AN INVESTIGATION OF RURAL ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

August 2014

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ABSTRACT

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Two elementary general music teachers serving in rural public schools in Ohio were interviewed to investigate the nature and characteristics of elementary general music in rural school districts and elementary general music teachers' perceptions of their level of preparedness to teach in a rural school district. The research questions that guided this study were: (a) What is the nature of rural elementary general music programs? (b) What challenges and advantages are unique to rural music education? In relation to learning? In relation to teaching? (c) What are teachers’ perceptions about their level of preparation for teaching in a rural elementary general music program? (d) What district wide professional development opportunities are available for rural elementary general music teachers? In what kinds of professional development experiences do these teachers participate? Each semi-structured interview was audiotaped and transcribed. The interview transcripts were then analyzed for codes, categories, and themes. Three themes emerged from the data: (a) Characteristics of These General Music Programs and Teaching Positions; (b) Context: Understanding the Place Where One Teaches; and (c) Community. Because this study investigated the perceptions of two rural elementary general music teachers, expanding the number of contexts and participants may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of these music programs, of teachers’ roles and identity, and could more extensively examine challenges and advantages related to the rural setting. Other studies could include: a comparative study of rural, urban, and/or suburban elementary general music programs to examine the similarities and differences between programs; or an ethnographic case study of elementary general music students, located in rural settings, to investigate their lived experiences as growing musicians.
This thesis is dedicated to Philip and Jin Young Smith

Dear mom and dad, I seldom understood the grown-up lessons you persisted to teach me when I was a child, but I have since realized the importance of your efforts as a woman. My passion for music, education, rural life, and social justice is rooted in the childhood you fashioned for my sisters and me. Thank you for providing a place of wonder, imagination, and magic – a place for us to learn... a place for us to call home.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Completing a thesis is an endeavor that propels you to challenge, question, and justify your own opinions, biases, and perceptions about the ways of the world. It is both a solitary and social journey. I would like to thank those who supported my undertaking of this project.

First and foremost, to Dr. Gruenhagen, my thesis chair: Thank you just seems so insufficient to convey the depth of my gratitude for all that you have done for this project and me — nonetheless, thank you. You’ve inspired me to truly search for and examine my interests and passions, and to simply let go and allow life to reshape who I am so that I may become a better music teacher and human being. I am forever grateful that you asked me: “why not elementary general music?” all those years ago on Oyaron Hill. To Dr. Kantorski, my thesis committee: Thank you for your assistance in, and support of, this project. To Julianna & Mackenzie, the participants: This research study would not have been possible without your participation, openness in sharing your stories with me, and trust in my writing of your programs. Your stories have changed my life – thank you!

To Philip, Jin Young, Katherine, Ashley & Jaclyn Smith, my family: I simply would not be me without you. Thank you for your unconditional support and encouragement, and for the myriad of random late night phone calls and text messages to make sure I was still awake and hunkering down with the writing. To all my friends near and far: Thank you for checking in and cheering me on! I am so grateful for every prayer, Facebook message, cup of coffee, and piece of chocolate.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

All students in publicly funded schools have a right to receive a balanced education regardless of where that school is located (Shuler, 2012, p. 7). Shuler (2012) suggested that a balanced education is made up of core subjects that are necessary for all students to learn (p. 9-10). According to educational organizations such as the College Board, as well as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the No Child Left Behind Act, the core subjects include: English, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, and the arts (Gerrity, 2009; Shuler, 2012). While many schools in America provide music education, there are some students who may not receive a complete music education (Bates, 2012; Gerrity, 2009; Shuler, 2012). Data indicate these students are typically poor, minority students (Shuler, 2012, p. 7).

Bates (2012) suggested that music teachers might be able to help all students receive a quality music education by providing opportunities that encourage everyone’s participation and by engaging all students’ interests within the music classroom (p. 35). The large performance ensemble is a standard in North American music education (Bates, 2011a, p. 90), but not all students desire to participate in these types of ensembles and they may not be able to because of financial or other reasons. Bates (2011b) contended that although these sorts of school music experiences can be positive they might not necessarily enable lifelong music making (Bates, 2011a, 2011b). School music students whose only experience is the large performance ensemble may not be aware of the smaller ensemble performance opportunities in the community, such as folk ensembles, country bands, rock bands, garage bands, or church choir. Bates (2011b) suggested that music making does exist in the rural places in the United States (p. 117). By aligning school music opportunities to more closely reflect the values and attitudes characteristic
of smaller ensembles, students may be more apt to find or create other music making opportunities, in addition to the large performance ensemble, outside of school.

According to researchers in education (Budge, 2006; Nitta, Holley, & Wrobel, 2009) and music education (Bates, 2011a, 2012; Burkett, 2011; Hunt, 2009; Isbell, 2005; Sindberg, & Lipscomb, 2005; Wilcox, 2005), the rural setting offers unique advantages and challenges distinct to its location. These challenges may include low population, professional isolation, and geographical isolation, whereas advantages might include school and community interdependence, and a sense of belonging to the town and school. Music educators specifically may experience challenges such as “active community involvement, maintaining privacy, district and administrative support,” (Hunt, 2009, p. 39-40) or “the expectation to build the ideal band, orchestra, or choir program” (Bates, 2011a, p. 92). Advantages may be “sustained contact with students” from “elementary through the high school levels” (Hunt, 2009, p. 39), flexibility to shape programs to meet the needs of the students, or “close long-term relationships with students, parents, and community members” (Bates, 2011a, p. 92).

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have discovered that context influences teaching and learning, that rural music education possesses its own unique qualities, and that professional development designed specifically for a local context can indeed support teacher learning and growth (Bates, 2011a, 2012; Burkett, 2011; Gruenhagen, 2008, 2009, 2012; Hunt, 2009). Although some researchers have investigated music education programs in rural schools, these studies tend to be focused on instrumental music (Bates, 2011b, 2012; Hunt, 2009; Isbell, 2005; Wilcox, 2005). Little research has been conducted to investigate the nature of elementary general music programs in rural schools.
Need for the Study

Schools are continually changing and little is known about the nature of elementary general music programs in rural schools. Investigating the characteristics of rural elementary general music programs may increase awareness of the significance of this setting's diversity, which may better equip music educators to meet the needs of today's students. Developing this understanding may provide insight on extending beyond simply offering the availability of elementary general music to providing all students with equal access to a quality music education.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature and characteristics of elementary general music in rural school districts and elementary general music teachers' perceptions of their level of preparedness to teach in a rural school district. The research questions were: (a) What is the nature of rural elementary general music programs? (b) What challenges and advantages are unique to rural music education? In relation to learning? In relation to teaching? (c) What are teachers’ perceptions about their level of preparation for teaching in a rural elementary general music program? (d) What district wide professional development opportunities are available for rural elementary general music teachers? In what kinds of professional development experiences do these teachers participate?

Definition of Terms

The National Center for Education Statistics and the Census Bureau designate areas into one of four main categories: city, suburban, town, or rural. Cities, suburbs, and towns may be considered to be urban depending on the population and proximity to a principal city, urbanized area, or urban cluster. Urbanized areas are places that have a population of 50,000 people or
more while urban clusters are places that have a population between 25,000 and 50,000. *Rural* is defined as “areas that do not lie inside an urbanized area or urban cluster” (Provasnik, KewalRamani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007, p. 1-3). For the purpose of this study, the term *rural* is synonymous with this definition.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The “Magna Charta of Music Education” refers to the event, in 1838, when the Boston School Committee agreed to hire a vocal music teacher for the Boston public schools (Mark, 2008, p. 48). Mark (2008) suggested that while music was taught in schools prior to 1838, this action signified that “music was approved for the first time in the United States as a subject of the public school curriculum, equal to other subjects, and supported with school funds” (p. 48). During the ensuing years, music education expanded to schools in other communities, including large cities and small towns.

Societal changes and technological advancements impacted a number of schools, including music programs, and professionals wondered about the future of school music education. In 1967, the MENC Tanglewood Symposium assembled selected leaders and distinguished scholars to examine the purpose, role, and state of American music education. A written statement, titled the “Tanglewood Declaration,” reflected the consensus that music ought to be returned to the core of the school curriculum with adequate time allotted for instruction (Mark, 2008, p. 110-111). The MENC Goals and Objectives Project (1969) continued this work by developing professional standards that would enable all students, of all ages, in all schools to receive a comprehensive music education (Mark, 2008, p. 112-113).

In 1999, music education leaders and scholars reconvened, via Vision 2020: The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education, to re-examine the state of music education in light of the evolution of both the American society and music education (Mark, 2008, p. 171). Mark (2008) asserted that the “Housewright Declaration” summarized the professional goals that were created onsite, which included: “all persons, regardless of age,
cultural heritage, ability, venue, or financial circumstance deserve to participate fully in the best music experiences possible” (p. 171).

**Music Education in Context: Urban and Rural**

Researchers (Bates, 2011a; Burkett, 2011; Gruenhagen, 2008; Hunt, 2009) have suggested that music teachers need time and opportunity to learn how to design and implement music instruction that will be appropriate and meaningful for the children and context in which they teach. To discover perceptions about the impact of context on music education, Hunt (2009) interviewed nine music teachers, administrators, and parents from four rural and urban school settings. Her study included the following interview questions: “(a) What is the music teacher’s role in your district? (b) What is the music teacher’s role in your community? (c) What can you tell me about your district’s music program? (d) What are both positive/negative issues I need to understand? (e) How do you deal with those issues?” (p. 37-38)

Hunt discovered that there were common themes found in both of the rural and urban contexts: “defining the music teacher’s role (e.g. community interaction and awareness), understanding advantages and challenges (e.g. rural advantages and challenges and urban advantages and challenges), preparing music teachers (e.g. music skills, general teaching skills, organizational skills, and advocacy skills), and recruiting and retaining music teachers” (p. 38-41). The participants revealed that they were aware of the impact of the rural or urban context on the music program. All participants identified that the following characteristics were similar to both the rural and urban context: “(a) importance of teachers’ musical, general education, advocacy, and organizational skills; (b) difficulty recruiting new teachers; (c) demanding teachers’ schedules; and (d) importance of understanding cultural diversity” (p. 42). Responses from urban school participants indicated that “(a) emphasis on teacher cultural diversity training;
(b) high levels of administrative support due to many teachers and diverse cultural needs; (c) diversified curriculum; and (d) abundant community resources such as concerts, community experts, and private lessons” were traits unique to the urban context (p. 42). Characteristics identified by the rural school participants were: “(a) high community involvement; (b) fishbowl effect, lack of privacy, community scrutiny; (c) sustained student contact from K-12 is possible and fulfilling; (d) music teachers travel to several schools and sometimes lack a home base; (e) community support, caring and involved parents, and interested citizenry” (p. 42). Hunt suggested that developing an awareness of context is dependent on each music educator, and “with increased understanding, the potential for greater success and retention of committed and caring music teachers also increases” (p. 46).

Rural Music Education

Music teachers in rural locations are often required to teach multiple or comprehensive music classes, rather than only band, or choir, or orchestra (Isbell, 2005, p. 30). Isbell (2005) contended that there are challenges unique to teaching in a rural school, such as insufficient resources, geographic isolation from other music teachers, low enrollment in instrumental and choral groups, and nonexistent or inadequate facilities. However, music education programs in rural schools vary because of the location and “effective rural music teachers find ways to make small-town life work in their favor” (p. 30). For example, to overcome low enrollment of rural instrumental music programs, multiple grade levels may be combined to create one larger ensemble, small ensembles (i.e., chamber groups, drum ensembles, brass quintets, barbershop groups, etc.) may be created to provide more music-making opportunities, or the music teacher may choose to rewrite the music to fit the school ensemble (p. 30-32).
Wilcox’s (2005) interview with a rural music educator revealed that most of the students in this setting participated in all the activities. These activities include: “speech, drama, Future Farmers of America, Future Business Leaders of America, athletics, and music” (p. 2). The music teacher explained that this required him to be available and willing to help the students when they are able to come for music instruction. Despite the school’s low population, the music program is very large. Thirty-eight of the 45 high school kids participate in band and 26 are in chorus. Wilcox (2005) suggested part of the reason for this success may be the teacher’s “relationship with his students and his appreciation of their ideas” (p. 2).

Support from school administrators, staff, and members of the community are integral to the sustainment of these rural music education programs (Isbell, 2005; Wilcox, 2005). Developing an understanding of the nature of the rural setting may better inform music educators to meet the needs of the students in that place more fully (Hunt, 2009, p. 46).

Professional Development for Rural Settings

Bates (2011a) contended that the rural school is diverse and that prospective music teachers need to be prepared to teach in this setting by overcoming misconceptions and biases about rural students and schools, by learning to teach in diverse settings, by becoming critical thinkers, and by being inspired and excited to teach regardless of place (p. 94-97). Bennett (2008) discovered that the secondary education pre-service teachers enrolled in her course were unaware of unique aspects of cultural diversity that were distinct to the local neighborhoods and of how this impacted the local public schools. To help these pre-service teachers gain a better understanding of the impact of social class in the local schools, Bennett (2008) invited them to tour several neighborhoods and to write a reflective paper based on the following topics: their personal background and childhood, a demographic description of the schools, how the tour
impacted their own teaching philosophies, and how this tour may impact their own classrooms in the future. After completing the paper, the students discussed their experiences in small and large group discussions. Bennett noticed that there was a shift in the students’ attitudes during the class discussions, and decided to analyze reflective papers (N=60) from six different semesters. To triangulate the data, the researcher developed two small focus-group discussions and analyzed students’ posters from the large group discussion. Bennett suggested that pre-service teachers need experiences that expand their awareness of cultural diversity, that challenge their understanding of how cultural diversity impacts school life, that cultivate attitudes of empathy and care, and that provide opportunities to become culturally responsive in their teaching (p. 252-254).

Professional development opportunities may enable in-service teachers to receive similar support and education that may equip them to better meet the needs of their students. Sindberg and Lipscomb (2005) conducted a study to investigate issues of professional isolation among public school music teachers. To determine the extent to which public school music teachers felt professional isolation, and to discover its causes, 100 Illinois public school music teachers were randomly selected to respond to a series of statements (p. 43-44).

A pilot study was conducted to determine the appropriateness and reliability of the survey items. A 5-point Likert scale and open-ended comments were used to collect responses. Out of the 100 surveys mailed to the randomly selected participants throughout Illinois, 36 responses were received. Participant responses were classified into the following categories: I believe that professional isolation exists in my building, I feel isolated from other teachers in my building, I feel isolated from other music teachers, I believe professional isolation is related to the subject I teach, scheduling has an impact on my level of professional isolation, I believe lack of
Results indicated that there was a correlation between the years of teaching experience and the specific causes for feelings of professional isolation. In relation to building isolation and subject matter, teachers with one to 10 years of experience indicated feeling a higher level of isolation than teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience (p. 48-51). Sindberg and Lipscomb (2005) suggested that future studies might include focusing specifically on the public school music teacher, revising the survey, investigating specific causes, or using different age groups (p. 54-55). Interaction with other professionals in the field may positively impact teaching, but some music teachers may not have any opportunities available.

Gruenhagen (2008, 2009, 2012) contended that in-service teachers need support that is designed, and situated, in local contexts to continue learning new ways to meet their students’ needs. To investigate the nature of collaborative conversations of early childhood music teachers, six early childhood music teachers met monthly for 11 months (Gruenhagen, 2008). Gruenhagen (2012) examined the perceptions and experiences of Katie, a first-year early childhood music teacher, to expand current knowledge about novice music teacher learning and teacher learning in practice. Katie’s insight was gathered via focus group meetings, a midpoint and endpoint interview, and artifacts (p. 32-33). Findings revealed the following themes: structures and frameworks (e.g., “the processes in which Katie engaged in order to learn about children’s musical learning and the tools she discovered for use in her planning and instruction”), building community, and collaboration (p. 34). Gruenhagen suggested music teachers need support while developing their own teaching practice and discovering ways to meet their students’ learning needs.
To investigate the effects of music-specific professional development activities on rural instrumental music teachers, Burkett (2011) designed a local study that included two Orff Schulwerk workshops, two curriculum seminars, two master classes on instrumental performance techniques, two workshops on jazz and string pedagogy, and one-on-one classroom visits. These professional development opportunities were offered to 56 elementary general, choral, and instrumental music teachers as part of a community symphony orchestra’s education outreach project for two school years (p. 54). Music teachers were selected to participate based on their school’s remote, isolated location.

Twenty-six participants attended all of the professional development activities and three participants volunteered to be interviewed three times. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, videotapes of one-on-one master teacher and conducting sessions, and post session feedback from the master teacher, conductor, and music teachers. At the end of each workshop, participants filled out a questionnaire that was designed “to identify the types of professional development activities that are meaningful to teachers” (p. 58). Interviews were conducted to gather the participants’ perceptions of the professional development activities offered in this study and of the opportunities provided in the past by their school district.

Burkett discovered two themes in her analysis of the interviews: “the practicality of the material presented and the need for more professional development activities of a similar nature” (p. 59). Data indicated that 96% of the participants “were satisfied with the professional development activities, and that these would be applicable to future teaching positions” (p. 61). Burkett suggested “professional development activities that were created and designed to address topics directly related to musical and pedagogical topics of the rehearsal were preferred over the more typical district offerings of nonmusic-specific in-service activities” (p. 61). However, the
relevance and meaning of professional development activities may be enhanced when such
events transpire in the local context. She also suggested that:

When music teachers are placed in isolated areas removed from the influence of former
music professors, state arts agencies, and universities, it is perhaps vitally important for
local arts institutions, such as community orchestras, to offer teachers an opportunity to
experience firsthand the music they’ve studied, provide a means of professional support,
and help teachers relate the art form in an effective manner to students in the classroom
(p. 63).
CHAPTER III: METHOD

Qualitative research is a type of inquiry that enables the researcher to investigate phenomena that occur in natural settings. Studies may take the form of ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, or case study. There are different types of case studies with particular qualities and procedures. These include: historical organizational case studies, observational case studies, life histories, and documents. Multiple sources of data are collected and examined in order to formulate a rich and descriptive narration of the contexts and people being studied. These data sources may “include interview transcripts, fieldnotes, photographs, videotapes, personal documents, memos, and other official records” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). The case study design “is a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 59).

This research was a multiple case study. Multiple case studies examine “two or more subjects, settings, or depositories of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 69). For this study, I purposefully selected participants based on their current position as an elementary general music teacher and the school’s rural location.

Participants and Setting

Before contacting the participants, I obtained an approval letter from each school stating that I had permission to conduct this research study in their school. Participants were contacted through a written recruitment letter sent by email. I obtained email addresses from the school district websites, which were accessible to the general public. The letter informed participants about the study, provided information on why the study was being conducted, explained the activities in which they would participate, explained that participation was voluntary, and provided contact information in case they had questions. Participants were assured that whether
they chose to participate or to not participate, this choice would not have an impact on their current teaching position or relationship to Bowling Green State University. The opportunity to meet in person to discuss the project was offered to each participant.

I gave the written consent form to those who agreed to participate and they were given the opportunity to read the form and ask any remaining questions they may have had about the nature of the study and about their participation. This form explained the study and described activities in which the participants took part. The form also described the voluntary nature of the study, the rights of the participants, and invited them to contact me, or my advisor, with any questions they may have. Once participants had time to read the information, had all questions answered, and agreed to participate in the study, I asked them to sign the written consent form.

The participants consisted of two elementary general music teachers serving in rural public schools in Ohio (see Table 1). Lighten Dale Elementary is located 11 miles from the nearest city. In 2011, multiple school buildings that were located in separate villages joined together to form one consolidated school district. At the time of this study, the school building served all grade levels from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, as well as the district office. The elementary general music program includes pre-kindergarten through fourth grade and a “fusion” class that is a combination of fine arts and music. The preschool music class meets for 30 minutes each morning and afternoon, while kindergarten through fourth grade music classes meet for 30 minutes once a week. All elementary school students attend the fusion class once every four weeks.

Opencast Elementary is located seven miles from the nearest city. In 2012, multiple school buildings that were located in separate villages joined together to form one consolidated school district. At the time of this study, the school building served pre-kindergarten through
fifth grade. The elementary general music program consists of kindergarten through fifth grade, however, the elementary general music teacher who participated in this study taught kindergarten and second through fifth grade, while a second music teacher taught first grade. Each music class meets for 30 minutes once a week.

Table 1

School District Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lighten Dale</th>
<th>Opencast</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Located 11 miles from nearest city</td>
<td>• Located 7 miles from nearest city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PreK-12 school building</td>
<td>• PreK-5 school building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elementary General Music</td>
<td>• Elementary General Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o PreK-4</td>
<td>o K-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Fusion (fine arts + music)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data Sources and Collection

I conducted one individual semi-structured interview with each participant. In qualitative research, “the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 103). The questions addressed the following areas of information: demographics, nature of elementary general music, advantages and challenges of rural music education, students’ access to elementary general music, preparation to teach elementary general music in rural schools, and access to professional development. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by me. I also kept a detailed research journal and wrote memos throughout the course of the study. Participants were asked to engage in member checking by reviewing or commenting on the written report to ensure validity of my analysis and the study. The interviews, transcripts, fieldnotes, researcher journal, and memos served as data sources for the study.
All participant responses remained confidential and all names were changed. Only my project advisor and I had access to the data sources. All audiotapes were directly downloaded from the digital recording device onto my project advisor's password-protected Bowling Green State University office computer and were destroyed at the end of the study. To protect the identity of participants, each file was given a codename. All transcripts of these tapes were stored in password-protected files on my project advisor's computer and were accessible only to my advisor and me.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was an ongoing process that began with the original gathering of data and continued through each subsequent re-examination of the data. Interpretations of the data were formulated and re-formulated to develop ideas about my findings. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings” (p. 159). I coded the interview transcripts using suggestions by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). This included developing a coding system by uncovering patterns and topics, and creating words or phrases to represent those patterns and topics (see Table 2). Through subsequent analyses of the data and codes, categories were developed. The categories are: Pedagogy, Philosophy, Context, Support, Classroom Management, and The Student. Table 3 illustrates the definition of each category. The categories were then analyzed for emerging patterns and themes.
Table 2

*Codes Generated During Initial Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Musical Development</td>
<td>CMD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Music</td>
<td>CM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>CXT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Teach</td>
<td>H2T</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Environment</td>
<td>LEVT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Learning Experiences</td>
<td>MLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Elementary General Music</td>
<td>NEGM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion</td>
<td>PSN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planned Instruction</td>
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<td>Professional Development</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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<td>Resources</td>
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<td>Student Behavior</td>
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<td>Student Characteristics</td>
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<td>Student Needs</td>
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<td>Support</td>
<td>SPT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Knowledge</td>
<td>TK</td>
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<td>Teacher Opinions</td>
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<td>Teacher Skills</td>
<td>TSK</td>
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<td>Teacher Tasks</td>
<td>TTKS</td>
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<td>Teaching Experiences</td>
<td>TEXP</td>
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<td>Teaching Method</td>
<td>TM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>TRN</td>
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<tr>
<td>What to Teach</td>
<td>W2T</td>
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Table 3

*Categories Generated During Subsequent Data Analyses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>What, when, and how to teach elementary general music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Teacher’s beliefs and opinions about teaching and learning music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>The setting of the elementary general music program: school, district, community, state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Support for the elementary general music program and teacher by community, administration, colleagues, and other music education professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>Program expectations and routines, and teacher duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Student</td>
<td>Teacher’s perceptions of the role, and influence of, the elementary general music student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Findings**

Three broad themes emerged from further analysis of the categories: (1) *Context: Understanding the Place Where One Teaches*; (2) *The Rural Elementary General Music Teacher’s Role and Identity*; and (3) *The Nature of Rural Elementary General Music*. The remainder of this document is constructed upon these themes. Chapter IV defines each theme and illustrates the participants’ perceptions. Chapter V provides implications for music education and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Data analysis revealed three emergent themes: (1) Characteristics of These General Music Programs and Teaching Positions, (2) Context: Understanding the Place Where One Teaches, and (3) Community. Characteristics of These General Music Programs and Teaching Positions illustrates aspects of these teachers’ typical workday, their duties, and their curriculum; Context: Understanding the Place Where One Teaches highlights unique characteristics of these rural settings; and Community conveys the significance of support and relationships for these elementary general music programs.

Characteristics of These General Music Programs and Teaching Positions

At the time of the interview, Julianna was in her 26th year of teaching at Lighten Dale School District. She taught kindergarten through fourth grade general music, a preschool music class in the morning and afternoon, and a class called “fusion” that met once every four weeks for each grade level. Julianna explained that the fusion class was a combination of fine arts and music, but this year the class incorporated more movement and dance because the elementary school did not have an art room anymore. I do not know how the elimination of the art room and the addition of the fusion class are really connected, because Julianna did not elaborate on the topic further. However, this consolidation of the art and music classes seemed to reduce time in Julianna’s schedule for planning and teaching the general music classes. When I asked Julianna to describe what a typical workday was like for her, she said:

Well, right now my schedule is a little crazy. My Wednesdays and Thursdays I have…10 classes a day…Tuesday through Friday it’s basically 10 classes a day with…one planning period – and they’re half-hours…and then…two Mondays out of the month I have my fusion and then the other two Mondays is total prep time for whatever I need…But
also…on that day, I meet with my preschoolers, and I meet with Mr. Windham [the principal]…But, um, my schedule is pretty full. I’m back-to-back solid from 8:20 ‘til about 2:15.

Mackenzie had been teaching elementary general music for 31 years at Opencast Elementary – three of those years were spent at another school district in a rural community. At the time of the interview, she taught general music for kindergarten and second through fifth grade. A second music teacher taught first grade general music in addition to first grade art, kindergarten gym classes, and assisted with the high school freshman and junior choirs. When I asked Mackenzie to describe her typical workday, she said:

Well, I get here around…quarter after eight. And, I usually leave by 4:00…4:15. So you know – eight hours. My typical day, well, this year is very nice because I have a planning period every day except one. And that’s my Wednesday…And, my typical day is great because the kids all come to me so I can stay in this room. I’m not going, like sometimes in years past, I’ve had to go to other classrooms too…the kids come in – they have a 30-minute…music class with three minutes in between…The three minutes are obsolete, because I can never keep track. We just keep going until the teacher comes in the door and says I need my kids back…

There were no additional enrichment music programs, such as chorus or musicals, offered at Opencast Elementary, because Mackenzie believed in providing the same opportunities to all her students. By focusing solely on her elementary general music program, she was able to encourage all of her students to be involved in all of the school music activities.

I haven’t had any…honors programs or anything. I believe in all the kids having the same opportunity. I’m not gonna pick out this person and this person…to be elite…I
think it’s better that all the kids participate. We have an evening program once a year for each grade level…and we perform the songs we’ve been working on in music class. So, it’s kind of like a share type of thing…Out of a hundred and four kids…I had 99 show up for the evening program. So, that says a lot.

Both of these participants were veteran elementary general music teachers – they each had been teaching for more than 20 years in their current position, and both seemed confident while responding to my questions about their program. However, when I asked each teacher how well prepared she was to teach elementary general music in a rural school district at the beginning of her career, I received contradictory responses. Mackenzie replied that she felt prepared because of the general music textbooks she had available in her classroom. She explained that these had provided her with suggestions for what music to teach and how to teach those lessons. Julianna said that it was not until after she completed the first level of Orff Schulwerk training that she finally felt prepared to teach music to young children.

Not prepared at all! I was trained secondary choral…the first year I got out…[I interviewed [for] many secondary choral [positions] – Oh great, looks good, however you have no experience, see ya later. So, I had a year of subbing and then I did my interviewing again. Great, looks good, no – [you’ve got] no experience; try getting into general music. And, my last call was a part-time in general music here at Lighten Dale, and the guy says…do you have any skills in teaching elementary music? I says: Well I did that in my student teaching. I’m basically secondary choral – I sing a lot. He says: You willing to try? I said: I’m willing to try. He hired me. So…and I was lucky that in this district there was someone who had taken level one, and she was a new teacher as well at the central building. But, she had had level one at her college…I went over to
observe her and [saw] how easy her’s was going together, and I’m thinking how can she be doing this and how am I not doing this? And she told me it was taking Orff Schulwerk which really helped prepare her. So, I then invested a year, and then boy did my world change! So, no, I was not prepared – my first year I was not prepared. I was teaching out of textbooks the best I could…I went in blindsided…You know, you always have your ideas – but…it was a shocker.

Later in the interview, Mackenzie said that she continued to use the general music textbooks to help with planning her curriculum and lesson plans, but that she now supplements most of those suggestions with materials and teaching strategies that she collected from her two levels of Orff Schulwerk training. These resources have helped Mackenzie to extend her lessons in a way that is geared more toward her students and their learning needs. When asked to describe her students, Mackenzie’s response was: “Country kids? Is that what you mean? How do I describe them? They’re very well mannered, they’re respectful, they enjoy coming to school. They’re middle class, and well we have some very low-class, um, low-income families too. Um…I would say they’re average.” Julianna said that the population at her school included students of various races, ethnicities, disabilities, and socio-economic status. She seemed very aware that more than half the students at Lighten Dale Elementary participated in the district’s free and reduced meal program.

Being located in a rural setting did not seem to impact these teachers’ perceptions of teaching elementary general music, because their focus was on getting to know their students and figuring out what their students needed in order to progress as musicians. Julianna shared with me that she did not think there was necessarily a rural or urban general music program, or that
the children necessarily identified themselves as rural or urban. Instead, she believed that the music curriculum should be created and adapted to the children:

…I think you need to know where your students are. I think you need to know what they can handle, what they can’t handle. I think…you need to know when to start, when to stop, when to go, and when you don’t go…I don’t think there’s a definition of how far you can go – I think you have to know your students, and that was something I learned from day one. I really try to get to know my students when they’re kindergartners, and I try to know their names…I think that it lets the kids know that I really care. I think it lets the kids know that it’s secure and safe in here…that they’re free to make mistakes, because we all make mistakes…but if you don’t know your students, you can’t teach a quality program.

For both of these teachers, teaching kindergarteners to keep a steady beat and to find their singing voice was the starting place for building a foundation in music. However, by examining what their own students were able to do and what they needed to know, they each developed a program that was unique to their own setting. Mackenzie did not elaborate further on what she taught beyond the kindergarten level except that she enjoyed seeing her students’ skills develop year after year. Julianna identified particular music skills and concepts that she taught at each grade level (see Table 4), but explained that her students actually experienced all the elements of music from kindergarten through fourth grade: “you come back and you’ll re-teach something…you’re building blocks as you…teach, so that’s what I do.”
### Julianna’s Outline of Music Skills and Concepts by Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Music Skills and Concepts</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>• Steady beat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How to sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• To be with a community/ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
<td>• Rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How melody goes high, low, stays the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; &amp; 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
<td>• Identifying pitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reading music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
<td>• Performing with dynamics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Julianna also shared that she introduced concepts to her students in “small increments at a time as they master each level.” Due to this careful attention to what and how she was teaching, Julianna realized that she needed to learn to trust her students more. Even though she had her own goals for her students, she discovered that they were actually progressing more quickly.

…Sometimes, I want to stay in my comfort zone because we’re successful. But…we’re delving into minor and all that now, so…that’s what I’ve learned over these last 27 years…gotta get out of your safety zone…I’ve stretched – we’ve experienced mainly common meter, you know duple meter. Third grade really stretched into triple meter this year…but I prep triple meter in first grade by moving up and down…having them find the strong beat and weak beat after they’re secure in a steady beat…Second grade we did it with body percussion, and singing, and playing it on instruments. So it builds…we sang in minor key, we’ve gone to la-pentatonic a little bit more now in lower grades. Um, I’m singing canons and partner songs earlier…and rounds, earlier than I was…each class is different, each class is special, and you have to gear it…there’s always a tangent that goes either left or right and there’s never a straight – this is solid, successful, boom.
So, it depends on the children, it depends on the day; it depends on what kind of day they had…Even though the curriculum looks perfect on paper it doesn’t necessarily flow that way in the classroom.

In addition to being flexible to change lesson plans according to the students’ needs, state-driven assessments have led Julianna to change her curriculum. For example, in the past, she taught her students folk dances and then invited their parents to come in to learn the same dances. Then, Julianna would arrange an evening of folk dancing that took place at a nearby barn where local folk bands performed, and community members were invited to attend the event along with her students and their parents. However, in order to provide sufficient time for students to complete the requirements of the state-driven assessments, units such as the folk dancing were eliminated from the elementary general music curriculum.

Well, we’re in the process of writing SLO’s [Student Learning Outcomes], assessing kids…I just assessed them about a month and a half ago, and now we’re into learning all the new stuff…I’ll do a mid-test a mid-assessment in January, and then I’ll do a final assessment in March …a lot of my assesses were personal one-on-one watching. Now it’s they have to be videotaped, recorded, data-driven…it’s kind of taken more time, so I don’t have as much flexibility in my schedule to do things where I invite the parents in…

Due to the demands of state-driven requirements, such as the SLO’s and Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments, aspects such as scheduling, the availability of facilities, and financial support have been impacted. These teachers indicated that developing an understanding of the place where one teaches by discovering the interests of the community, the school district, and the elementary school, is critical to sustaining the elementary general music program.
Context: Understanding the Place Where One Teaches

Multiple levels of context were discovered within the participants’ responses. Researchers have (Bates, 2010, 2012; Gruenhagen, 2012; Hunt, 2009) indicated that developing an understanding of the context in which one teaches is integral to music teachers knowing how to fulfill the needs of the students in that place more fully. Context can extend beyond “rural” or “urban.” In my study, context turned out to be a multi-level phenomenon that includes grade-level music classes (e.g., kindergarten may include four separate music classes because there are four homerooms or general classrooms), grade-level music programs (i.e., kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade, etc.), building-level music programs (i.e., elementary chorus, beginning band, etc.), the school building (e.g., elementary, middle school, junior high, high school, or K-12 building) the district-wide music program (i.e. elementary and secondary general music, band, chorus, orchestra, preschool music programs, or additional select/honors ensembles, musical drama club, guitar class, theory class, music technology, etc.), the town in which the school is located, and the state. Any given student may simultaneously participate in any level of contexts, or multiple levels of context, and the characteristics associated with one particular context may influence the others. The remainder of this section is based on the consolidation of Mackenzie’s and Julianna’s school districts and the impact of consolidation on the elementary general music program.

School Consolidation. School consolidation was revealed as a unique characteristic of both of these rural districts. In 2011, Opencast School District completed their school consolidation project. Mackenzie stated that prior to the consolidation, there were three different elementary schools in three different villages. At that time, she taught both elementary general music and art for one of the elementary schools. However, “…due to cost cuts and the fact that
Lighten Dale completed their school consolidation project in 2012. Julianna provided a brief school history and summary of the consolidation process:

Lighten Dale is a district that was made up in 1951 of small districts. They all consolidated about 52 years ago to become Lighten Dale Local Schools. The elementary schools were in west, central, and east. As we got closer to building this new building, they tore down…a junior high; moved them to east…moved some of them to central to me…So, they became a K-5 building. Six, seven, eight, and the high school, was here…And, then we all merged together as a P through 12 building…Our buildings were in such deterioration that…the superintendent got a hold of a special group in Ohio, and…it was a special funding for special needs or for special group[s], because our building was in such a deterioration. So, it [took] a committee of community members, administrators, parents, and superintendent to form a committee to show that this building was needed. And they were trying really hard to get the community on board. And half of that money, some of the money, came from the state, but most of that money was generated from the community to buy, to build, this new building.

Julianna shared that the consolidation created new challenges that did not exist when they were split into different buildings. For example, everyday routines were impacted, because it took time to get used to the layout of the new building and figuring out colleagues’ schedules.

Well, we have our new building and getting used to a new building takes time. I didn’t realize how much time it would take – just getting used to the lay of the land…getting used to the schedules. When we were used to being in five buildings, you had your own cafeteria schedule. You didn’t have to worry about people getting into it. This year,
being in this building, you have to worry about who’s going to be in that auditeria - what
time, when you get in, when you get out…we have to schedule because it’s not always
going to be free.

Despite this new challenge, Julianna emphasized that the auditeria (one room that serves as both
auditorium and cafeteria) was a valuable asset to the school that she appreciated. Prior to the
school consolidation, an auditorium did not exist, and neither did the sound system that was
included along with the auditeria. Mackenzie shared that Opencast Elementary did not have an
auditorium, but the high school’s auditorium was used for all music performances. Since the
buildings were located in a centralized campus, she could walk across the driveway to use that
space.

Well, with the high school right next door, sometimes I can ask them for … like, using
use of the facilities. Or, do you have the microphone? Or, do you have the conga drum?
Or, can we borrow…, or, can you come over and perform for us? Or, can we come over
to stage? So I have that resource right across the driveway. So, we were able to go over
and use the auditorium for our night performance. So, it’s nice to have a centralized
campus.

Being closer to the other music teachers in the school district seemed to enhance the spirit of
community. Both Mackenzie and Julianna said that communication with their colleagues was
noticeably improved when they moved into their new buildings.

These teachers indicated that they realized the value of having reserved spaces that were
large enough for students to sing, play instruments, and dance. Mackenzie said she felt like she
was “living the dream now.” The elementary general music classroom in both of these schools
contained modern technology (e.g. SMART Board, computer, stereo systems), cabinet storage, a
sink area, a class set of stools/chairs, an Orff instrumentarium, a digital keyboard, and carpeted flooring. However, Julianna explained that even though she was teaching in a new facility and was given new technology, the music equipment she used regularly for teaching was not new:

One of the challenges is being from a low-income school…is not being able to get the equipment that’s needed. Even though we have a healthy PTO [Parent Teacher Organization], financially, when you get a new building you don’t get new equipment…the state doesn’t see it as equipment, they see it as an add-on. So, I came to a new building with a new piano, which I got, and new stands…but, I could have used new barred instruments. My barred instruments are over 30 years old…So, I’ve written a grant before, and I’m going to try to write another grant through AOSA to see if I can get a new instrumentarium because they’re starting to fall apart like crazy. But you know…that’s one of the downfalls…there’s not the resource – we don’t have the business resource in our rural area; ours is basically financially supported by our farmers, and our community. And, the reason we got this building is because of the community.

Financial revenue for the school consolidation of each district was supplied from mostly community members. It was imperative that the community agreed that newer buildings were needed, and that they would generate the rest of the money, because the state provided less than half the funds, and the community lacked adequate business resources to support the project.

**Community**

In addition to financially supporting the school consolidation, community support was identified as an integral characteristic of teaching elementary general music in these settings. Julianna explained that the PTO helped fund a few activities of the elementary general music program that have made positive influences in the lives of students:
… they financially support endeavors like the Toledo Symphony… they pay for our field trip. They’re going to pay for our brass quintet that’s coming in March. They just do a lot of neat things so that children in this area who wouldn’t get to see a symphony or who wouldn’t get to hear a brass quintet are able to.

When I asked Mackenzie about what the advantages were for working in a rural school district, she said community support, and explained: “Well, we were without a supplemental contract for evening programs for three years. And finally, our parents had had enough of it and said we want our evening programs back…the kids want the evening programs back.” This high-level commitment of community support was a characteristic of both of these settings. Julianna believed that her school was lucky to have what they did have: “…I’d say we’re probably one of the gold…one of the diamonds in the rough of having everything we still have because we’re rural.” I asked Julianna to elaborate on what she meant by “because we’re rural,” and she said: …the community supports the music education…they expect it. I think the administration is very supportive of the arts so they will continue. I think it’s been a tradition…They could have easily cut a position out of music last year when our high school person retired. But, they chose to hire somebody new. ‘Cause we are a smaller school district, they could have made us a K through 12. They could have made me K-12 vocal, and K-12 instrumental, and then made us split in between two. But, they chose to keep that third person in. We were three and half people – we did get downsized about seven years ago, and we really miss that half-time person. But, the way we’ve got it now…I think we’re balanced, but I don’t think we could cut down any more. And I think they realize that. There’s too many students that love music that it would have sacrificed. So, I think in a rural sense – I think community will pull it through and will expect it.
In order to acknowledge the support she receives for the elementary general music program, Julianna organizes evening programs for each grade level. Community members may attend these programs to hear the children perform, and she has also publicly honored veterans and grandparents through these events as well. In the past, students have sung at football games, but since time is limited in the elementary school it is difficult for them to go out to the community like the secondary-level music programs.

A sense of community also existed in the elementary school itself, which was demonstrated through support from these teachers’ administrators. Julianna revealed that her principal and superintendent were very supportive of the elementary general music program, and that they will typically find ways to provide the resources she says she needs – as long as her requests are reasonable. For example:

…about two years ago…he had set aside some money from PTO funds, and he told me at the end of the school year: I know you go to conference…here’s $700.00…do as you wish. And, for a rural setting, $700.00 do as you wish is, uh, is like: oh I found a diamond in the rough. I was able to purchase a new xylophone, some books, some stuff for SMART Board…West Company was a good company, because as I kept purchasing, the price got cheaper and cheaper. And, I took it all home on the plane…So that’s where the generosity comes. Also, calls me the best music teacher…[east] side of Mississippi. Yeah. So, but…I usually don’t go for want – usually if I ask, I get.

At Lighten Dale Elementary, the teachers are conscientious of teaching students about community, and by modeling what it looks like to their students through their interactions with each other. Both Julianna and Mackenzie revealed that community was a characteristic of their elementary general music programs, and that their students engaged in community-type activities
that included taking turns, pair sharing, working in groups, and performing different parts simultaneously. Julianna also shared that her students seemed to be welcoming of new students, and that she thought the parents of rural settings might be more involved with the elementary general music program than parents of urban schools:

…I think, I don’t know because I haven’t experienced outside of rural, but I think the kids once they – they’re more community oriented because they are from a rural community. They do things a lot together. There are 4-H groups, there are church groups, they’re everywhere together…Most of them are welcoming of transient students. They don’t treat each other as this is me, and you’re you, so you stay over there. But, we build that community too. I think [the] teaching staff…we’re…very community oriented as well…We’re still kind of separated in the high school, middle school, elementary area, but it’s become better communication with us being in one building…I think the parents are involved. Most parents are more involved in a rural setting possibly than in an urban setting…we had over 50 volunteers for Fall Fest event, and they kept coming. So, um…I think the smaller, I think the rural setting is just a warmer place to be.

These teachers indicated that the sense of community was embedded within the elementary school teachers’ relationships to colleagues and students, and within the elementary general music classes by how the students interact with each other. In general, these teachers both stated that the students are respectful, welcoming of new students, and express an eagerness to learn about and make music. This advantage enabled these teachers to feel a sense of belonging to their school and community. At the end of the interview, Julianna shared with me one final thought about teaching in a rural place that conveyed her connection to the school and community:
I think this has been the best opportunity to be a teacher. Um. I love this district. This district has given back to me in many ways…whether it be just the comments, whether it be the hugs from the kids…you know you’ve made an impact. I’ve loved it so much I’ve stayed here 26 years…I’ve never wanted to move except that one time, and, the only reason was it was a selfish reason. So…maybe it was God’s mysterious way of saying nuh-uh road-block…you go back to where you belong. Um, district’s been good to me, parents have been good to me, administration’s been good to me. You know we all have struggles paperwork up the wazoo that’s driving everybody crazy, but that’s probably in every school setting. You know? But the kids walking in…singing in the halls, having pictures made…right there, that’s the cream of the crop. Having a new building. Who’d want to move?
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

“The thesis can be born out of a comparison of what your research has revealed and what
the professional literature says about the subject…or, it can contrast what practitioners claim and
what your research has revealed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 199). Through this research study,
I proposed to answer the following questions:

• What is the nature of rural elementary general music programs?

• What challenges and advantages are unique to rural music education? In relation to
  learning? In relation to teaching?

• What are teachers’ perceptions about their level of preparation for teaching in a rural
  elementary general music program?

• What district wide professional development opportunities are available for rural
  elementary general music teachers? In what kinds of professional development
  experiences do these teachers participate?

These questions were formulated during my review of literature, because I discovered that the
limited research studies about music education in rural schools consisted mostly of instrumental
music programs. Each of the research questions is addressed in the Conclusions section of this
chapter.

Limitations of the Study

There were a variety of limitations that I encountered at various stages of this study. The
purpose was to investigate the nature of rural elementary general music programs by collecting
and examining the perceptions of two participants. Having only two elementary general music
teachers participate in this study resulted in gathering a limited amount of data, and because of
this, the results are case specific and should not be generalized. Interviewing more participants
may have revealed additional data that could have been used to compare and contrast the stories of these two participants.

As I examined and re-examined the data that I collected, I also discovered that conducting these interviews, as a graduate student, might have been a limitation. The participants may have felt that it was necessary to provide responses that they thought I needed, or wanted, for the study because the interview was a formal event that was being used for fulfilling a degree requirement.

I wondered whether these participants had thought about these topics before the interview or about their level of comfort discussing their opinions and experiences with me. Even though I perceived them to be confident and relaxed during the conversation, I may have misjudged their demeanor. The topic of teaching elementary general music in a rural setting may have been a limitation if they had strong views that they did not want to disclose or if they felt that I was intruding on their way of life. Perhaps an experienced researcher would have been able to guide the conversations more swiftly to probe for richer data.

**Conclusions**

*What is the nature of rural elementary general music programs?* Based on my findings, there seemed to be no such thing as “rural” elementary general music. Julianna specifically said that she did not think that children thought of themselves as “rural” or “urban.” Rather than thinking about developing or maintaining a rural elementary general music program, the children were placed at the center of these teachers’ decision-making regarding curriculum development. While the children ought to be the focus of planning and instruction, these children live in the rural community and bring into the music classroom characteristics and ways of thinking that may emanate from the community or home. For example, during Julianna’s interview, she
began to talk about some of her students being from broken homes and how this particular characteristic did impact her elementary general music program to the point where she opted to financially provide recorders for those students:

Some of them are low-level kids that come from homes that are just so broken…*this* is their safe environment. So if they can have 60 minutes of something they’re secure in – that’s my goal. Um, to give them a sense of security…because you don’t know you might be the teacher that changes that child’s life. You’re not going to know that – you may never know that unless they come back and tell you…But…you’re the one that’s the catalyst, you’re the one that can give them that opportunity…cycle of poverty…if they start out in poverty they may stay in poverty, but some may find out I can do something to improve it and pull myself out…So, I don’t know…necessarily if poverty is the issue that creates a learning disability, whether it’s that or if it’s just the investment. I think the teacher has to do the investigating and has to invest in the time…I’ve had a couple parents say we just can’t afford the recorder. $7.35 is too expensive…so, I sponsor. I purchase some of the recorders myself. The kid doesn’t have any control over whether they can buy or not buy a recorder. So what do you do?

*Vision 2020: The Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education* (1999) emphasized that all students deserved to participate in the best music experiences possible (Mark, 2008, p. 171). Through these teachers’ descriptions of their general music programs and the types of experiences offered to their students, it seemed as though they each were trying to provide the best music experiences possible for their setting.

*What challenges and advantages are unique to rural music education? In relation to learning? In relation to teaching?* These participants struggled with identifying challenges and
advantages during the interview, and I think it was because of the recent transition to a new building. Both of these teachers used to teach in smaller, dilapidated school buildings, but they are now teaching in new, spacious facilities that are fully equipped with up-to-date technology. At one point, Mackenzie said that she was “living the dream.”

What are teachers’ perceptions about their level of preparation for teaching in a rural elementary general music program? These teachers’ perceptions about their level of preparation for teaching in a rural elementary general music program was influenced by their college degree training, their post-college Orff Schulwerk training, and their teaching experiences. Mackenzie and Julianna had contradictory opinions about their college preparation. Both of them majored in music education as secondary choral music specialists, and took general music methods as part of their degree requirements. While Mackenzie felt confident about her training and using general music textbooks to guide her planning, Julianna expressed frustration and the need for additional training in order to fully understand how to teach music to young children. As veteran teachers, both Mackenzie and Julianna relied on the materials and teaching strategies they acquired through their Orff Schulwerk training to provide sequential, holistic, and developmentally appropriate music learning experiences to their students.

These participants revealed that they grew up in rural communities, attended rural public schools as children, went to universities in rural settings, and have spent their career teaching elementary general music in a rural school district. Julianna shared that she had not necessarily been looking for a teaching position in a rural school, but that she thought being from a small town might have helped her to understand teaching in a rural setting.

…I came from a rural community so I kinda knew, ya know, what to expect…I think that’s maybe why I was comfortable because I…lived in a small town…but, I didn’t
necessarily prepare myself – I took the job I could get…Having that background
of…coming from a small town I think helped.

Later in the interview, Julianna expressed that she realized her teaching experiences were limited
to only rural, but when she found her spot, her niche, she was comfortable and just stayed.

Neither participant had experiences teaching in a suburban or urban school, however they
each expressed opinions about the elementary general music programs in those settings. For
example, when I asked Julianna if she thought there were any characteristics unique to rural, she
said:

…depending on where you are…I don’t think I could teach the same kind of music that I
teach here necessarily to my older kids as I would teach in an urban [school]. I don’t
think I could bring some of that urban stuff – although I think some of it can because we
are close to a city, like hip-hop. Um, I don’t think I could take a lot [of] country out to a
city setting per se. I may be able to use a little bit…

Based on my findings, both of these participants suggested that it was their desire to teach
music that empowered them to find ways to become better prepared to teach elementary general
music in a rural setting. They accomplished this by gathering appropriate and engaging lesson
materials, taking time to make sense of the progression and sequencing of music skills and
concepts, and by developing effective teaching strategies through discussion and collaboration
with their colleagues.

What district wide professional development opportunities are available for rural
elementary general music teachers? In what kinds of professional development experiences do
these teachers participate? The data I collected on professional development for these
elementary general music teachers was insufficient to fully address this question. However,
Mackenzie and Julianna both revealed that their school district provided in-service days as professional development for teachers. Julianna shared that at her school all the teachers gather for these meetings to discuss and create plans to prepare their students for endeavors like the PARCC assessments. Her school has also used in-services as an opportunity for the teachers to discuss the design and implementation of their SLO’s. However, other topics and training relevant to the elementary general music program are not typically addressed, or provided, during in-service days. Both Mackenzie and Julianna did share that they have attended a variety of music education professional development events in the past, such as the Ohio Music Education Association conferences, and the American Orff Schulwerk Association national conferences and regional chapter workshops.

I had suggested, under the heading “Need for the Study,” that investigating the characteristics of rural elementary general music programs may increase awareness of the significance of this setting’s diversity, which may better equip music educators to meet the needs of today’s students. Based on this study, diversity did not seem to be a significant factor. However, both Julianna and Mackenzie specifically expressed an awareness of the presence of students from low-income families in their general music programs. Indeed, Julianna was aware of and discussed the cycle of poverty and its impact, and implemented solutions that supported those students’ involvement in her music classes.

**Implications for Music Education**

The results of this study indicated: (a) that additional training (i.e., Orff Schulwerk, Kodaly Method, Dalcroze, etc.) beyond the undergraduate degree for these teachers enabled them to be better prepared to teach elementary general music; (b) that the main focus of these
teachers was on their students rather than on the place where they were located; (c) and that these programs were sustained by ongoing community support.

**Suggestions for Future Studies**

The research literature regarding elementary general music programs in rural schools is limited. Because this study investigated the perceptions of two rural elementary general music teachers, expanding the number of contexts and participants may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of these music programs, of teachers’ roles and identity, and could more extensively examine challenges and advantages related to the rural setting. Other studies could include: a comparative study of rural, urban, and/or suburban elementary general music programs to examine the similarities and differences between programs; or an ethnographic case study of elementary general music students, located in rural settings, to investigate their lived experiences as growing musicians.
REFERENCES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Lucy, T. A., & Laney, J. D. (2009). This land was made for you and me: Teaching for economic justice in upper elementary and middle school grades. *The Social Studies, 100*(6), 260-272.


APPENDIX A: HSRB APPROVAL LETTER

DATE: October 28, 2013
TO: Holly Smith, Bachelor of Science in Music Education
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
PROJECT TITLE: [508597-4] An Investigation of Rural Elementary General Music Education
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: October 27, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: September 10, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 2 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on September 10, 2014. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Elementary General Music Teacher,

My name is Holly Smith, and I am a Graduate student in Music Education at Bowling Green State University. As part of my work on a Master of Music Education degree, I am conducting a research study for a thesis on the nature and characteristics of elementary general music in rural school districts. Dr. Lisa M. Gruenhagen, Assistant Professor of Music Education, is the advisor for this research study. You are invited to be in this research study because of your experience of teaching elementary general music in a rural school district.

Benefits for study participants include having the opportunity to discuss their music program with another music educator and to possibly uncover new ideas and strategies for instruction in rural schools. Your insight into the nature of rural elementary general music education programs could inform the music education profession of particular advantages and challenges distinct to teaching and learning in these settings.

Your involvement in this study would include: 1) one individual semi-structured interview (approximately 30-45 minutes in length); and 2) a review of the written report (to ensure validity). The interview will be audio taped and the tape will be transcribed by me (PI). I will also keep a detailed research journal. The interviews, transcripts, field notes, and researcher journal will serve as data sources for the study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The decision to participate or to not participate will have no impact on your teaching position or relationship to Bowling Green State University. Participant responses will remain confidential, and all names will be changed. The only people with access to the data include myself, and my project advisor, Dr. Lisa Gruenhagen.

I hope you will consider taking part in this study and I encourage you to contact me, or the Project Advisor, with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Ms. Holly Smith
Graduate Assistant, Department of Music Education
Bowling Green State University
Email: hasmith@bgsu.edu

Dr. Lisa Gruenhagen, Project Advisor
Assistant Professor of Music Education
Bowling Green State University
2159 Moore Musical Arts Center
Tel: 419-372-2005
Email: lgruenh@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX C: DISTRICT APPROVAL LETTERS

Local Schools
PHONE: [redacted], Ohio
FAX: [redacted]

Date: 10/14/13

To: HSRB Review Board
Subject: Project request by Holly Smith

I am writing on behalf of graduate assistant, Ms. Holly Smith, who is completing her Master's thesis in Music Education at BGSU. As principal of [redacted] Elementary and direct supervisor of Mrs. [redacted], I am granting my approval for Ms. Smith's project request to interview Mrs. [redacted].

If I can be of any further assistance in helping Ms. Smith, BGSU, or music education in general, simply email or call me at [redacted].

Respectfully,

[redacted] Elementary School

"The Local School District, as a unified learning community, is dedicated to graduating students who are life-long learners and productive citizens in an ever-changing society."

Local Schools is an equal opportunity employer.
October 15, 2013

Lisa M. Gruenhagen, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Music Education
Program Coordinator, Student Teaching
College of Musical Arts
Bowling Green State University
2159 Moore Musical Arts Center
Bowling Green, OH 43403

Re: Mrs. Interview

Dear Dr. Gruenhagen,

Mrs. has graciously agreed to participate in an interview as you examine the nature of a rural elementary general music program. This letter is to serve as my support of your request.

Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Principal

Pc Mrs.
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographics

• What is your age?

• What levels of education have you completed?
  
  o What was your major for each degree?
    
    ▪ What was your specialty or focus area?
  
  o What additional certifications or training have you earned?

• How many years have you been teaching in rural public schools?
  
  o Why did you decide to teach in a rural school district?
  
  o How many years have you taught at this school district?
    
    ▪ How would you describe the student population at this school?
    
    ▪ What classes and grade levels do you teach?
    
    ▪ Have you taught classes or subjects outside of music? If so, please describe?

• In what other school settings have you taught? Rural, Suburban, or Urban?
  
  o What can you share with me about that experience?
  
  o Why did you leave that position to come to this school?

Nature of Elementary General Music

• What can you share with me about the elementary general music program?

• What is a typical work day/week like for you?

• Have you taught enrichment programs or offered additional opportunities to students to supplement their music education in the past or present? If so, please describe those opportunities.
Were students expected to purchase or donate any items to participate? What were those items?

Advantages and Challenges of Rural Music Education

- What advantages and challenges have you experienced as a rural elementary general music teacher?
- What aspects would you keep the same or change about teaching elementary general music in a rural school?
- In what ways have the students changed during the years?
  - Have you noticed any trends over the years?

Students’ Access to Elementary General Music

- How do you ensure that all students are able to fully participate in elementary general music?
- How adequate is your supply of resources?
  - What sorts of equipment or supplies would you like to be able to purchase for the elementary general music program?
    - Do you think these things would enable you to offer a higher-quality elementary general music program than you currently do? Explain.
- In your school or district, to your knowledge, are there any issues with student access to elementary general music?
- How is the school district ensuring all students have equal access to elementary general music?
- What do you think would improve students’ access to elementary general music?
Preparation to Teach Elementary General Music in Rural Schools

- How well prepared were you to teach elementary general music in a rural school district at the beginning of your career?
  - What steps did you take to become better prepared?
  - What information did you need to know to help you be a better teacher?
  - What did you do to learn more about rural music education?

Access to Professional Development for Rural Elementary General Music Teachers

- What professional development opportunities does your district provide for music teachers?
- What other professional development events do you attend?
- What would you like to know more about in relation to rural elementary general music?
APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE OF CODED TRANSCRIPTS

think your style of teaching - there's a foundation but I think the way you bring it might be different. That might be the difference. Um I don't think it's necessarily a difference in the little ones - maybe in your older students. I think you have to have a foundation with your younger students and it's gotta be a solid curriculum built on rhymes, built on steady beat, built on singing - and concentrating on head voice, and then expanding into the hip hop or the country or the whatever. So I don't know if it's necessarily a unique program to the rural setting or the urban setting - it may be a general music program using influences from the urban or from the rural. And I think I could be more cultural. You could send rural stuff into urban, urban stuff into rural so that they get exposed to it. That that's the way I'm thinking I don't know if it's if there's anything that's like an elementary rural program or an elementary urban program. I think there's a foundation there and it's what you make of it.

HAS: Okay.
CAS: And it's how you engage the child.
HAS: Um
CAS: My opinion I guess I don't know
HAS: Yeah this is great um ... and earlier in our conversation you mentioned the low-income being a big factor for this school -
CAS: Mmm

HAS: Is there anything that you wish you had known, or anything that's still a mystery to you that you'd like to know more about?
CAS: Um I know through training they say income may affect - there's research that says income may affect students' learning, there's research that says it's not the income it's how you teach. Um. Some of them are lower-level kids that come from homes that are just so broken. Um ... this is their safe environment. So if they can have sixty minutes of something they're secure in - that's my goal. Um to give them a sense of security um because you don't know you might be the teacher that changes that child's life. You're not going to know that you may never know that unless they come back and tell you. Um. But you you've got you're the one that's the catalyst you're the one that can give them that opportunity. Um. You know. Cycle of poverty some if they start out in poverty they may stay in poverty but some may find out I can do something to improve it and pull myself out. Um. So I don't know if necessarily if poverty is the issue that creates a learning disability whether it's that or if it's just the investment. I think the teacher has to do the investigating and has to invest in the time.

HAS: Have you seen it impact your classroom in any way?
CAS: Um right the only the only way right now I see it maybe if students can't wear a simple - if I say white shirt and blue jeans, I don't have any white shirts - do the best you can. Um I don't make them go out and buy a white shirt. I don't make them feel um terrible if they don't have a white shirt because that's not the goal. The goal is to look uniform but the goal is to have the child singing or the child playing. So if they come in a grey shirt, old pants, I'm not gonna say you can't perform. Um the other way is recording. I've had a couple parents say we just can't afford the recorder. Seven dollars and thirty-five cents is too expensive. Well you look over that three-year span that's maybe two dollars a year. Compared to a pack of cigarettes that's four forty-one a week. But do you tell that to your parents? No. So I sponsor, I purchase some of the recorders myself. The kid doesn't have any control over whether they can buy or not buy a recorder. So what do you do? I pay for it...

HAS: Yep
CAS: You invest - so I guess in that way, I invest my the money that I make - I invest the money that I make and hopefully it becomes a good investment in return. Um. Maybe and I know that in an urban setting if there was low-poverty you know you could buy