

Keeping Instruments Out of the Attic: The Concert Band Experiences of the Non-Music Major

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Abstract

Students' participation in music beyond high school continues to be a goal of many music teachers and a topic throughout decades of music education literature. The purpose of this inquiry was to understand students who continue making music in college by participating in a campus band as non-music majors. One hundred band members provided written responses about their campus band experience. Twenty members were interviewed. Research questions were: How did the band members perceive the campus band experience as contributing to their musical lives? How could the experiences and understandings of the band members contribute to our knowledge of lifelong participation in music? Many participants' prior memorable music experiences were competitive; however, they desired low-stress, non-competitive environment in campus band. Participants enjoyed the campus band community and atmosphere. Most participants wished to continue playing their instrument and stated they felt that the concert band was their only viable musical opportunity.

the majority of the students, active participation ceases upon the day of graduation from our high schools" (p. 33).

For many students, high school graduation marks the moment when band instruments are packed away in the attic. This issue has been studied from various perspectives to tease out possible factors contributing to the decision to continue, or re-start,

Introduction

Lifelong music participation is a worthy goal held by many music educators. The notion that years of public school education in music should result in students graduating high school with the desire and skills to continue making music has been an enduring theme for decades among practitioners and policy makers alike (Leonard & House 1972; Myers, 2005; Poland, 1987; Revelli, 1937). At a recent Lifelong Learning Symposium, Myers (2005) suggested the formal approach to music instruction in schools is irrelevant in terms of its ability to foster engagement in music beyond high school, and that current practices in music education emphasize short term goals ending upon graduation. Remarkably, almost 75 years ago William Revelli (1937), a highly regarded band director and music educator of the twentieth century noted, "Perhaps one of the greatest weaknesses of our school band program is that, for

... where more than one person is working on the analysis, it is helpful to have each person develop the coding scheme independently, then compare and discuss similarities and differences. Important insights can emerge from the different ways in which two people look at the same set of data, a form of analytical triangulation. (p. 464)

Using the coding strategies suggested by Patton (2002), we began by looking for “recurring regularities” (p. 465), or patterns, within bits of the respondents’ answers that we then sorted into categories. As recurring regularities occurred, we put these bits of data into categories, constantly asking, “What does this answer mean in terms of this person’s experience in Campus Band?” Next, still separately, we sorted through the bits of data that we had divided into categories and checked to see if they seemed consistent, inclusive, and credible (Guba, 1978). We then traded our lists of categories, and the data bits within, to see if they were “reproducible by another competent judge ...

most memorable musical experience thus far, for example: “Winning State Champions with my marching band my junior year of high school” or “I loved when our marching band in high school broke a record score.”

only opportunity that I have to pull the clarinet out of its case every week.

Opportunity. In a number of cases, participants wrote that campus band had become part of their musical lives because it was convenient, easy, and accessible to non-music majors: “I forgot to audition for [another] ensemble,” “It’s an Easy A,” “Campus Band fits in my schedule this year,” and “I don’t have time to devote to any of the higher music ensembles.” In an interview, we asked a participant to elaborate more on why he joined campus band. He mentioned his major, and scheduling: “The reason why I enjoy campus band is because I majored in the sciences. The reason I’m not in ensembles regularly is that I am in the lab or science building most days of the week.” He said he enjoyed the once-

satisfies a variety of needs on both individual and collective levels. These data also provide support for the continued presence of ensembles for non-majors in all col

characteristics (i.e., lack of grades, lack of competition, and music for music's sake) are also found in many informal settings outside of the public school setting (Green, 2008). It seems logical then, that public school music educators may help foster continued participation in music if competition is deemphasized, placing more attention on educational outcomes that emphasize individual expression,

Woody, R. H., & Lehmann, A. C. (2010). Student musicians' ear-playing ability as a function of vernacular music experiences. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 58, 101-111.

Appendix A

This semester, in collaboration with faculty at the [name of institution], I will be conducting a study designed to uncover information about the experiences of non-music majors in college instrumental ensembles. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. You have the right to refuse to participate. Take as much time as you need to provide thoughtful responses. (use an additional sheet of paper if necessary)

1. Describe your most memorable music experience (can be in- or out-of school)

2. What is (are) your primary reason(s) for joining Campus Band?

3.

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