, students from two school sites indicated instances of “teacher favoritism” and “stress during testing” while other sites were identified as having a strong sense of “community” and “teamwork.” After analysis, I was able to identify three sites that would further my understanding and interpretation of the data collected in Phase One.

Phase Two. At the three school sites for Phase Two, I used the inductive and comparative method of data analysis of how teachers utilize instructional practices to build an inclusive music learning environment. Interview and observation data were compared and analyzed simultaneously. Teacher interviews were transcribed, and data were compared to other interviews, student writing samples, and observations to establish broad trends within the data. As Merriam (2009) suggests, observation data analysis begins with segmenting data into themes or categories that are meaningful to my research questions. Phrases or sentences of text (either recorded, observed, or written by students) were identified as units of data. Coding allowed for thematic categories to emerge and guide the findings.

The qualitative forms of inquiry in Phase Two sought to answer Research Questions Three and Four. In the observations, interviews, and reflective writing samples, I came across the following units of observation: students engaged throughout the lesson (measured by eye contact, body language, performance on an instrument, being ready to play when the teacher

instructs them to do so), students interacting with the teacher and peers on a social and personal level (use of inside jokes, references to common likes or dislikes, shared memories of past performances), and use of feedback to individuals or grouped sections (importance given to certain “sections” of the orchestra, engagement of all students with feedback both positive or negative).

Recognizing that my background as a middle school music teacher may have influenced my interpretation of data, I collaborated with outside researchers with no music or teaching experience, non-music teaching experience, and one other music teacher. This collaboration allowed for a more thorough analysis of data without interference of my own personal bias.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocol was adhered to throughout the data collection and data analysis. Consent from participating in the school district and university was obtained before data collection. Each site, teacher, student, and parent/guardian gave permission to participate or declined participation, and student privacy was a top priority. Student names were not collected on the surveys or reflective writings. During data analysis, all materials were securely stored. Records will be kept for two years after study completion and then destroyed. As this research involves student emotions and state of mind, anonymity, and confidentiality are of the utmost importance. I consulted with the district’s Mental Health Collaborative in the Fallwood school district to design a survey of both rigor and appropriateness for the students. The Mental Health Collaborative routinely administer surveys to the students, teachers, and district community and provided valuable assistance to protect students in this research process. I was the only individual with access to participant names and assigned codes. The teachers collected the

questionnaires; however, the student responses and any information that could identify students was sealed in a business envelope.

Addressing Reliability

To ensure the highest level of reliability, all procedures were cataloged and recorded with specificity. Notes and data were organized in a timely and precise manner so that another researcher may replicate my study.

To ensure the highest level of validity possible, each participant received the same treatment. Identical surveys and writing prompts were distributed to each participant. Written responses were analyzed through a systematic data analysis and coding process. To strengthen the validity, the data were triangulated. Triangulation is a “validity procedure where researches research for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes” (Creswell, 126). Merriam (2001) recommends using “rich, thick description” (p. 227) to increase generalizability. During the observations and interviews, I described the classroom environment, instruction that occurred, and student-teacher and student-student interactions with as much detail as possible.

CHAPTER FOUR: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the survey data I collected from 190 middle school students who were currently enrolled in their school-based orchestra ensemble in Fallwood USD. Adapted from Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership scale, this survey allowed me to compare student participation data with prior research findings that suggested music students may find a deep sense of connection to their music learning environment (Adderley, 2009). Chapter Two presented the theoretical framework that I used as a lens to analyze student reported levels of connectedness. The adapted survey design reflecting this framework was used to answer Research Question One, and inform Research Questions Two, Three, and Four.

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

From the district's middle schools, all six seventh-and-eighth grade middle schools were asked to participate in the study. The three K-8 schools were excluded from participation. From the six middle school sites, five teachers elected to participate in the study. The school site that did not participate had initially expressed interest and the site administration consented to site participation; however, the participating teacher did not disseminate surveys to students due to scheduling issues. Ultimately, a mutual decision to withdraw from the study was agreed upon by myself and the teacher.

The five participating teachers were asked to choose one class in which to disseminate study surveys and collect responses. When selecting the class to participate in the study, I asked the teachers to consider the size of the class, as more students allowed for a larger possibility of participants. I also suggested that the teachers chose a class that would be minimally impacted by participation. As instructed by the school district IRB, student learning and classroom

instruction was not to be interrupted. Finally, I indicated to teachers that the skill level of students was not a factor in this study. The only requirement for selecting a class was that students needed to have one-year playing experience on their instrument.

Of the five teachers, three chose their “highest level” performing orchestra ensemble to participate, and two chose a “lower” performing level orchestra to participate. When asked about the selection of the classes, teachers were mixed on their responses. Two of the teachers chose the “highest level” group because they felt the students in these classes had a better chance of completing the survey and submitting the accompanying permission forms, while the third teacher felt that the students of the selected orchestra, regardless of performance level, would be able to give more detailed answers to the reflective writing. The two teachers who selected “lower level” classes cited their reasoning on the large size of the class, which may produce more student respondents. There are no evident indicators that the skill level of the students played a substantial factor in data analysis. Participation from all sites was high, between 78% and 100% of students enrolled in their school orchestra ensemble participated in the survey and reflective writing. In all, the overall response rate from all participating sites was 86%. The questionnaire was distributed to 221 students, and 190 students returned the completed survey and reflective writing.

The sample of student participants was comprised of middle school students either in their seventh grade (44%) or eighth grade (54%) academic year. The majority of the sample was female (52%) and played their instrument for four years (41%). A total of 66% of students were of Asian descent, a consistent factor that across all five sites. Overall, student participants were representative of the district as a whole, with a slightly higher percentage of participating students of Asian descent. See Table 1 for the demographic breakdown of survey participants.

Table 1

Demographics for Full Sample and Individual Site Samples (in percentages)

	<u>District</u> (n=34,617)	<u>Full</u> <u>Sample</u> (n=190)	<u>Oak</u> <u>View</u> <u>MS</u> (n=44)	<u>Crawford</u> <u>MS</u> (n=34)	<u>Sage</u> <u>Canyon</u> <u>MS</u> (n=26)	<u>John</u> <u>Reid</u> <u>MS</u> (n=40)	<u>Rose</u> <u>Park</u> <u>MS</u> (n=47)
<i>Gender</i>							
Male	52.1	43.7	40.9	63.9	34.8	35.0	42.6
Female	47.9	51.6	50.0	33.3	65.2	65.0	48.9
<i>Grade</i>							
7	8.1	43.7	52.3	22.2	0.0	35.0	80.9
8	7.7	53.7	45.5	75.0	100.0	62.5	15.6
<i>Ethnicity</i>							
White	27.2	8.4	4.5	8.3	0.0	15.0	10.6
Asian	47.8	66.8	81.8	55.6	87.0	60.0	57.4
Hispanic	11.0	2.6	0.0	2.8	0.0	5.0	4.3
Pacific Islander/Filipino	3.1	1.6	0.0	2.8	4.3	2.5	0.0
Multiple	8.2	10.5	11.4	16.7	4.3	7.5	4.3
Other	2.7	4.2	0.0	8.3	0.0	2.5	10.6

Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures

A total of 190 middle school students enrolled in their school-based music orchestra ensemble completed an adapted version of the Psychological Sense of School Membership survey (Goodenow, 1993; see Appendix A). In order to measure the students' sense of connectedness to their school music learning environment, the language of the survey questions was altered to reflect their experience in an orchestra ensemble. Of the 18 questions in the

survey, four of the questions remained focused on the school site as a whole, while the remaining 14 questions reflected the music ensemble in which they were enrolled. By keeping four questions based on the student feelings of belonging to the school as a whole, data could be collected to serve as a comparison between the experience students have on their school campus and the experience they may have in their music learning environment.

The adapted PSSM is a survey in which students rate 18 statements about their school music ensemble on a scale from one to five, with “I don’t know” calculated at a “3” (See Appendix E). For example, students were presented with a statement such as, “People in this orchestra notice when I’m good at something” and asked to respond “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” “Strongly disagree,” or “Don’t know.” The answer to “Don’t know” was treated as “3” points and, therefore, not influencing a positive or negative connectedness outcome.

The scoring of the survey in this study differed from the original scoring methods of the PSSM survey. The original survey features a 5-point Likert scale of “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Neutral,” “Strongly disagree,” or “Disagree.” I chose to substitute “Don’t know” for “Neutral” in the survey for this study. Acknowledging that “Neutral” and “Don’t know” are not interchangeable terms and incite different reactions from participants, my decision to use “Don’t know” was to examine if students felt they had enough information to respond to statements about connectedness. I hypothesized that an answer of “Don’t know” may provide information about pedagogical practices that existed or did not exist in their music classroom.

As on the original PSSM survey, four questions on the scale are reversed, which required reverse calculations of those statements in order to get a proper representation of the question. The answers for the 18 items were averaged, yielding an overall sense of school

connectedness score. The scale was designed so that lower numbers represent a lower sense of school belonging. The total sense of school connectedness can range from a sum of 18 to 90.

Primary Quantitative Findings

Data from the survey analysis was consistent with previous literature suggesting that students feel a positive sense of connectedness in their music learning environments. The 18-question adapted survey showed a Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficient of .894, indicating that the survey scores have acceptable reliability. Overall, the average score of connectedness was high across all sites. Students with a summed score above 45 could be considered to have generally positive experiences, while those with a summed score below 45 generally experienced more negative than positive. Table 2 shows the mean score and standard deviations for the full sample and individual site samples.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviations of Connectedness Score

<u>Sample</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
All Sites	190	70.17	34.00	90.00	11.27
Oak View MS	44	69.61	34.00	90.00	12.98
Crawford MS	36	74.08	41.00	90.00	10.88
Sage Canyon MS	23	73.48	57.00	86.00	8.42
John Reid MS	40	67.75	46.00	90.00	11.12
Rose Park MS	47	68.15	41.00	87.00	10.43

Upon analysis, all sites showed positive connectedness scores; however, it was clear that certain sites such as Crawford Middle School and Sage Canyon Middle School reported not only higher overall scores but also a smaller spread of participant answers. Likewise, John Reid Middle School showed not only the lowest connectedness score of the sample sites (though still with an overall positive score) but also the second highest standard deviation. When implementing such a survey, Goodenow (1993) outlined the importance of analyzing the distribution of scores to identify students who may have a low sense of school membership. Goodenow suggested that these students may need additional social-emotional interventions to address their development needs. Out of 190 survey respondents, two student participants are shown to be outliers. Figure 1 provides a frequency distribution of the scores by the sample site.

Though it did not directly answer a research question, a one-way analysis of variance test, or ANOVA, was conducted to determine if the means of students' sense of school connectedness differed based on the site. A statistically significant effect was found [$F(4, 185) = 2.52, p = .043$]. Post hoc comparisons of the sites using the Tukey HSD indicated that the mean connectedness scores at John Reid MS differed significantly from Sage Canyon MS ($p < .09$). The means the other sites (Oak View MS, Crawford MS, and Rose Park MS) were not significantly different from John Reid MS.

This analysis of connectedness in schools further confirmed the need to observe Sage Canyon MS and John Reid MS in the second phase of data collection. In addition, Crawford MS was selected for observation based on two factors; (1) Crawford had the highest overall mean of sum connectedness scores across all five sites, and (2) 100% of student orchestra members at Crawford MS turned in their student surveys. The 100% participation was particularly

interesting, as there was no outside reward for participation, and further indicated that something of interest may be occurring at this school site.

Connectedness Score by Site

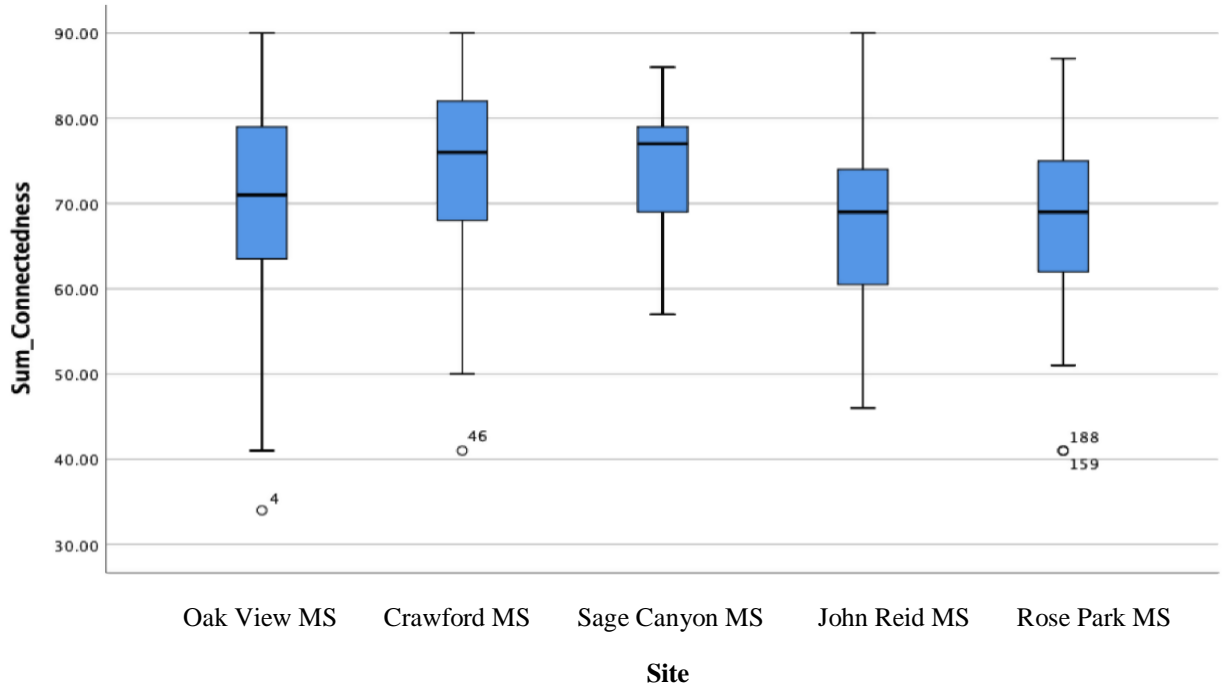


Figure 1. Connectedness sum by site.

Finding One: Students who participate in their school-based music ensemble report positive levels of connectedness to school. According to the survey data, the students enrolled in their school-based orchestra had a positive level of connectedness to their school learning environment. Overall, 92% of students surveyed felt like a “real part” of their orchestra and 86.9% of students “felt included” in the activities of their class. Eighty-nine and five-tenths of students reported they felt their music teacher respected them, and 87.9% of students felt they were treated with as much respect as their peers. The data collected indicate that students feel a sense of belonging when participating in their middle school orchestra class.

In the survey, students were given a statement and asked to respond “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” “Strongly disagree,” or “Don’t know.” The addition of the “Don’t know” was an interesting factor in data analysis. The “Don’t know” option was treated as a neutral statement and given the point value of 3 (Strongly Agree = 5 points, Agree = 4 points, “Don’t Know = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1). Throughout the 18 question survey, some statements had a large percentage of “Don’t know” responses from student participants. When students were asked about how others thought of them, the response had a larger percentage response of “Don’t know.” For example, the statement, “Other students in this orchestra take my opinions seriously” had the collective sample of sites responding 37.4% “Don’t know.” In another example, when asked to respond to the statement, “People in this orchestra know I do good work,” students responded 33.2% “Don’t know.” It should be noted, however, that while 33.2% of students responded, “don’t know,” 56.3% of students responded positively and only 9.5% negatively.

According to this data, students are unsure about how their peers perceive their strengths and contributions to the music ensemble. Students participating in orchestra feel a positive sense of connectedness to their music learning experience yet may lack peer to peer feedback that could further strengthen their sense of belonging. When observing the middle school orchestra classrooms, there were no moments in class where students were asked to give peer feedback to individuals. When students participated in collaborative discussions, the topics were kept general and concerned the ensemble as a whole. The difference in answers to questions about the individual versus group feedback is a potential topic of further study.

In the survey, fourteen questions were specific to music class, and four questions were specific to the school as a whole. Both school and orchestra received positive scores of

connectedness, though students reported higher positive scores when asked about their experience in music. See Figure 2.

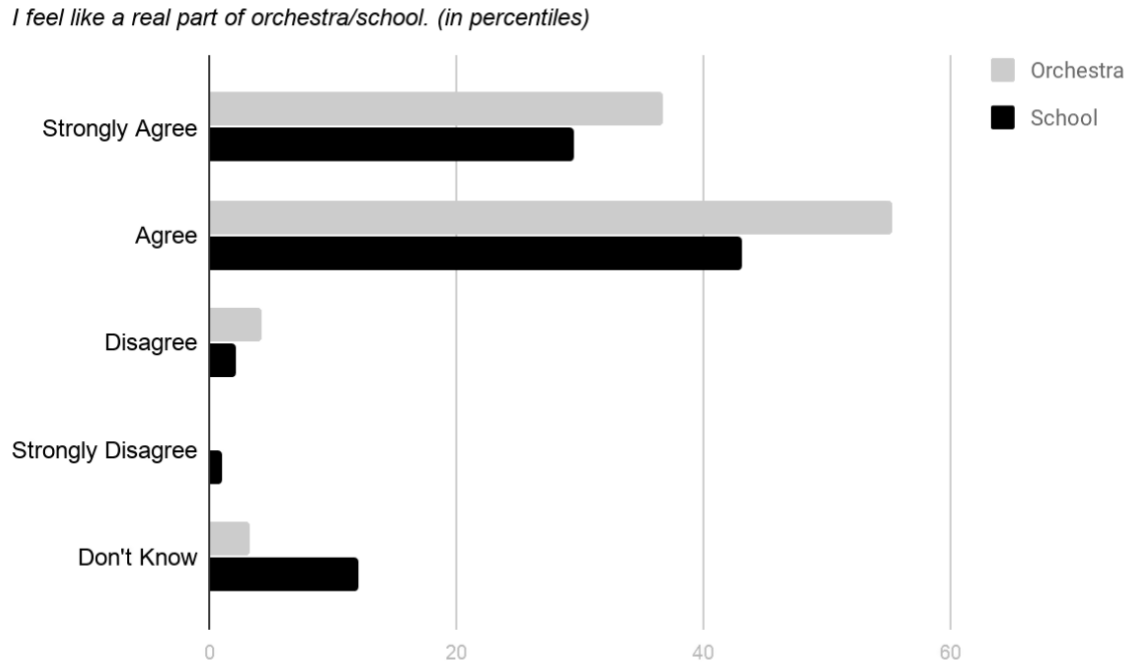


Figure 2. Student report of connectedness related to music experience

It is unknown if participation in music class had an effect on a students’ overall sense of school connectedness, or if the feeling of belonging is only situated in students’ music learning environment. Only students who were enrolled in an orchestra elective were surveyed in this research study. Further research is needed to ascertain if there is a correlation between music participation and overall school connectedness.

Summary

This chapter detailed the major findings from my quantitative data analysis. According to the surveys, students report a positive sense of school connectedness within their middle school orchestra ensemble. I also found evidence that variation of connectedness scores exists between school sites and that students may lack peer-to-peer feedback in their music learning

environments. The following chapter details the results of student reflective writing, observations, and interviews conducted with participating music teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter presents qualitative data from 190 student reflective writing responses, five teacher interviews, and 9 classroom observations. The student reflective writings, interviews, and observations were designed to study student perceptions of connectedness and teacher instructional practices that influence the socialization, motivation, and sense of belonging in school music ensembles. With each interview, student writing, and observation, I learned more about student perceptions, thoughtful philosophies behind instructional choices, and opportunities for impactful music instruction. The findings in this chapter seek to answer Research Questions two, three and four on how music teachers can use instructional practices foster connectedness, positive socialization, and create an environment of inclusion for middle school students.

First, I will provide a brief overview of the study research procedures, then a description of the middle school sites, and finally I will explore the findings and how they relate to the study's research questions.

Demographic Data of Qualitative Sample

The student participants who completed the connectedness survey outlined in Chapter Four were asked to complete reflective writing. One hundred percent of student respondents chose to complete three short questions on how it felt to perform music with others, why they chose to participate in their schools' orchestra ensembles, and how membership of the school orchestra impacts their experience in middle school. The sample of student participants was the same as the quantitative phase of the study.

The five music teachers whose schools' participated in the survey and reflective writing were interviewed. All five teachers received their undergraduate degrees in music, ranging from

a Bachelor of Arts in Composition to Bachelor of Music in Music Education to three graduate degrees in Conducting or Composition. All teachers were credentialed in the state of California and full-time employees of the school district. Their teaching experience ranged from ten to thirty years, with the unique fact that all five teachers had taught their entire career in the target school district. One of the teachers had altered their career paths from a non-musical occupation to become a music teacher later in life, and another teacher had begun as a composer only to discover later that teaching was their true passion. Another unique factor that was consistent throughout the teacher's profiles is that all of the teachers' primary instruments were brass or percussion instruments. None of the interviewees teaching orchestra had professional experience on string instruments which the student participants played.

Qualitative Data Analysis Procedures

To answer Research Questions Two, Three, Four, and Five, I analyzed 190 reflective writing samples from student participants. In the reflective writing samples, students were asked to answer three questions concerning their reason for selecting orchestra as a middle school elective, how they felt when they performed music with others, and if their membership in school orchestra had a positive, negative or neutral impact on their overall experience in middle school. Along with answering these three questions, students completed a linguistic map where they circled words or phrases that represented their experience in orchestra.

I then conducted five semi-structured interviews with the five teacher participants. Based on the quantitative data presented in Chapter Four, I chose three sites to study further. While all five sites indicated positive levels of music ensemble connectedness, three sites showed distinguishing factors that indicated additional research was necessary to answer my research questions. It should be noted that four teacher participants were men, and one was a

woman. Pseudonyms were chosen to protect the identities of teacher participants, as well as disguise gender. See Table 3 for site pseudonyms.

Table 3

Teacher and Site Pseudonyms by Teaching Experience and Student Participants

Teacher Pseudonym	Teaching Experience (years)	Site Pseudonym	Number of participating students
Dennis	10	Oak View Middle School	44
Cameron	14	Crawford Middle School	34
Patrick	30	Sage Canyon Middle School	26
Joshua	16	John Reid Middle School	40
Charles	29	Rose Park Middle School	47

Crawford Middle School was selected for further study because it demonstrated the highest collective connectedness score between all the sites. When asked to respond to the statement, “I feel like a real part of this orchestra,” 53% of students at Crawford MS marked “Strongly agree.” In comparison, other sites ranged between 27% to 39%. When asked to respond to the statement, “Sometimes I feel as if I don’t belong in this orchestra,” 61% of the students at Crawford MS marked “Strongly disagree.” Other sites ranged between 29% to 39%. In addition, Crawford MS had 100% voluntary student participation, which indicated that students seemed particularly invested in their experience in music class and reflected a connection to their music teacher who disseminated the surveys during class.

Though Sage Canyon MS was the smallest of the classes that participated, it was statistically the second highest in connectedness score, and the student reflective writings

provided highly insightful student comments about the collaborative nature of the classroom. After reading the students expressions of their engagement in learning at Sage Canyon MS, I realized that more research was needed to understand the unique instruction of this classroom.

Finally, John Reid MS was selected for observation because it had the lowest connectedness sum scores and the spread of standard deviation was the second highest from the other sites. In the survey, students were asked to respond to each statement that measured connectedness with either, “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Disagree,” “Strongly disagree” or “I don’t know.” Interestingly, John Reid had the highest occurrence of “I don’t know responses” when asked questions for a certain focus. When the survey asked how students perceived others thought about them, John Reid MS had a prominent occurrence of “I don’t know.” For example, when asked to respond to this statement, “People in this orchestra notice when I’m good at something,” 43% of John Reid MS participants responded, “I don’t know.” In comparison, 17% to 28% of students at other sites had the same answer. In addition, students indicated in the reflective writing that they perceived “favoritism” or “teacher’s favorites” in this site. It became clear that John Reid MS differed from the other middle school sites in the district in student perceptions of connectedness and, therefore, was selected for further study.

Primary Qualitative Findings

Using the information provided from the connectedness scores and student reflective writings, the observations and interviews helped to enrich my understanding of the impact of music instructional practices on school connectedness by expanding on what the students reported in their reflections. In the following presentation of findings, I have chosen to integrate the data from reflective writings, teacher interviews, and classroom observations and organize the material by themes rather than sources of data.

Positive feelings about orchestra. The data collected from student reflective writings provided insight into how students perceived their music learning and helped to explain the quantitative findings in Chapter Four. Chapter Four found that students enrolled in their middle school orchestra reported positive levels of connectedness, and the language used by students in the reflective writings expressed how this sense of connection was fostered in their orchestra experience. Overall, the student responses were remarkably similar among schools. Themes of friendship, changes in mood, self-confidence and pride, learning through challenges, community, and collaboration were prevalent throughout the 190 total responses.

Students were first asked to complete the sentence, “When I play my instrument with other students, I feel...” and, overwhelmingly, the responses were positive. Students wrote, “confident in myself,” “happy and relaxed,” “like I can do great things, being a part of something makes me feel good,” and “proud of myself for being able to play in an orchestra.” Relaxation or happiness was cited 114 times throughout the 190 responses. As a seventh grade cellist from John Reid, MS wrote, “I feel happy and relaxed. I feel this way because playing music allows me to more creative than my other classes, and it helps me take my mind off stressful things.” Happiness and enjoyment during music learning reflected the positive psychology framework in Chapter One of this study. Noddings (2003) states that children learn best when they are happy.

The second question in the reflective writing component was “I choose to participate in orchestra because...” Although there were three students that claimed “my mom makes me”, the other 187 responses expressed sentiments such as, “playing violin brings me joy,” “I want to have a class that isn’t just boring school work,” “when I play music, I feel like I’m doing a good thing,” and “it is a place to meet other students who are similar to you.” Socializing with friends and meeting new friends was a prominent theme throughout the answers to the second question.

Across the five sites, students wrote about finding new friends with similar interests or “sharing something in common and having something to talk about” with the friends they meet in orchestra. Students not only valued developing friendships through membership in orchestra, but students at each site also wrote about their relationship with the music teacher. Referring to reputation, such as “I heard the teacher at Rose Park MS really helps students learn,” to “I like the teacher at John Reid, he really makes class fun,” this collection of data demonstrated a student-teacher connection. Additionally, students cited past experience as a reason to choose music as an elective in middle school. A student from Oak View MS wrote, “I feel like I’ve played so long, it’s not okay for me to bail out now.” That student later added, “I also think it’s fun and exciting.” Another student from Oak View MS wrote, “I had been playing cello for so long it just makes orchestra the right fit.” Past experience playing an instrument was a motivating factor for students to extend their music learning into middle school.

The final question in reflective writing was, “Does being a member of your school orchestra make your experience in middle school better, worse, or has no impact? Why do you think that is?” Most students answered positively that being a member of their orchestra was a positive addition to their middle school experience. The data collected in this reflective writing question confirmed the quantitative data in Chapter Four. Like the connectedness scores found in the survey, Crawford MS and Sage Canyon MS reported the highest level of experience for students. No student, across the five sites, reported that being a member of their orchestra made their middle school experience worse. See Table 4.

Table 4

Reflective Writing Question 3 (in percentiles)

Does being a member of your school orchestra make your experience in middle school better, worse, or has no impact?

	Full Sample	Oak View	Crawford	Sage Canyon	John Reid	Rose Park
Better	79.1	72.1	88.6	86.9	75.0	78.0
Worse	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
No Impact	20.9	27.9	11.4	13.1	25.0	22.0

The students who responded that orchestra had no impact reported a variety of reasons. Students at Rose Park MS wrote, “No impact, for the most part, it just feels like a normal class,” and “it has no impact because it doesn’t really have to do anything in real life.” It could be that the question itself needed to be worded or explained differently because there were some students that answered in seemingly contradictory statements, such as, “Being a member of this school orchestra has no impact because it overall, it makes me happy.” In another example, a student at John Reid MS wrote, “It has no impact. It is an enjoyable class.” It is unclear how some students choose to interrupt the term “impact” during the study. As stipulated by the participating school district, all reflective writing was done at home where the student could answer the questions in privacy. If needed, a student was unable to seek clarification.

Overall, the student reflective writings provided descriptive data to confirm the findings of the quantitative survey. The themes found in the student writing allowed for a more developed lens during observation and guided some questions during the teacher interviews.

A positive impact during the school day

First of all, *if* my orchestra experience was *worse*, I would have already switched electives. Of course, it makes my [middle school] experience better. I get to learn new instrument techniques. I also get to play more challenging songs, and I get to practice songs with my friends. When playing in this orchestra, it makes me more relaxed and makes me enjoy music.

-Seventh-grade violinist at Rose Park Middle School

As discussed in Chapter Two, adolescent mental health-related issues are a critical factor not only in student academic achievement but in the overall happiness of today's youth. The data collected in this study point to the need for balance in a student's schedule between courses of academic rigor and creative outlets such as music instruction. Prior research supports this claim, suggesting that children with developed musicianship are better able to express their emotional state, regulate their emotional actions, and decrease developing stress and anxiety (Hallam, 2010). Overwhelmingly, student participants in this study cited relaxation and happiness as a reason for choosing a music elective. An eighth-grade student at Oak View Middle School wrote:

It makes [my middle school experience] better because, without a little music every day, I think I would go crazy. If all day was sitting in front of a desk and doing paper homework, I can't live with that. Orchestra helps me think of something other than the test that is coming up.

Out of 190 student written responses to questions, 114 students mentioned "happiness," "enjoyment," "relaxation," or "feeling good" as part of their orchestra experience in middle school. Such descriptions were self-generated by students, as the survey did not ask about

happiness, relaxation, or stress. Interestingly, when asked why students join a music ensemble at their school, only Cameron from Crawford MS spoke of student relaxation and enjoyment:

I think it's [because music class] is fun. It's their one fun thing in the day because they are always studying. These kids are very stressed out all the time with trying to get good grades and honors and advanced courses. So, it's something different in their day, and I think they enjoy playing, or that's my hope. For example, yesterday we were wrapping up rehearsal, and a kid said, "Why does this class always go by so fast? All of our other classes go by so slow, and this one goes too fast." And that made me smile. I'm glad it goes fast, it means you're having a good time.

The mention of stress in middle school was found in the student-written reflections as well and will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

Finding two: Students who participate in school-based orchestra ensembles report a positive change in the mental or emotional state during music instruction. The data collected showed a variety of reasons why and how students find enjoyment or relaxation from their music ensemble. While it may be that music itself has an innate ability to act as a mood alterer and evoke an emotional response (Thompson, 2015), the participation and performance of music within a group setting may also depend on the manner in which instruction occurs. As music teachers run rehearsals, the choice of music and style in which music is rehearsed impacts student perception. In this study, all teacher participants spoke to making rehearsals "fun," "humorous," and "full of energy." Enjoyment of music seemed to be a central philosophy in their teaching.

Expressing a love for music. Enjoyment of playing an instrument was a consistent response from students when asked why they chose to participate in their middle school

orchestra. Of the 190 students surveyed, 138 responded that they “loved” their instrument or had “fun” or “enjoyed” playing music. Students expressed an awareness that they enjoyed music-making; however, seemed to be unaware of why this was. Students from Oak View MS and Crawford MS wrote, “For some reason, I just feel good when I play music,” and “When I play I feel amazing, it’s something hard to describe, the only thing I can do is have a big goofy grin on my face.” The music teacher, Charles, at Rose Park MS cited success in elementary school as the main factor why students continue playing their instrument and find enjoyment. He speculated that students enjoy activities that they are good at and successful music learning experiences before middle school contributed to their desire to learn more. The idea of finding one’s sense of value in performing music with others will be discussed later in this chapter.

Throughout the data collection, there were interesting parallels between the information the students provided and the interviews with teachers. While 138 of the 190 students wrote about their love of music, all five of the music teachers interviewed felt compelled to share their own love for music. At the end of each interview, I asked the participating teacher if there was anything else they would like to share and almost immediately each teacher went into a story about finding their own passion for music and how it led them to become a music education. This parallel between student enjoyment of music and teacher enjoyment will be later discussed in Chapter Six and may be of interest to study in future research.

Upon observation, Patrick’s love for music shined through each class period. When we sat down to talk, Patrick at Sage Canyon MS expressed that he “didn’t choose music, it chose him.” He recalled listening to the Beatles’ Eleanor Rigby as a child with his sisters and becoming amazed at the sound of a string quartet:

My older sisters were crazy about The Beatles. “Eleanor Rigby” was on the Hi-Fi, and then that string quartet came in, and I remember standing there, and I couldn’t breathe; I thought, ‘this is the most awesome thing I’ve heard in my life.

This fascination led to his desire to consume music as a listener and practitioner and was evident in his classroom.

In front of his students, Patrick expressed his fondness for certain passages in a musical selection, and the students nodded along as if they spoke the same language. He asked the students how the tempo feels, and they described the passage as “rushed” and “not comfortable.” Agreeing, he turned on the metronome to a new tempo and asked the students if this “feels better.” The students nodded in affirmation, and they began the same passage in Vivaldi’s *Concerto for Two Cellos* again. “Feeling comfortable” with a tempo did not require heavy technical explanation, rather it referred to the emotional state that tempo gives to the performers, in this case to teacher and students. When music is rushed or too fast, it feels uncomfortable to perform and listen to; however, when the perfect tempo is balanced with technical accuracy, it becomes more likely a performer will enjoy the experience. While students wrote about the enjoyment of playing their instrument, it may be that they were also referring to successful performance experiences. As Charles at Rose Park MS previously mentioned in his interview, students’ past success in music learning impacts current success. It may be that successful performance, past and present, lead to a positive change in emotion for students and further influence the feeling of connectedness to their school environment.

Finding humor together. Chapter Two discussed a teacher’s disposition as a powerful factor in instructional practice. While not necessarily a skill taught in teacher training programs, a sense of humor is undoubtedly an important instructional tool for teachers. Students wrote

about how “fun” or “funny” their music teachers were as a reason they continue to participate in orchestra class. While “being funny” is not a trait exclusive to music teachers, it was a consistent factor found in teacher interviews and observations.

When asked how the music classroom might differ from other classrooms, Cameron from Crawford MS thought for a moment and said, “I think my energy. I’m always dancing and singing and jumping. I’m kind of crazy, dramatic and I think I might be funny because [the students] like to laugh. I think it’s just my personal energy.” Laughter and energy are immediately apparent stepping into the music room at Crawford MS. Cameron stood on the podium in front of nearly forty students and danced with a metronome. The students smiled and laughed, and it was clear that this was a common occurrence in their classroom. Responding to the dancing, the students began to playfully sing their parts to a Holst *March*, which lasted for several minutes. They all laughed at the conclusion of the singing and then took up their instruments to now play the same passage. A tall student in the viola section, with a full head of curly hair, playfully made a comment about their singing style. The teacher laughed and responded back with a sarcastic joke that, to me, did not make much sense. The whole class laughed together. Inside jokes were a feature of this classroom and reflected a culture that has been created by the students and the teacher.

Likewise, Patrick at Sage Canyon MS spoke about the uniqueness of each class and school culture, “I know that each of our music programs possesses a personality directly connected with the personality of the director, and the kids have no escaping that.” He continues on about involving the personalities of the students in the classroom environment:

I remember my first few years of teaching. I got off the podium and said, “Who was that guy?” because I was much more strict. I was much more rigid. Our middle school kids

are the funniest people in the world, I think, especially when they don't know they're being funny.

Patrick's class is also full of humor. When I first entered the classroom for observation, there was a young student teacher on the podium rehearsing with the students. The class was quiet, respectful, and there was a slightly tense feeling. I began to note how the students of this class were serious and rigid. I found this surprising because their reflective writings were vividly descriptive and full of excitement when they wrote about music class. Patrick stood with his arms folded at the side of the room, watching and listening to the orchestra as the student teacher spoke softly about tempo. After about ten minutes, she concluded her lesson segment and walked to the back of the room. When Patrick stepped onto the podium, almost instantaneously, the class transformed into a different group of students. Students sat up straighter in their seats, and one student sitting in the front row muttered something softly, and the students began to chuckle. Patrick grinned and complimented the student for being "so good today...I can hardly recognize you." This playful banter continued until Patrick raised his arms to begin rehearsal, and the students focused on their piece.

Later, sitting in his office, surrounded by stacks of music and books, Patrick pulled out a small yellow note from a desktop organizer.

I kept this note from [these twin sisters]. They both were late to my class, and for a reason wrote, "Exploding box." I thought, "This is so phenomenal." I couldn't even ask why I just thought I have to keep this. It's just hilarious.

Joshua's students at John Reid MS wrote about their funny music teacher. One student wrote, "I think this is the only period where I can just have fun, and it is the only class I enjoy going to every day. Music is like my time to calm down and not worry or stress about school

work.” Another student wrote that they are in class because of the teacher, “The teacher is really awesome. It’s a class where I can have fun, be happy, and not have to worry about anything.” This impact on the students’ mental and emotional state is noted by the teacher as well. When asked what makes the music classroom different on campus, Joshua thinks for a moment and says, “I think people know that the music room’s a fun place to be.”

Joshua stands tall over his students with a laid back approach that makes his classroom feel relaxed and informal. He has a quirky sense of humor that is met with smirks and grins from the students when he makes eye contact with them. During one observation, several students gravitated towards him at the end of class, not speaking but just standing next to him, staring at him. He acknowledged their presence by talking about their siblings in music class. He tells one-seventh grader that he saw his older eighth-grade brother ask a funny question at a recent assembly and wants to know what the younger brother thinks about that. They playfully tease each other while the student is careful not to overstep his boundaries. In this particular situation, a group of students just stand around him, waiting to think of something to say. Knowing he will respond with a joke or funny comment, they seem at ease just being in this teacher’s presence.

This type of personalized teaching is not unique to music learning but is a definite feature of the music classrooms I observed and further confirmation of the high connectedness scores that were reported in Chapter Four.

Positive socialization

The fundamental thing that we’re talking about here, it was the awakening or the realization that “These are my people.”

Dennis, Music Director at Oak View Middle School

Experts agree that social behaviors are a skill set to be developed in a child's educational setting. As outlined in Chapter Two, forming and maintaining positive friendships and engaging in social settings is predictive of academic success (Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2014). The findings of this study confirm the prior research of Ritblatt et al. (2013) which identifies music learning environments as successfully contributing to various social skills, such as social cooperation, social interaction, and social independence. While the teachers I interviewed mentioned that students elect to take a music performing ensemble in middle school because of friendships, and, while students also mentioned friendships as a reason to be in orchestra, the student data collected indicated a much more in-depth view of socialization in these elective courses.

Students not only maintain friendships in orchestra; they form new friendships, oftentimes with peers they did not expect to get along with and find a connection with students who shared the same passion. A student from Crawford MS wrote, "I'm in music because I want to learn various types of music. Also, when there is a bunch of people who share a passion for music, it feels really good." A student from Sage Canyon MS wrote, "I like playing music in a group. It's fun and such a great experience to be in class with people who have the same interests."

Finding three: Music learning environments encourage positive socialization between peer groups and student-teacher relationships. Walking towards any music room is often an auditory experience. Before you open the door to the classroom, the sounds of strings tuning, scales playing, and squawks of various instruments bellow through the hallways. The music environment is noticeably and purposefully loud and full of commotion. Students take their seat while unpacking their instruments, talking and laughing with their "stand-partners," and adjusting music on the stands. One afternoon, the students at Sage Canyon MS set up a

concerto rehearsal and shuffled their feet as a type of “orchestral applause” for their classmates who approached the solo stands at the front of the room. A student who normally plays cello walked over with music in hand to the keyboard and adjusted the setting to harpsichord. The violin students nearby nodded in acknowledgment at the pianist and reached out with a few fist bumps as he adjusted his chair. The two violin soloists in front of the orchestra looked a bit nervous, perhaps because there was a stranger observing from the back of the room. The two soloists exchanged small smiles and made faces at their friends sitting in the orchestra. The teacher, Patrick, began the piece, and a slow Baroque concerto was heard. The first soloist lifted his violin bow, started to play with stunning advanced tone and the orchestra exploded into laughter. The soloist stopped playing and laughed with the orchestra. It was unclear to me what had just happened, however after some discussion, it seemed that the tempo was not set correctly and the orchestra had tried to fix this during a previous rehearsal. A cellist in the first row looked at the soloist and apologized, telling the soloist, “I got this.”

It is these types of social behaviors that can define a music lesson. While students develop friendships in any classroom on a school campus, the music learning environment is a unique experience in social skill development. While the previous classroom observation can be an example of teamwork and collaboration, which will be discussed later in this chapter, it is also an example of prosocial skills. As discussed in chapter two, prosocial behaviors are positive actions that benefit others as a result of empathy and personal responsibility instead of being prompted by personal gain. When the cellist took ownership for an incorrect tempo, he acknowledged not only his responsibility that a correct tempo would benefit the soloists and the overall performance, he also was able to communicate in a positive and humorous manner. The ability to form and maintain friendships is a highly important part of prosocial skill building. It

may be that environments that provide students a place to maintain friendships and practice prosocial skills leads to greater school connectedness.

Maintaining positive relationships with teachers is another social skill that develops in the music classroom. Although this is not unique to music classrooms, it is apparent in each classroom, I observed that students felt comfortable approaching their music teacher. During observations at the school sites, it was unclear if the music teachers were able to provide fair and balanced attention to all students. The student reflective writing, however, provided some insight. A few students at John Reid MS wrote that their teacher was not always equal with their attention to attitude towards all students. One-eighth grader wrote, “The teacher has favorites and doesn’t always acknowledge all the students.” Though I was not able to substantiate this claim during observations, perceived favoritism could be a factor that helps to explain the lower connectedness scores and wider standard deviation of answers at John Reid MS. More discussion on this topic is found in Chapter Six.

Discovering like-minded people. Seeking relationships with others who think in similar ways is a part of adolescence. Research shows that students who engage with like-minded peers are afforded opportunities for belonging and connectedness (Riley & White, 2016; Mondoni et al., 2014). Students at Crawford MS wrote, “I have more friends because of music, I can talk to more people outside of class” and “I became friends with people I don’t usually talk to.” At Oak View, MS students wrote, “In orchestra, there are a lot of people that have similar interests, which makes orchestra fun” and “I make a lot of friends in orchestra, and the environment is just way nicer than other classes.”

Making friendships is often an overlooked aspect of learning. Loneliness, isolation, and low social status can harm a person’s sense of well-being, including intellectual achievement,

immune function, and overall health (Walton & Cohen, 2007). As described in Chapter One, the structure of secondary school is often at odds with what is in the best interests of adolescent socioemotional development. Students are grouped in large classes which rotate physical learning environments in fifty-minute blocks of time. A student's day may be filled with multiple class groupings of adults and peers, making it challenging for some students to develop and practice prosocial skills. Patrick at Sage Canyon spoke of some of the challenges for students at his school to form friendships, "Part of it is just the layout of the campus. It's pretty spread out. The physical structure of it does play a role." Given these types of structural and scheduling barriers that may impede students from forming friendships, the music classroom may stand out as a unique environment for prosocial skills to foster. As one student from John Reid pointed out, "I believe [being a part of my middle school orchestra] makes middle school better because it's nice having one group of people that you know you'll see for the whole year. You change electives every trimester, which means a different batch of people every time."

At Crawford MS, I took a walk with the music teacher, Cameron, through a series of inside hallways to the office. On our walk, we ran into the tall, curly-haired violist that has a preference for saying funny comments in class. The music teacher greeted him and asked if "he's getting into any trouble?"; he laughed and said, "No way; I'm a good guy." The teacher laughed in agreement and asked if he eats spinach like Popeye on the shirt he is wearing. He replied he would have to work on that and continues down the hallway. As we continued to walk, Cameron told me that other teachers get frustrated with that student. I'm surprised given his jovial demeanor and asked for more information. Cameron explained that maybe they don't understand his humor or he acts out in other classes, but there have been no problems in the music room. If only, Cameron says, they would come watch him play viola and see how much effort and skill he

has and how he relates to others in the orchestra. This tall violist with curly hair is understood by his teacher and peers in the music room.

Seeking and interacting with peers with similar processes of thinking indicates the development of knowledge-related identity (Hughes, 2010) and has implications for social inclusion. As students from Sage Canyon MS wrote, “It’s such a great experience being with like-minded people who understand each other” and “I think my participation in the school orchestra makes my [middle school] experience better because it allowed me to meet new people similar to me.” My interview with Dennis revealed similar feelings to the student from Sage Canyon. Dennis began his career outside of teaching and it was this lack of ‘like-minded’ colleagues that inspired a change in profession:

I haven’t been around these people...I’ve been sitting in an office...this reminds me that the fundamental reason that my life has changed to become a teacher was because I was missing *my people*.

Engagement with like-minded peers or, as Dennis from Oak View MS referred to as “my people,” cultivates a sense of belonging. Remarkably, my interview with Dennis had significant parallels to the interview with Patrick a week later. During interviews, both Dennis and Patrick spoke at length of their own sense of identity through being a part of music ensemble; however, as teacher members rather than as student members. Patrick at Sage Canyon expressed:

The honest reason I am able to have a great life is because these kids sign up for music. They are the reason I’m here. These kids don’t have to be here; they chose to be in here. The easiest way to put it, and I don’t want to get long-winded on you—they are my friends, and we are colleagues. I am them. I have sat where they are sitting, it seems like,

not so long ago. We are connected in that way...There's no other vocation for me in life. They are my people.

Both Patrick and Dennis used almost identical language to suggest that they had found their own sense of identity in the music classroom. Such a sense of belonging for teachers will be further addressed in Finding Five.

Instructional practices that build connectedness

In music, kids are participating a hundred percent of the time. Everyone's engaged at all times....a large part of this grade is based on participation, and I always say, "All of you are going to get a high mark because this is class where you have to be on at all times.

Like in choir, if we're singing, you're singing. If we're doing choreography, you're doing choreography. There's no option."

-Joshua, Music Director at John Reid Middle School

While the quantitative data of this study indicate the middle school orchestra classroom is a place of connectedness, further research was needed to explain how music teachers build communities of inclusion and belonging in their classrooms. The music classroom as a place for all was a repeated philosophy of participating teachers throughout the interview process. How teachers put this philosophy into practice was the goal of my qualitative data collection. Throughout the observations and interviews were the themes of de-emphasizing competition between students, promoting a student's individual value within the group, and guiding a common purpose that engaged students in building self-efficacy. Though the classrooms I studied differed in instructional approach, the teaching philosophies of the five music instructors in this study were remarkably aligned and provide further explanation of the positive connectedness scores from student participants.

Finding four: Music teachers use instructional practices to build connectedness through de-emphasizing competition, strengthening a student’s sense of relational value, and self-efficacy. While music classrooms may be places of inclusion, many music classrooms had a history of being the opposite. The literature review in Chapter Two explored the history of music education in the United States as heavily influenced by a military band paradigm (Hendricks, 2018). This often translated into a dictatorial, top-down approach to music teaching. Charles from Rose Park MS remembered his experiences as a band student:

I’m old enough that I have seen some of those band directors who were the old-school fire and brimstone, “I’m gonna yell at you and throw things at you and make you cry in my rehearsal, and that’s the way I’m gonna motivate you.” So, I have been in those type of situations.

Dennis from Oak View MS echoed these experiences: “Oh, man. I’ve got recordings of [my band director] screaming at us.” When asked how that has altered, Dennis continued, “There are fewer people [of that nature] that continue to teach. Those people just now are either retiring or have passed away. I think that has changed a lot. I’ve noticed that in the temperament of teachers that are coming through the ranks now.” Dennis also referenced the coursework in teaching training programs that now emphasize adolescent psychology and learning theories remarking, “I think pedagogical authority has evolved over time.” The instructional practices of the teachers in this study reflect this change.

No last chairs

When I play my instrument, I feel happy because I feel like a part of something bigger than me. I feel like a piece of a puzzle that when put together with others, can become something amazing.

-- 8th-grade student at John Reid Middle School

In 190 student reflective writings, students mentioned “being part of a team” or “part of a group with a common goal.” Remarkably, not one student mentioned his/her “chair placement” in orchestra as a factor for membership in the ensemble. Traditionally, orchestras are seated according to skill level. The students deemed to be higher skilled sit in the front row closest to the conductor and numerically progress by skill until the back row of the orchestra. Depending on the type of orchestra seating arrangement (i.e., where the first violins, second violins, viola, and cellos sit), the higher skilled players sit on the outside of the orchestra, closest to the audience. It is typical for orchestra auditions to take place to determine the seating arrangement.

A typical audition may include a student performing individually for the conductor or judge trained in assessing the individual instruments. After scores are calculated, students are placed in their “seats” and may not move their seated location for months or the entire year. In addition, the top scores for each instrument are awarded “principal” positions of leadership, with the first ranked violinist named “concertmaster.” The concertmaster has additional responsibilities such as walking separately on stage before a performance, after the rest of the orchestra is seated and to the applause of the audience. The concertmaster often facilitates tuning and is involved in such decision making as “bowing directions” for the rest of the orchestra. Such formality and tradition can, oftentimes, breed heated competition between students and families.

When analyzing the student data, I noticed that students failed to mention the role of competition in their orchestra experience. After interviews and observations, it became clear that while all of the five participating teachers did some type of assessment of student skill at the

beginning of the year, typical “orchestra seating” traditions had been evolved in their instructional practice. Cameron from Crawford MS explained,

This year has been really cool because yes, I heard them [play individually] at the beginning of the year but my motto all year has been, “there are no last chairs in orchestra.” So, for every concert, I ask, “Who hasn’t played first yet?” And I’m forcing them to play outside or inside, moving them around, so they’re never just stuck in one spot. It’s been really cool because some of the kids have really grown. You have to contribute everywhere. I say, “Look at you, you’re a leader, you’re leading.” And, I’ve just kept on it, and I think they bought into it.

This type of rotational seating, giving all students the experience of being “unranked” and emphasizing the importance of every person in orchestra was a theme throughout my observations at Crawford MS. During observation, it was evident, as Cameron had mentioned, students were not placed by skill level. When Cameron addressed the orchestra, it was to all students and not directed at the “first chairs.” Eye contact, asking questions, and receiving student input demonstrated a fair and balanced teaching practice. As I was watching the students play, all students were noticeably engaged in performing. To play an instrument requires physical movement; however, when a student is truly “musical” with his/her instrument, there will be extra movement to his/her performance. Expressing musicality, or what music teachers may refer to as “emoting through the instrument,” may look like a student swaying with the tempo of the music, breathing audibly at the beginning or end of musical phrases, and moving his/her head to the tempo of the music in an artistic manner. Such examples of musical expression are often displayed by advanced musicians and are signs that a student is demonstrating leadership when performing.

At Crawford MS, the students played with confidence beyond their technical ability. Though there were noticeable mistakes in intonation and note accuracy, the students performed with musical energy in their playing, and it appeared that almost all students were demonstrating musical leadership. Cameron later attributed this sense of leadership and engagement to the “no last chairs” philosophy in class, along with the students’ general excitement for learning music. It may be that rotational seating and de-emphasizing competition not only fosters a sense of belonging in the learning environment; it may develop higher level skills of musicianship.

An old tradition of secondary music ensembles is the “seat challenge.” After students are ranked by audition, a student may “challenge” another student for their “chair.” The conductor would choose an excerpt in the concert music, and the two students would play either in front of the orchestra or only the conductor. The student who performed “better” would either hold or gain that seat placement. Seen as a “motivator” for students to practice their instruments, the tradition of “challenges” may be disappearing. None of the participating teachers used challenges in their ensembles. Joshua at John Reid MS remembered,

One of my first years, we did a challenge. All the kids wanted a challenge. And we did it, it was a Friday after school, and some girl was crying, and I was like, “I’m never doing challenges again.” I don’t want to leave on a Friday night, and my vibe into the weekend is that I made a girl cry. I don’t want to do that anymore.

When asked about the challenge system, Cameron also disagreed on many levels. “I don’t believe in chair testing or challenging. I just think that creates a negative environment, and it stops kids who are too scared to try from growing. Never do that.” Like Cameron, Charles at Rose Park MS also disagreed with challenges and implemented rotational seating in the orchestra:

I also rotate kids on every single song, including violas and cellos. Nobody's a backseat driver. Nobody's that fourth-row kid who is never going to get out of fourth row. And there are ways to set the group up that is not going to be detrimental to the sound. I believe that I can put a kid in a position to be successful. Mixing up stand partners, making the kids feel that, "Yeah, the third violin part is important. Look, I just put the concertmaster on third violin. That part is important. If I can do that, then, you can play third violin, too. Don't tell me you're too good to play third violin"...As a matter of fact...This is my philosophy of education. My philosophy of education is that my goal is to get each child to put their individual needs secondary to the needs of the ensemble while my goal as the conductor is to put the needs of the individual ahead of the ensemble.

Feeling valued. "I think inclusivity is...well, I think it's just organic. With music, we've got a place for everybody." Patrick at Sage Canyon MS sat in his office with his chair pointed towards the office door. During our interview together, we were interrupted several times by students with questions about extra practice time and inquiring when Patrick would be available in the music room. With each interruption, Patrick apologized; however, it became quickly apparent that both he and the students value checking in with each other.

Patrick continued to illustrate his point about inclusivity by sharing one of the first few lessons of the year. "Here's my favorite dessert recipe: chocolate mint brownie squares. My wife makes them once a year." As he continues, Patrick gets noticeably excited and more animated.

Here are the ingredients and the reason this is so yummy is because of these ingredients in the proportions. Let's look at, if our class were a recipe today we'd have too much

flour, very little sweetener, and all the things that make it good are in the smallest amounts and lots and lots of butter, who doesn't love butter?

In this analogy, the brownie ingredients refer to the instrumentation of the ensemble. Patrick uses band instruments to illustrate his point to me in his interview, but here in class, he makes the point with the students in orchestra as well. Describing a band with too many flute players, too many clarinets, and not enough low brass instruments, Patrick tells them:

Even too much of a tasty thing can be bad. In nature, as in cooking, balance is important. In music, it's critical. Thankfully, nobody's going to the hospital if we have imbalance here, but to the ear, it's going to be like this imbalanced recipe.

A balanced ensemble is a goal of most music teachers. As each instrument group has a part in the performance, the ability to balance and blend the parts together is, as Patrick put it, "critical" to the overall success of the group. Too many students playing one type of instrument often leads students to switch instruments to provide more varied instrumentation. Patrick was clear that he never forces a student to change instruments and never asks students directly to change. He only presented the analogy of the recipe, and students respond. He continued, "The miracle of middle school kids -- they'll just start raising their hands to volunteer to change instruments. I never even ask."

This "mint brownie recipe" exercise at the beginning of year may be more than just a balancing of instrumentation. It is a way of connecting the students from the beginning of their ensemble experience and illustrating that the success of the group is connected to every student's role. Patrick stated, "They feel valued. They are filling a role that nobody else in the room was going to fill. As soon as I point that out, the kids will spontaneously applaud for each other. It's celebrated."

Relational value is the extent to which one feels valued by “important others,” such as family, friends, and members of the community (Leary, 2005). Students who feel valued by their peers and school institution experience a state of high psychological well-being. Famously, Maslow referred to it as the need to belong. The quantitative data in phase one of this study confirms that students feel included in orchestra class. When asked if they are included in “lots of rehearsal activities in this orchestra,” 86.9% of student participants across the five sites responded positively. Additionally, when asked if they are treated with as much respect as other students, 87.9% of the students across the five sites responded positively. Students from Sage Canyon MS, who participate in the “mint brownie recipe” collaborative exercise, report a 91.7% positive response.

The amount of attention a student receives, the ratio of positive to negative feelings expressed by others, and degrees of thoughtfulness are indicators of relational value. Belonging, relational value and inclusion are all descriptors for the student’s need to feel important. Charles from Rose Park MS spoke passionately about this student need:

The analogy they [other teachers] keep using is the idea that it’s like a sports team. You only have one quarterback. I don’t care; this is not a sports team. Everybody plays. Nobody sits on the bench. I don’t care if the orchestra is not going to sound as good as it could, that’s not what my job is. My job is not to create great music. My job is to create a great experience for kids and great opportunities.

Interestingly, the orchestras at Rose Park MS are recognized as some of the highest performing ensembles in Southern California. It may be that the instructional practices used by teachers, such as Charles, have positive performance and connectedness implications. Charles continues:

I have special needs kids in my classes, and I think it's great. And the kids are open to it. I've got a kid right now; he's a mallet player. That's his chair. Because he can't stand up for the entire class. And it was really cool because the last time he had a test, he said, "My turn?" I said, "Yes, Jacob, it is your turn. Go!" And he just went about playing something on the instrument. I said, "Great job, Jacob!" The kids gave him applause. So, there's a place for everybody in music. There has to be.

It is important to include that there were a few negative comments found in the student reflective writings concerning favoritism and testing. A few students at John Reid MS wrote that the teacher was not always equal with attention to all students. One student wrote, "There are good sides to orchestra (practicing my instrument) and bad (the teacher has favorites, and only the first violins are acknowledged." Another student at Rose Park MS wrote, "Being part of the orchestra means that I can play my violin which I am glad to do, but through orchestra, I feel uncomfortable always taking the blame for my stand partner's mistakes because my stand partner is the music teacher's favorite."

Rose Park MS implemented testing procedures where the individuals play testing material in front of the entire class, and this led to students to feel "stressed" or "embarrassed during test time." A student from Rose Park MS wrote:

Being a member of the orchestra hasn't been the best time of my life, but it wasn't the worst. Sometimes I feel like no one notices me except when I make mistakes on test days. It is also very stressful when I take tests because people stare, make faces at the mistakes I make or talk about how bad I was behind my back.

This type of testing was found only at one school site. The data collected indicates such “public testing” assessment techniques are not instructional practices that foster connectedness and inclusivity.

Building self-efficacy through the creative process

Music is only a blueprint of a basic concept. The hard part is going beneath the printed markings and making music out of that. That’s the difficult part for some middle school kids to get, but you can make that fun, make it relevant and important and they will embrace it. I think that’s the magic that they take with them and they know the higher level of achievement you can produce in an artistic setting, especially one as nebulous as music when you can get black dots on a page.

-Patrick, Music Director at Sage Canyon Middle School

The students at Sage Canyon MS were rehearsing for a concert featuring two cellists in the *Vivaldi Double Cello Concerto* when, about four minutes into the lesson, the pianist raised her hand with a confused look. Patrick, the orchestra director, turned to his left to check in, and she reported, “Something’s not right.” She asked him to check the chord progression in a certain measure. Patrick picked up the score to study it closer and muttered to himself, “F Major, Dominant Five...” The other students watched as the pianist and teacher discuss the tonality of the piece. The orchestra began to talk a little, and the teacher motioned for them to stop, “Hey, shush, Chloe is trying to think,” he said smirking at the orchestra, “Do any of you do that, do you try to think?” The class laughed while Chloe punched out some more chords. Now confident in her analysis, she said firmly, “There is a mistake in the part, that is a wrong note.” Patrick froze in disbelief and agreed. “How did you...wow...you heard that.” He took out his pencil and

scribbled something in the music and walked over the piano. Patrick and Chloe's fist bumped, and the first violins reached for their pencil to fix the mistake in music.

After class, Patrick was excited to use the situation as an example of something he told me during our interview. "Most people don't know middle school kids and would never think they could achieve anything that would take your breath away," Patrick said, "but I've seen them do it and it still shocks me." He continued to say that he had not noticed the mistake in this new edition of the piece, and the students continue to "humble" him to take ownership of his mistakes. I asked him to talk a little more about mistakes in his classroom.

I think from a music standpoint, making mistakes is a part of the creative process. Our whole district has that focus, make mistakes. No fear of making mistakes. Mistakes are how you learn. Well, that was invented eons ago. When people started making music, they perfected something. I think in other classes, it's harder to illustrate that, even though it's just as real, but in music, you have to do those things in order to get to the point where you have mastery on something. So, it's endemic. I think [mistakes] are just endemic in our situation.

During this phase of data collection, I witnessed each class rehearsing passages of music over and over again. The music teacher would identify a passage and have the students comment on what was "incorrect" or "not refined." The students would remark about the "phrasing," "tempo," or "intonation." The teacher would give input as part of the collective process. The orchestra would then try the same passage countless times, striving for improvement. Patrick and I continued to talk about the value of mistakes and the "can-do" mindset the students must adopt in music learning. Patrick emphasizes that along with feeling value, students must know that they can achieve the creative task put in front of them.

Nobody can be failing. If you're failing in here, you're not playing your part. That's not how we work. It can't work that way. It's like our central nervous system. We plan on our cardiovascular just running while I'm talking to you here. Imagine if it was a conscious thing that we had to run. We couldn't keep a thought in our head. That's how we work. Everybody has to be inclusively doing their job. That's the miracle of music. And then the sound stops, and we all think, "That's neat."

As we talked, Patrick admitted that he wished he could be a painter because he could sit back and admire a physical painting. Music is transient, disappearing as soon as it is performed. As we discussed the transient nature of music performance, I offered the Buddhist sand mandalas as an analogy. Sand mandalas are highly intricate works of sand art that is destroyed once completed. Though Buddhist sand mandala tradition refers symbolically to material life, Patrick agreed with the analogy, "Yes, it's like the physical example of what music would be like. It's there for just a moment." After the sound has stopped, what is left is the existence of the performers' technical skill and what Patrick refers to as "authentic assessment." Students self-evaluate their performance and recognize their accomplishment. Patrick says that this type of student reflection on skill and reaching set collective goals is a music teacher's "vehicle to move the students forward into a higher level of thinking."

Growth mindset is a useful construct to analyze the data collected about music learning in this study. Growth mindset is the belief that through effort and perseverance, one can become better at something. Engagement, motivation, choice, ownership, and a growth mindset are intimately related (Dweck, 2007). The data suggest that students develop features of self-efficacy through music learning. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. This belief, specific to a task or an area of knowledge or

performance, shapes the behaviors and strategies that help one pursue their goal (Bandura, 1997, 2006).

“I love listening to music, but the idea of me being able to play it still blows my mind,” wrote a seventh-grade violinist from Crawford MS. He went on to describe noticing his playing skills improving each week: “I think improving on the violin is helping me focus better overall.” Students from Rose Park MS wrote about their increased confidence, “When I’m around other people who also like to play and share music, I am more confident in my own playing,” and “Once I get into the piece, I feel more confident in myself and my playing.” Confidence or self-esteem is often linked to self-efficacy. However, while self-esteem refers to a measure of self-worth, self-efficacy refers to the belief that one can do what is necessary to achieve a specific goal or task. A student at Oak View wrote, “I am proud of myself for being able to play this orchestra, and I feel a connection to the music and feel like we all strive towards goal - finding the best in ourselves to create beautiful music.”

Having high self-efficacy can help students navigate and persist through challenges. Even when a student experiences failure, noticing the gradual improvement of skills can give the student confidence that a goal will ultimately be achieved. The nature of music learning in an environment of connectedness may be fostering a student’s sense of self-efficacy.

Collective identity

I feel that I am part of a team to create music. I can be creative when I want to and feel important in my role.”

Eighth-grade violinist from Crawford MS

In 1973, Cusiak studied the social nature of school environments and found that students in “music cliques” experienced close-knit social networks. Morrison (2001) furthered Cusiak’s

findings by suggesting that music classrooms are not just classes, performing groups or only social groups, but form their own “culture that enriches the lives of their members” (p.24).

Identity, Morrison (2001) asserts, is a prevalent theme in the music classroom. “Students take math. Students enroll in science class. But students become members of the choir; they join band; they are in the orchestra (p. 25)” (Morrison, 2001). This study affirms these findings.

Finding five: Music teachers use instructional practices to build a collective identity within the performing ensemble. In the reflective writing component of Phase One of data collection, students wrote about being part of something that was unique on their school campus. A student from Rose Park MS wrote, “I am so content that when we come together as an ensemble to play, I feel part of the group when I play with other students.” A sense of belonging and connection to a larger group experience was evident in the positive connectedness scores in the survey and expressed in multiple ways in student writing. Orchestra students wrote they were “members,” “part of,” or specifically identified with their particular instrument grouping. Students identified themselves not just as students and not just as musicians, but as “cellists,” “violinists,” “violists,” or “string bassists.” A student from Rose Park MS wrote, “I feel an automatic connection with someone when I learn they are a violist.” Other students wrote about their “section” within the orchestra and how each section contributes to the larger group as a whole. A seventh-grade violist from Rose Park MS wrote:

How do I feel? I feel like a part of something. I love hearing every section - Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, Bass - come together. And, when I hear my section taken out, I learn how crucial my part is, and I love feeling needed.

This study not only found that students formed an identity based on individual musicianship but extends Morrison’s (2001) view of identity as a cultural theme to the larger

context of collective identity. Polletta and Jasper (2001) define collective identity as “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity” (p. 285). Throughout each school site, students wrote about being part of a “team” and their “role” within the greater group.

A student from Sage Canyon wrote, “In orchestra, I feel very content and excited because I love being able to create music with fellow students. I actually enjoy playing in groups more than playing as a soloist because I feel like part of a team working for a common goal.” As the definition of collective identity further suggests, student writings in this study showed a minor theme of “perceived status” throughout the data collection. A student from Oak View MS wrote, “I think being a member of this school orchestra makes me feel like I’m part of something highly privileged.” Likewise, a violinist from Rose Park MS expressed, “I feel like a part of a group of students with extraordinary talent.” A student from John Reid MS wrote, “I feel accepted and part of an elite crowd of students.”

It is important to note that this sense of perceived status may be linked to the specific orchestra class in which the students participate. In each of the participating middle schools, there were at least two to three orchestra classes. The students are enrolled in each particular performing ensemble not based on grade level, rather on skill level. Participating music teachers self-selected which class to disseminate surveys in the research study. As stated in previous chapters, three out of the five participating teachers chose their higher performing groups. Two of the teachers chose their middle performing groups. Though reasons for these selections varied between participating teachers, the theme of perceived status was found in each orchestra,

regardless of performing level. This seems to suggest that “perceived status” may be less about the level of musicianship within orchestra, and more concerned with overall membership to a performing ensemble within a school site.

Collective identity, or the shared sense of belonging within a group, was found in student perceptions of their middle school orchestra experience and also in the teacher experience as well. During interviews, three of the five teachers spoke at length of their own sense of identity through being a part of music ensemble; however, as teacher rather than student members. Patrick at Sage Canyon expressed that the students are the reason he chose this profession, remarking “They are my people.” Remarkably, Dennis from Oak View MS echoed these sentiments almost verbatim. The sense of belonging to the experience of the middle school music classroom was significant for Dennis. As expressed in Chapter Four, Dennis changed vocations later in life and found his calling to be a middle school music teacher after a high school band reunion. Feeling reunited with his former classmates, some of whom had continued on to become professionals in the music field and most of whom who had not, was an “awakening” for Dennis, or as he put it, “These are my people.”

Charles from Rose Park MS spoke about a general sense of attachment to the school music experience. During his work in a teaching credential program, the head of the Education Department encouraged student teachers to consider different levels. California state music teacher credentials are single subject K-12 credentials, indicating that a music teacher is certified to teach every level of music in K-12 schooling. Charles found that he was initially drawn to desire a high school music teaching job.

I, at the time, was like most music education majors. I was set on doing the high school thing. And I think a lot of music education majors pick the high school thing because it’s

their more recent experience. They have the sharpest memory, and that is where they fall in love with music. And I think a lot of them, instead of wanting to be teachers, they really just want to perpetuate that experience that they had as a high school music student. I had a great time as a high school student in band. And it's almost like a Peter Pan thing. They don't want to grow up. They just want to be in band forever. And I think that is why we have a lot of problems...I think that is why we sometimes have a lot of situations where maybe high school teachers have classroom management issues or that's where we get those, unfortunately, inappropriate relationships because they're seeking to more adult students than adult teachers.

It could be, as Charles suggests, that the sense of membership to a school music ensemble has further implications than the initial scope and design of this research study. More research is needed how students who emerge from school-based performing ensembles choose and perceive vocation in field of music education.

In social psychology, the need to belong is an intrinsic motivation to affiliate with others and be socially accepted. Our need to belong is what drives or motivates one to seek out stable, long-lasting relationships, participate in social activities, and be accepted by others. In Maslow's "hierarchy of needs," belongingness is part of a major need that lies at the center of the pyramid. For students, a sense of belonging or connectedness in an academic environment is crucial for academic achievement and a general sense of well-being. For teachers, it may be that a sense of belonging to their vocational choice has implications for teacher retention, job satisfaction, and effectiveness in instructional practices. Additional research is needed to study the sense of belonging or collective identity formed by teachers within their classroom experience.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented findings from student reflective writings, interviews, and classroom observations. The data show that participation in middle school orchestra may influence a positive change in mental or emotional state and encourage positive prosocial skill development. Student data provide rich descriptions of feeling valued, connection through collaboration, working towards a common goal, and stress reduction. Teacher observation and interviews allowed instructional practices to be identified that may foster a sense of belonging in students. In Chapter Six, I will discuss these findings in greater depth, as well as their significance the overall research on music learning environments, music instructional practices, and school connectedness.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence found in this study supports and extends knowledge about music teacher instructional practice and school connectedness. Though there were certainly limitations to the study, the findings suggest that students enrolled in their school-based middle school orchestra report positive levels of connectedness to their music learning environment and may experience a positive change in mental or emotional state during instruction. Furthermore, music teachers may have an essential role in building places of inclusion on a school campus. By implementing instructional practices that de-emphasize competition and encourage prosocial skills in peer groups and student-teacher relationships, teachers can strengthen a student's sense of value, self-efficacy, and build a collective identity in the music classroom. This study makes visible how vital school-based music ensembles are to academic institutions and should be provided for students on every school campus.

In this final chapter, I begin by discussing the major findings of this study and their implications for existing literature on school connectedness and teacher instruction. Next, I discuss the limitations of the study's design. Finally, I provide recommendations for future research and suggestions for teacher practice.

Discussion and Implications of Major Findings

Prior research examined the sense of belonging in school-based music ensembles in almost exclusively qualitative research (Adderely et al., 2003; Cusiak, 1973; Conway & Borst, 2001; Hylton, 1981; Morrison, 2001). This study strived to expand existing literature through quantitative data collection and examine how teacher actions and instructional choices may impact a student's mental and emotional experience in music class. The guiding literature, research design, and survey protocols incorporated the term and framework of "school

connectedness. The American Psychological Association defines school connectedness as “the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Though the term “school connectedness” is often cited in educational research, it is rarely linked to music education. A goal of this study was to view music learning through the existing body of research on school connectedness and strengthen the connection between music education research and educational research as a whole. As the findings suggest, it is clear that music classrooms play a vital role in building a student’s sense of school connectedness.

Sense of belonging. The five middle schools that participated in the research study reported positive levels of connectedness within their school-based orchestra ensemble. This finding supports decades of prior research on the sense of belonging in school-based music ensembles. Morrison (2001) suggested that music classrooms are not just classes, performing groups, or only social groups, but form their own unique culture. It would make an interesting examination to study how the culture of music participation affects a student’s overall sense of connectedness to schooling. This study attempted to minimally investigate such a question, as four of the 18 survey questions concerned the experience of school as a whole. The remaining fourteen questions were specific to the music classroom. In these four questions, students reported a stronger connection to the music classroom than the overall school experience. Future research may choose to compare the connectedness scores of music students and non-music students at a single school site.

Interestingly, while the three schools that were selected for further study in phase two of data collection had differences in connectedness survey results, the classroom observations and teacher interviews did not reveal substantial differences in instructional practices. For example,

although there was the highest connectedness score at Crawford MS and the lowest connectedness score at John Reid, both showed strong evidence of connectedness during observations and teacher interviews. The classroom environments were different, as they reflected the individual teacher personality and curriculum choices; however I did not find the variation in instructional choices that I originally hypothesized might be occurring. It should be again noted that the highest and lowest connectedness scores in this study were both positive examples of school connectedness within the music ensemble.

Two of the three sites chosen for further study, Crawford MS and John Reid MS, were Title I schools which indicated they had larger concentrations of low-income students than their counterpart schools. It was interesting that this demographic difference did not seem to play a role in the connectedness scores or overall sense of belonging that participation in a music ensemble instills in students. Performing in orchestras may often be viewed as an activity for students of privileged backgrounds; however the findings of this study seem to refute this idea. Participation in music ensembles may have greater implications for equity and access on school campuses for minority populations.

It was further evident during teacher interviews and classroom observations that school administration was supportive of music learning. Teachers reported that important decisions about the music program were made almost exclusively by the music teachers themselves, with little input from the administration. Teachers were free to set their own curriculum, decide how many performances to schedule during the year, plan diverse field trips for only music students, and set their own grading practices. One teacher, Charles from Rose Park MS, even went as far as to tell the principal at his school site, “The best way for you to support me is to stay out of my way.” Another instance of administrative support was the inclusion of all learners in music

classes. At all five school sites, the music program allowed students to begin an instrument without any prior musical experience and accommodate students with learning differences. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Charles opened his classroom to all students and modified instruction to accommodate students with special needs. This inclusion of all learners reflects not only an open and inclusive mindset of the music teacher but the school site as a whole.

At Sage Canyon MS, Patrick's support from administration resulted in the construction of an entirely new classroom to accommodate the needs of the music program. While at Crawford MS, the simple act of an administrator walking by a music rehearsal and giving a "high-five" to Cameron signaled strong support of music learning. It may be that not only do students feel a sense of belonging in their music classroom, but the music program itself maintains a sense of belonging within the school site.

Positive change in mental or emotional state. Examining the data through the lens of positive psychology, or the belief that happy students make the best learners, it is evident that music ensembles provide a valuable space for students to experience relief from academic stressors. Happiness and relaxation were prevalent themes throughout data collection. Students reported that in music they "have fun, are happy and do not worry about anything." Other students wrote about feeling "relaxed and de-stress[ed]" while playing their instrument with others.

In fact, as previously stated in Chapter Four, 114 out of 190 students mentioned stress-relief and happiness in their reflective writing samples. This significant finding led to an examination of the survey protocol to see if students were unknowingly prompted to write about happiness or stress relief. The participating student packets first contained the connectedness survey and a stapled page of short answer questions followed (see Appendix A and Appendix B).

The words “stress” and “relaxation” are mentioned once at the end of the reflective writing section as two of twelve descriptive words in a linguistic map, after students were to complete the short writing questions. The word happiness never appears in the survey and reflective writing protocol. This seems to suggest that students self-selected to write about “happiness” and “stress-relief” during music instruction, making it a significant finding in this study.

As discussed in Chapter One, the emotional consequences of connectedness have been well-studied. Forming meaningful connections with others can be the cause of happiness, and supportive social networks can buffer against stress and depression. Research has found that students who feel a sense of belonging in school have more developed self-esteem, internal regulation, and motivation to succeed (Osterman, 2000). The feeling of being accepted and included at school factors critically in student emotional well-being (Furlong et al., 2003; Maddox and Prinz, 2003). Such research further strengthens my study’s findings that students who report positive levels of connectedness in their school-based orchestra also report a change in mental and emotional state during the music learning experience.

Adolescents who are positively connected their school experience are more likely to be motivated to learn (Cornelius-White, 2007), have increased attendance (Blum, 2005), perform better on tests (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), and have fewer internalized problems such as depression (Reddy et al., 2003). While the students in my study reported a change in emotional and mental state during music instruction, the question remains if this translates into increased attendance, academic achievement throughout the school day, and overall emotional well-being. A more in-depth, longitudinal study is needed to further explain the connection between music learning and these critical factors for student success.

Socialization within the music ensemble. Prior research in music education focused heavily on the social nature of music classrooms. In 1973, Cusiak reported that “music-drama” social groups were one of the closely knit circles on the high school campus. Conway and Borst (2001) studied what non-musical influences motivated middle school students to continue music into high school. Their study found that students were motivated for a variety of reasons, including singing for learning’s sake, singing for self-expression, singing for social and group reasons, singing for enjoyment, singing for performance, singing to be identified with the school, and singing for the music itself. Singing for social reasons was a prevalent finding of this action research study, causing Conway and Borst (2001) to recommend that choir teachers focus on creating more opportunities to socialize with each other between various school sites, and to form mentors in high schools.

My study confirms that the social benefits of music participation are of great significance to students. Students wrote about “making new friends” and “connecting with people I didn’t think I would ever know.” One student described the class as a “family” and wrote a length about overcoming social anxieties through music learning. The in-depth descriptions that some student participants provided were unexpected. At times, students wrote at great length, filling every space of the page, or continuing to write on the back about their experiences in orchestra. The detailed responses that I received prompted me to reach out to some of the teachers to see if students were asked to write at length and ask if the students received any compensation, such as extra credit if they wrote great details. Every teacher participant, I asked replied that they only asked the students to follow the prompt and be honest. It should also be noted that students returned their survey responses to the teachers in sealed envelopes, and therefore, teachers were unaware of the length or content of the student responses.

The nature of asking students to participate in reflective writing may have contributed to the detailed and personal information the students provided. Students completed the survey with paper and pencil in their own home environment and not within the vicinity of other students. Students knew that the information they provided was going to a person they did not know, that no feedback or comments would be given in return, and a promise of discretion was made. Students also placed their responses in a sealed envelope. It may be that these factors contributed to students feeling free to express themselves in a manner they may not have felt comfortable expressing in front of peers or in person during an interview.

It was not surprising that friendship was a common theme found throughout the reflective writing questions. Middle school music is an elective in the target school district, and electives traditionally coincide with the social tendencies of students. However, it was unexpected that students wrote more about finding new friends rather than only strengthening existing friendships. Forming friendships and finding like interests strengthen the idea that students can “find their people” or a social network in which they belong. This finding may be especially important in middle school and high school music classes.

During middle school, most students go through periods of feeling socially insecure and emotionally vulnerable. It is at this formative age that adolescents begin detaching and differentiating from their parent influences and begin to develop a sense of individuality. The importance of a social network outside of the home deepens, and peer group membership often involves conforming in order to belong. Teasing, exclusion, bullying, rumoring, and ganging up become more common. Middle schools and high schools have the responsibility to provide opportunities for students to make meaningful connections to a positive social network. Forming

and maintaining positive social relationships is a significant feature in the psychological construct of belonging and contributes to emotional well-being.

Using instructional practices to build inclusion. The findings of this study indicated that teacher instructional practice plays a significant role in fostering prosocial skill development and an overall environment of inclusion. The past two decades of research in instructional-practice based teacher education found that, as a whole, teacher education has focused more on teacher knowledge rather than the interactive practice between teacher and student (Grossman & MacDonald, 2008). It was important in this study not only to gather data on school connectedness in music ensembles but to examine if teacher practice had an effect on the reported student outcomes. Observations and teacher interviews gave the study a more coherent and vivid account of the phenomena as a whole and helped to determine that teacher practice contributes greatly to overall student connectedness.

Humor and personal connection between teacher and students. To begin, the social nature of music learning and use of humor was a common thread throughout the observed music classes. Instead of students acting like the stereotypical “class clowns,” the humor was mostly teacher initiated. Each observed music teacher used their own sense of humor or comedy to interact with students and convey instruction.

Teachers used playful banter, sometimes rather sarcastically, to make students laugh, or teach a concept. When discussing balance between instrument sections, Joshua from John Reid MS did not merely point out that one section was too loud, he used humorous descriptions and teased students in a non-threatening manner to evoke change. From the observer's perspective, when the teacher used humor to evoke musical change in the class's performance, change was achieved quickly and effectively. Cameron from Crawford MS used a more silly, comical

approach to engage students in learning and reinforcing the concepts of tempo and pulse when dancing on the conductor's podium to the beat of the music.

The use of sarcasm was interesting to observe through all three school sites. While the students themselves were often sarcastic to each other, each teacher used sarcasm to add humor to the class environment. Upon reflection, it appeared that the use of sarcasm was generally appropriate and was accepted by the teacher and student as part of "playful banter." This was interesting to observe as sarcasm can be described as hostility disguised as humor. The origin of the word sarcasm derives from the Greek word "sarkazein" which means "to tear or strip the flesh off." However, the lightness of the sarcasm, oftentimes not directed at the individual but rather the group, allowed for it translate into successful humor. A more in-depth study of humor in the classroom may reveal information about how to or how not to use sarcasm to build inclusive classrooms.

It was apparent throughout the observations that the participating teachers really "knew" their students. Joshua from John Reid MS would relate students to their siblings in a joking manner or talk about their families. In one instance, Joshua asked if the student's mom knew how "good" he was at a target musical skill and after some laughter between them said, "I know your mom, she's pretty cool, I bet she's proud of you." Patrick from Sage Canyon MS joked with another student about his change in humor and personality from seventh grade to eighth grade, and with a sly grin, remarked, "Wow, look at you. You're so confident and funny now. What happened this past year?" Cameron from Crawford MS would playfully tease a student and then say, "You know I care about you, you've known me for a couple of years, I know your brother, you know I like to pick on you." In each situation, the students would laugh, smile, or playfully answer back with a witty remark.

This type of teacher-student relationship indicated that students were comfortable and personable with their music teacher. The nature of the sarcasm and light teasing indicated that a relationship that had been built was one of mutual trust and respect. It could be that the structure of the music classroom helps to build these types of relationships. Unlike other subjects, most schools have one music teacher and, if a student enrolls in music class, they are guaranteed to be a student of this teacher. In addition, students often take the same music elective for multiple years, therefore allowing teacher-students relationships to develop well past a normal one year or one-semester course. This expands in high school, where a student may be in a class for four years with a particular teacher. Within a multi-year experience, students may have the opportunity to form greater bonds in student-student relationships and teacher-student relationships. However, the type of relationship that is built depends on the teacher philosophy, personality, and commitment of the teacher.

During data collection, it became apparent that not all classes were completely egalitarian. Rose Park MS and John Reid MS were the only instances of students writing about “teacher favorites” and, interestingly, had the two lowest connectedness scores in the study. Rose Park had a sum connectedness score of 68.15, and John Reid MS reported a score of 67.75, where the other schools reported sum scores from 69.61 to 74.08. It should be noted, however, that scores are still considered positive by the grading scale of the survey protocol. Equal treatment of students is not an automatic trait of music classrooms, and teachers music strive to cultivate an environment of fairness. Instructional practices must be examined through the lens of students to ensure that the perception of fairness and equity is upheld. The data from this study support these claims, as testing procedures at Rose Park were the source of stress and a negative sense of belonging.

In this study, it is evident that the participating teachers' choice to use humor and make personal connections with students is an instructional practice that has positive implications for school connectedness. Maintaining an equitable classroom that the students perceive as "fair" should further guide instructional choices.

De-emphasizing competition. Of the five participating teachers, three teachers use "non-traditional" seating practices to de-emphasize competition between students. None of the five participating teachers use the "challenge" system in class to determine what "chair" a student is placed. Students rotate seating within sections based on the musical selection. This effects of this appear to be twofold.

To begin, rotational seating allows students to experience leadership roles in a more equitable manner. Different students sit closer to the front of the orchestra, near the conductor, which allows for a more varied experience in class. When orchestra students sit closer to the conductor, they are more exposed in their playing, mistakes may be more noticeable to the teacher and other students, and they may be surrounded by more varied instrumentation. For example, students sitting in first row of the orchestra are closer in proximity to the different sections of First Violin, Second Violin, Viola, and Cello. This allows for a different musical experience than sitting towards the back, only surrounded by the same instruments in your "section."

In addition, rotational seating allows for students to "share a music stand" with different students in the orchestra. In orchestra settings, students share one music stand with another like-instrument from their section. These students use the same copy of music to read from, make markings in their parts, and collaborate in a more intimate manner. When performing, the nature of using the same music stand leads to students turning their bodies towards the stand to see the

music, and consequently, a student hears his/her stand partner play more than any other student. Rotational seating allows students to collaborate with different students throughout the year and may lead to developing different prosocial skills. Students at Crawford commented that they found it easy to “meet new people,” “improve social skills,” and “practice getting along with others.”

Interestingly, one of the schools with a positive yet lower connectedness score also implements rotational seating. This seems at first to contradict the finding that de-emphasizing competition leads to more inclusive and connected classrooms. However, upon closer examination, the Rose Park school had some instructional practices that diverged from the other school sites. As mentioned previously, Rose Park MS, along with John Reid MS, had more instances of students reporting “favoritism.” Along with this factor, Rose Park MS reported different testing procedures than other school sites. At this particular school, students play test songs individually in front of the other students in class. This “singling out” method seems to cause a negative reaction for some students. It may be that any positive outcomes from rotational seating are outweighed by other instructional choices that have a negative appeal to students.

Self-Efficacy and value. This research study found that when teachers implement instructional practices that emphasize inclusion and de-emphasize competition, a student’s sense of self-efficacy is strengthened. Prior to data collection, I had not hypothesized that self-efficacy was a significant factor in a student’s participation in middle school orchestra. Such data led me to investigate further research on self-efficacy and motivation.

The finding that students are more likely to be motivated feel valued, and gain strengthened self-efficacy supports prior to the research of Asmus (1986), Sandene (1997), and Tucker (2018). Asmus’s (1986) model of achievement motivation was the first established

framework of student motivation in music learning environments. When investigating elementary and secondary music students' motivation to achieve, Asmus (1986) maintained that student's self-perception of achievement would determine successes and failures in music learning. This internal and external locus of control model was later expanded through more research. Tucker (2018) found that teacher attributions may influence student motivation and perceptions of self. Teachers have the opportunity to positively influence students to succeed or fail based on their strategies in class. Reading through the student reflective writings, it was evident to me that students developed a sense of value through playing in orchestra and a motivation to succeed in common goals.

Prior research indicates that music teachers can positively influence student self-efficacy by building supportive, cooperative environments in instrumental music classrooms (Hoffman, 2012; Sandene, 1997; Schmidt, 2005). Hoffman (2012) identified that competitive placement or "seating" discourages such cooperative environments. Hoffman's interviews with students reveal that when students are forced to audition for chairs or placed in competitive situations, a shift in identity occurs within students, and the student's sense of self-efficacy is weakened. This finding by Hoffman (2012) is confirmed in this research study. In reflective writings, students reported that competition or testing for chairs decreases a student's sense of connectedness. Furthermore, the interviews with participating teachers found that teachers noticed the negative aspects of "challenges" and sought to eliminate them from instructional practice.

In a learning environment that de-emphasizes competition and builds a student's sense of value in the orchestra, it is evident that students feel more at ease to experience the creative, collaborative relaxing benefits of music learning. Students wrote that participating in music made them part of a team to be creative and fill an important role. Feeling valued and

strengthening a student's sense of self-efficacy makes the music classroom an essential environment on a school campus. Teacher instructional practice of maintaining a fair and balanced environment wherein all students feel valued, implementing class structures that de-emphasize the competitive nature of music performance and using humor to convey learning targets build a student's sense of connectedness within their middle school orchestra.

Collective identity. An unanticipated finding of this study was the impact the music classroom had on music teachers. Originally, I intended only to interview the school sites that were chosen for further study during Phase Two of my research design. However, while corresponding with teachers about dissemination and collection of student survey material, each teacher inquired if they could share their experiences in the music classroom. After interviewing all the participating teachers, it became evident that music teaching was not just a job for these individuals, it was a part of their identities. The remarkable parallel between Dennis and Patrick revealed the impact of music learning environment as both referred to their student musicians as "my people." Cameron and Joshua both referred to their student music ensembles as "family," and Charles discussed finding his "place" or his "home" in teaching music to middle school students. Such "communities of practice," a term coined by Wenger (1999), develop a bond that is formed during collective learning. This bond was powerfully evident when discussing school connectedness with the participating music teachers. More research is needed to investigate how this collective identity may be broadened, strengthened, and even duplicated in other areas of education. It would be interesting to study job turnover and job satisfaction is knowing that the bond of collective identity is strong.

Study Limitations

This study affirms and supports prior research that found school-based music performing ensembles to be environments of positive connectedness, socialization, and inclusivity. This alignment with past research suggests reliability within this research study. However, while I tried to conduct a comprehensive study on school connectedness and music teacher instructional practice, this study is not without its limitations.

First, I chose to focus on orchestra students who play violin, viola, cello, and string bass. This choice was made in the effort to control for as many structural similarities between school site classes as possible. Each of the participating teachers taught orchestral string instruments, while all of the teachers were trained brass and percussion musicians and had no personal experience performing on string instruments. The teachers were entering the orchestra classroom without individual experience of being a string player. This made the teachers “transplants” in a way, having experienced a very different environment as band students when they were younger. This commonality may have influenced how the teachers chose to approach diverse instructional practices. In addition, this choice was made so that students were experiencing as close to the same musical experience as possible, (i.e., similar literature choices and instrumentation). Finally, the decision to only involve string students was made to ensure that students had similar years of training. In the target school district, the students begin learning string instruments a full year earlier than woodwind and brass instruments and a full three years earlier than percussion students. While this choice provided similar class structures and more accurate comparison between school sites, participating teachers mentioned several times that string students were “different” than band students in personality and musical

experience. It could be that a study of band performing ensembles and choir performing ensembles may yield different results.

In addition, in the effort to make the data collection manageable, only one orchestra class from each school site was chosen to participate. For a more thorough data collection, all orchestra classes at each of the five schools would have been encouraged to participate. The teachers were allowed to select the level of their ensemble that participated, which perhaps had an impact on the direct comparison between sites. Individual teacher bias may have influenced the overall results of data analysis.

This study focused on music learning through participation in performance-based music ensembles, however the term “music learning” encompasses a wide array of performance and non-performance based educational experiences. This study and much of the prior research on a sense of belonging in music classrooms focuses solely on student experiences in performing ensembles. Future research may benefit from examining connectedness within non-performing music experiences to further understand the impact of music education as a whole and pedagogical practices within each instructional setting.

During the second phase of data collection, I chose to observe Crawford MS, Sage Canyon MS, and John Redi MS three times. While this allowed for nine total observations, this limited number of observations may have inhibited my ability to observe greater variation in pedagogical practices. A more thorough investigation of music teacher instructional practices would involve a more in-depth observation schedule.

Finally, I chose to situate my study in an upper-middle class school district with a long history of high-level music performance. Although one can make a case that this allows for research on effects of a successful music education program, using just one sample district does

limit the study. This context should be considered if the findings of this study can accurately transfer to other environments. Merriam (2001) suggests that to increase generalizability, the researcher must use “rich, thick description” (p. 227). During observations and interviews, I attempted to describe the classroom environments and student-teacher interactions with as much detail as possible. When analyzing student data, I employed a purposeful strategy to select data across the different sites and from a diverse background of students (i.e., gender, ethnic background, instrument choice) to use as student quotes in the different chapters of this study.

Finally, this study is potentially limited by their own biases as the principal investigator. My background as a middle school orchestra director may have provided an existing theoretical framework that could have influenced me to misinterpret data to fit my own assumptions. With this in mind, during the coding process, I collaborated with outside researchers with no music or teaching experience, non-music teaching experience, and one other music teacher in the attempt to mitigate my own biases.

Recommendations for Educators and Academic Institutions

Research concerning school connectedness and the benefits of music instruction on whole-child development confirms the music classroom as an important and valuable environment on a school campus. In order to maximize the potential benefits of music learning environments, recommendations follow for music educators and school administrators.

Music educators. The findings of this study suggest that music teachers play a significant role in implementing instructional practices that may strengthen a student’s sense of belonging in the music classroom. Through analysis of the collected data, the following ideas emerged:

Recommendation #1. Music educators should implement instructional strategies that de-emphasize competition. Research has shown that the idea of “healthy competition” between student musicians is an outdated concept and an overall contradiction. Student motivation and self-efficacy can be encouraged and supported through instructional choices that emphasize ownership, internal locus of control, and persistence through challenges. Music teachers should favor rotational seating within the orchestra to allow students opportunities to work and collaborate with a variety of different students, develop leadership skills, and experience music making from different vantage points within the orchestral set-up.

Recommendation #2. Music teachers should use instructional strategies that encourage students to think of their collective identity and individual contribution to the music class. Music learning is unique in that students perform on different instruments, with different parts, to create a common goal or task. As one participating teacher employed his analogy of “mint brownie recipes,” instructional strategies can be used to build a sense of community, inclusion, and individual importance within the group setting. During rehearsal, the teacher can emphasize the importance of one section of the orchestra and the supporting harmonic lines as a balance between individuals and the collective goal. For example, when rehearsing the balance of melody and harmony, one participating teacher suggested that the harmony was “too much of a good thing” the students laughed and found a way to limit their individual sound for the greater collaborative balance of the orchestra.

Recommendation #3. Music teachers can create and encourage an environment that supports positive peer to peer feedback. While the overall school connectedness scores of this study were positive, students indicated “Don’t know” to questions that inquired about how other students thought of them and their performance abilities. Middle school is a challenging time in

adolescence, and peer opinion is often an important factor for student emotional well-being. This study revealed that, in school-based music performing ensembles, there might be a lack of peer feedback. It is a recommendation of this study that teachers establish a routine during class to encourage students to engage in positive and constructive feedback during peer review. Teacher can provide sentence starters and other types of scaffolded feedback structures to encourage students in prosocial communication skills with peers. Such activities in music lessons may strengthen a student's sense of belonging and could further improve the musicianship of the ensemble.

Recommendation #4. Music teachers should eliminate testing procedures that cause embarrassment and produce negative social pressures. The study found that when students are asked to perform for an academic grade in front of peers, there can be a negative effect on school connectedness and the overall emotional well-being of students. This recommendation does not suggest that students should refrain from playing in front of each other or that educators should refrain from helping students persist through performance anxiety. Rather, before an academic grade is given or students are asked to perform by themselves in front of peers, an environment of trust and mutual respect must first be maintained. Students in this study indicated that one site's testing procedures caused students to gossip or speak poorly of others during testing procedures. Changing the testing procedures to have students submit "playing tests" on recording devices or in a more intimate setting may be preferable for the overall positive environment of orchestra. Furthermore, it may be that implementing structures for constructive peer feedback such as *Recommendation #3* may provide the type of trusting and safe environment for students to perform in front of each other in a more respectful and confident manner.

Recommendation #5. Music teachers should be authentic in the classroom, using humor and striving for personal connection with students. Throughout the data collection, it was evident that the participating music teachers acted as their “authentic selves” and did not attempt to take on a different personality when teaching. Jokes, mannerisms, and expressions were consistent when the teachers were instructing large group ensembles, speaking with individual students, and during interviews with adults. Music teachers should use humor and comedy to motivate and engage student to participate during the entire lesson actively. Finally, music teachers should strive to know their students beyond their singular musical interest. Participating teachers demonstrated authentic care and concern for student success, well-being, and made additional effort to know more about their students. In each of the classes observed, family and siblings were emphasized, which brought a familiarity to the classroom environment.

Recommendation #6. Music teachers can use the classroom to maintain a physical place on campus for music students to feel connectedness. Each of the participating teachers allowed students to enter the music room at any time during the school day. When students arrive at school, the music room immediately becomes a space where students can practice their instrument or social with friends before school, at lunch, or after school. Upon the first day of class, one of the participating teachers announces that the music room is now their “home.” They care for it and accept everyone that is inside this “home.” During lunch, the music room may become a place where students can eat and socialize with friends so that everyone has the potential to socialize with peers during the school day.

School Administrators

While music teachers may play an important role for building and maintaining a student’s sense of connectedness on a school campus, school administrators play a vital role in providing

the structure to allow such teaching to occur. The following recommendations are specific to them.

Recommendation #1. School administrators must provide music learning opportunities for all students on campus. School budgets, the physical campus of a school, and the school schedule should reflect the value of a music program on a school campus. Administrators must provide the financial backing and scheduling flexibility to allow students to experience music learning in a group or ensemble setting throughout their school experience. This may mean scheduling music classes not to conflict with other general education courses or advanced placement courses. Also, it is recommended that administrators allow for the music environment to be thoroughly inclusive. Students from all backgrounds should be allowed and encouraged to participate in music learning, such as students with special needs, disabilities, and low income. Administrators need to establish a school philosophy grounded in the belief that all students can achieve in music learning and that it is not an activity for only a privileged or talented few. This may lead schools to provide instructional aides to help students with special needs or adapted equipment to provide opportunities for students with disabilities. It may also include allowing students who struggle academically or behaviorally to nonetheless participate in music field trips and performances. If a student is struggling academically, his/her success in music class may be the encouragement needed to persist through school. If a student is struggling with aggression or behavior concerns, his/her success in music class may provide the environment to practice and develop prosocial skills within a collaborative setting. Finally, school administrators must find means to provide instruments and music materials for students of low income, so the music classroom continues to be a place of equity and not an entitlement.

Recommendation #2. School administrators should provide music students the opportunity to perform in public venues and attend field trips. During interviews, two teachers hypothesized that a reason the students elect music was because it remains one of the few classes that routinely take field trips. At the secondary level, band, orchestra, and choirs participate in music festivals, field shows, play at sporting events, and may even participate in service projects, such as playing for senior communities or hospitals. Public performances allow the community to participate in public events on and off an academic campus. In addition, the bonding that occurs when students get on a bus and travel outside of the school campus may help to build a sense of collaboration and inclusivity among peers.

Recommendation #3. School administrators must strive to employ highly qualified music instructors. The participating teachers in this study were uniquely qualified to instruct music learning. All teachers had multiple degrees in music education, music composition, and music performance, and some had graduate degrees in the music field. In addition, all music teachers were credentialed and actively participated in professional development opportunities. The experience and dedication the craft of teaching was evident and may have greatly contributed to the experience the of students in their classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

As the field of research in music education continues to expand, future research is needed to understand the domain of school connectedness in the music classroom. While qualitative research remains the dominant research approach concerning this research topic, more quantitative research on student and teacher perceptions of inclusivity and connectedness is needed to balance the totality of research. In addition, this study revealed some unanticipated questions, such as why former music students chose to become music teachers. As one teacher

participant hypothesized, could this feeling of connection to the school music experience influence young adults to become music teachers solely for the purposes of prolonging their own music experience? Such a research inquiry could have implications for teacher turnover, job satisfaction, and teacher professionalism. In addition, if the sense of belonging and collective identity in the music classroom affects teacher happiness as well, research could explore how can this sense of belonging and collective identity be duplicated in other academic areas to improve teacher turnover. As this study focused on a middle to upper middle-class community, future research is needed in communities of low socio-economic status and an examination of how outside tutoring, such as ability to take “private lessons,” may contribute or not contribute to a sense of connectedness within a school-based orchestra. Finally, a study incorporating the experiences of band and choir students on school connectedness is needed to further inform teacher practice and administrative support.

Conclusion

This research was conceived through the hope that schools can provide emotionally healthy environments in which students can achieve academic success and enjoy schooling as a positive force in their adolescent lives. Music education may be the vehicle to bring communities together, highlight non-academic student achievement, and encourage students to attend school with regularity. It was also my hope to highlight that middle- and upper-class students are in need of emotionally safe places on school campuses to combat academic stress and promote positive student mental health.

The student voices in this research study were powerful. They expressed not only a love for music learning but identified the music classroom as a place of “happiness,” “relaxation,” and “fun.” While many elective courses may have elements of “fun” and “happiness,” when

observing the music classrooms, I saw environments of intense focus and dedication to the creative process. Students were engaged, sitting on the edge of their seats, holding their instruments in playing position, and playing with great energy to achieve the collective goal of excellent musicianship. While laughter permeated the music rooms walls, so did the perseverance to improve and perfect the musical performance. It is in this delicate balance of fun, commitment, collaboration, and happiness that students can find a sense of belonging to a creative force beyond their individual selves.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Please complete the following survey to the best of your ability. There are no right or wrong answers. Respond to each statement as honestly and accurately as you can. Your answers will be kept confidential.

<i>Please circle</i>	
Grade Level	7 8
Instrument	Violin Viola Cello String Bass Other: _____
Years played on your instrument	Less than 1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8+
Gender	Male Female Prefer not to answer
Ethnicity	White Asian Hispanic African Pacific Islander/ American Filipino Multiple Other Prefer not to answer

		<i>Please check one box for each statement</i>				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
1	I feel like a real part of this orchestra.					
2	People in this orchestra notice when I'm good at something.					

3	It is hard for people like me to be accepted in this orchestra.					
4	Other students in this orchestra take my opinions seriously.					
5	Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in this orchestra.					

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
6	There is at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.					
7	People at this school are friendly to me.					
8	I am included in lots of rehearsal activities in this orchestra.					
9	In this orchestra, I am treated with as much respect as other students.					
10	I feel very different from most other students in my orchestra.					
11	I can really be myself in this orchestra.					
12	My music teacher respects me.					

13	People in this orchestra know I do good work.					
14	I wish I were in a different class than this orchestra.					
15	I feel proud of belonging to this orchestra.					
16	Students in this orchestra accept others the way they are.					
17	I feel like a real part of my school.					
18	I can really be myself at this school.					

APPENDIX B: STUDENT REFLECTIVE WRITING PROMPT

Reflective Writing

Directions: Finish the following sentences. Feel free to add additional sentences to clarify your point. Your writing will not be shared with teachers, school officials, or other students. All information will be kept confidential.

1. When I play my instrument with other students, I feel

2. I choose to participate in orchestra because

3. Does being a member of your school orchestra make your experience in middle school better, worse or has no impact? Why do you think that is?

Directions: Look at the word list below. Circle any word(s) you feel represents your experience in your *school orchestra*.

Creativity	Exciting	Enjoyable	Dull
Friends	Fun	Stress	Be myself
Team	Anxiety	Relaxing	Commitment

APPENDIX C: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Semi-structured Observation Protocol Length of Activity: 50 minutes	
Date:	Class Observed:
Instructor:	Observer:
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
During learning activities, what information is given to students? -how, when, with whom, to do the activity? -are the educational aims stated? -how and from whom can they get help if needed? -what learning resources are utilized during activities? -is the relevance (in future life practice) of the activity stated?	
How is the learning activity implemented? -who is taking part? -number of participating students? -nature of the activity and teaching approach? -timing and location of the activity? -how is the activity organized? -roles and responsibilities of students and teacher? -how is time used during the activity? -who is making the decisions? (teacher, students, student leaders) -resources used during the activity?	
How are the participants behaving? -are students participating in the activity? -how are students using peers for help or guidance? -how are students interacting with their environment?	
How is the teacher behaving? -is the teacher participating in the activity? -how is the teacher working with students for guidance or direction of the activity? -how is the teaching interacting with the environment?	

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Semi-structured Interview Protocol Length of Activity: 30 minutes	
Date:	Participating Teacher:
Location:	Observer:
<p>Good Afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to speak with me about student mental health in the “Target School District”. As you know, I am currently enrolled in a UCLA doctoral program and studying music classrooms as learning environments.</p> <p>This interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during the interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order to maintain accuracy, I would like to digitally record our conversation so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. If, at any point, you would like to be turn the recorder off, please feel free to press the off button on the machine. Do you have any questions before we get started?</p>	
Questions	Reflective Notes
Tell me about your background in music education and how you came to part of the school district? <i>(possible follow-up questions)</i> -how long have you worked with the district? -what is your current job title? -how long have you been in this position? -what formal training does the district require to be a specialist in your field?	
In your perspective, why do students want to be part of a music ensemble? How can you tell?	
In your perspective, is there anything special about your schools’ music ensembles that could influence students to participate in music?	
Talk a little about your philosophy of music education? -does this philosophy drive the activities you implement in class on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis?	
How do you choose activities to implement in your classroom?	
Talk a little about the environment of your classrooms. What do you hope your students experience when they are here learning?	

What can you do, as the music educator, to ensure that students feel like they belong in your classroom?	
In your perspective, how are the characteristics of a music learning environment different than what students experience the rest of their school day?	
Do you find that students are uncomfortable in your classroom? If you did, what would you do to address this?	
What do you considered an “engaged” student in your classroom?	

APPENDIX E: SURVEY RESULTS FOR FULL SAMPLE AND INDIVIDUAL SITES

Survey Results for Full Sample and Individual Sites (in percentages)

		Full Sample	Oak View MS	Crawford MS	Sage Canyon MS	John Reid MS	Rose Park MS
Q1: I feel like a real part of this orchestra.	Strongly Agree	36.80	38.60	52.80	39.10	27.50	29.80
	Agree	55.30	47.70	44.40	56.50	60.00	66.00
	Disagree	4.20	6.80	2.80	4.30	5.00	2.10
	Strongly Disagree	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.50	0.00
	Don't Know	3.20	6.80	0.00	0.00	5.00	2.10
Q2: People in this orchestra notice when I'm good at something.	Strongly Agree	15.80	18.20	22.20	21.70	7.50	12.80
	Agree	36.80	22.70	47.20	39.10	35.00	42.60
	Disagree	17.90	29.50	8.30	21.70	10.00	19.10
	Strongly Disagree	1.60	2.30	0.00	0.00	5.00	0.00
	Don't Know	27.90	27.30	22.20	17.40	42.50	25.50
Q3: It is hard for people like me to be accepted in this orchestra.	Strongly Agree	0.50	2.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Agree	4.70	11.40	0.00	13.00	0.00	2.10
	Disagree	43.70	43.20	41.70	34.80	37.50	55.30
	Strongly Disagree	37.90	36.40	47.20	43.50	32.50	34.00
	Don't Know	13.20	6.80	11.10	8.70	30.00	8.50
Q4: Other students in this orchestra take my opinions seriously.	Strongly Agree	8.90	15.90	13.90	8.70	5.00	2.10
	Agree	38.90	40.90	52.80	65.20	27.50	23.40
	Disagree	12.10	15.90	0.00	4.30	15.00	19.10
	Strongly Disagree	2.60	0.00	5.60	0.00	5.00	2.10

	Don't Know	37.40	27.30	27.80	21.70	47.50	53.20
Q5: Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong in this orchestra.	Strongly Agree	3.20	2.30	0.00	0.00	2.50	8.50
	Agree	12.60	22.70	11.10	8.70	10.00	8.50
	Disagree	38.90	38.60	25.00	47.80	47.50	38.30
	Strongly Disagree	38.90	29.50	61.10	39.10	32.50	36.20
	Don't Know	6.30	6.80	2.80	4.30	7.50	8.50
Q6: There is at least one teacher or other adult in this school I can talk to if I have a problem.	Strongly Agree	38.40	38.60	33.30	34.80	40.00	42.60
	Agree	53.20	31.80	41.70	47.80	45.00	48.90
	Disagree	2.60	15.90	11.10	4.30	2.50	2.10
	Strongly Disagree	0.50	0.00	11.10	4.30	2.50	0.00
	Don't Know	1.60	13.60	2.80	8.70	10.00	6.40
Q7: People at this school are friendly to me.	Strongly Agree	42.10	50.00	44.40	39.10	35.00	40.40
	Agree	53.20	43.20	52.80	56.50	60.00	55.30
	Disagree	2.60	2.30	2.80	0.00	2.50	4.30
	Strongly Disagree	0.50	2.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Don't Know	1.60	2.30	0.00	4.30	2.50	0.00
Q8: I am included in lots of rehearsal activities in this orchestra.	Strongly Agree	45.30	45.50	55.60	52.20	30.00	46.80
	Agree	41.60	36.40	47.70	39.10	52.50	38.30
	Disagree	2.60	2.30	0.00	4.30	0.00	6.40
	Strongly Disagree	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.10
	Don't Know	8.90	11.40	2.80	0.00	17.50	6.40
Q9: In this orchestra, I am treated with as much respect as other students.	Strongly Agree	41.10	40.90	50.00	43.50	27.50	44.70

	Agree	46.80	40.90	41.70	52.20	62.50	40.40
	Disagree	4.20	6.80	2.80	4.30	7.50	0.00
	Strongly Disagree	1.60	2.30	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.30
	Don't Know	5.80	6.80	5.60	0.00	2.50	10.60
Q10: I feel very different from most other students in my orchestra.	Strongly Agree	6.30	9.10	2.80	0.00	5.00	10.60
	Agree	13.20	11.40	25.00	8.70	7.50	12.80
	Disagree	46.30	50.00	33.30	60.90	47.50	44.70
	Strongly Disagree	16.30	15.90	16.70	27.70	15.00	14.90
	Don't Know	16.80	11.40	22.20	4.30	25.00	17.00
Q11: I can really be myself in this orchestra.	Strongly Agree	23.70	27.30	33.30	17.40	20.00	19.10
	Agree	52.10	45.50	47.20	60.90	57.50	53.20
	Disagree	11.10	13.60	8.30	13.00	7.50	12.80
	Strongly Disagree	2.10	0.00	2.80	0.00	2.50	4.30
	Don't Know	11.10	13.60	8.30	8.70	12.50	10.60
Q12: My music teacher respects me.	Strongly Agree	45.80	50.00	55.60	30.40	42.50	44.70
	Agree	43.70	27.30	38.90	65.20	50.00	46.80
	Disagree	4.20	9.10	2.80	0.00	2.50	4.30
	Strongly Disagree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00%
	Don't Know	6.30	13.60	2.80	4.30%	5.00	4.30
Q13: People in this orchestra know I do good work.	Strongly Agree	17.40	15.90	25.00	17.40	15.00	14.90
	Agree	38.90	36.40	36.10	60.90	35.00	36.20
	Disagree	7.90	15.90	2.80	8.70	2.50	8.50

	Strongly Disagree	2.60	0.00	2.80	0.00	7.50	2.10
	Don't Know	33.20	31.80	33.30	13.00	40.00	38.30
Q14: I wish I were in a different class than this orchestra.	Strongly Agree	3.70	6.80	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.50
	Agree	4.20	4.50	0.00	4.30	2.50	8.50
	Disagree	29.50	25.00	27.80	26.10	30.00	36.20
	Strongly Disagree	52.10	47.70	69.40	65.20	47.50	40.40
	Don't Know	10.50	15.90	2.80	4.30	20.00	6.40
Q15: I feel proud belonging to this orchestra.	Strongly Agree	46.30	47.70	66.70	69.60	32.50	29.80
	Agree	36.80	38.60	27.80	26.10	45.00	40.40
	Disagree	6.80	6.80	2.80	0.00	7.50	12.80
	Strongly Disagree	1.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.50	4.30
	Don't Know	7.90	4.50	2.80	4.30	12.50	12.80
Q16: Students in this orchestra accept others the way they are.	Strongly Agree	31.60	34.10	44.40	39.10	22.50	23.40
	Agree	47.40	47.70	44.40	34.80	52.50	51.10
	Disagree	5.80	6.80	2.80	4.30	7.50	6.40
	Strongly Disagree	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.10
	Don't Know	14.20	9.10	8.30	21.70	17.50	17.00
Q17: I feel like a part of my school	Strongly Agree	29.50	43.20	36.10	34.80	17.50	19.10
	Agree	55.30	43.20	55.60	52.20	57.50	66.00
	Disagree	2.10	4.50	2.80	0.00	2.50	0.00
	Strongly Disagree	1.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.30
	Don't Know	12.10	9.10	5.60	13.00	22.50	10.60

Q18: I can really be myself at this school.	Strongly Agree	27.90	40.90	30.60	13.00	20.00	27.70
	Agree	52.10	43.20	50.00	60.90	55.00	55.30
	Disagree	6.30	4.50	5.60	8.70	7.50	6.40
	Strongly Disagree	1.10	2.30	0.00	0.00	2.50	0.00
	Don't Know	12.60	9.10	13.90	17.40	15.00	10.60

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