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### Parent Perceptions of Elementary General Music Instruction

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore parent perceptions of elementary general music instruction. This was a qualitative, multiple case study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009) in which the perceptions of elementary general music were gathered from a parent from each of the three geographical areas (rural, urban, and suburban) within Western New York. This study sought to determine how parents perceive elementary general music, as well as what types of perceptions of elementary general music exist in all geographical areas (i.e., rural, urban, and suburban districts).

*Keywords: elementary general music, parent perceptions*

State University of New York  
College at Buffalo

Parent Perceptions of Elementary General Music Instruction

A Thesis in Music Education

by

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Candidate for Master of Music in Music Education

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Music in Music Education

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Music is often perceived as a non-essential school subject, with priority given to core subjects, such as English, math, science, and social studies (Abril, 2005). Despite the possibility to develop essential life skills, such as perseverance, teamwork, and creativity, music programs are often the first to be cut or eliminated entirely (Brown, 2013; Criss, 2010; Goral, 2018). While public performances showcase successful learning, many people are still unaware of the purpose or significance of music courses. Other teachers consider music educators a perfect example of the old adage: “those who can’t, teach.”

Elementary general music in particular is often regarded as a prep period for classroom teachers and play time for the students (Stokes-Casey, 2019). School staff members have deemed the job of an elementary music teacher easier than others. These remarks negatively impact job satisfaction and retention of music educators and prompt questions as to why school staff feel this way (Killian, 2006; Robison, 2021). These perceptions can also elicit thoughts, such as how music teachers could alter the mindset of their colleagues.

While this is a topic that has been explored previously, the existing research is largely survey-based. Furthermore, the only perspectives that have been considered are those of administrators, classroom teachers, students, and the occasional specialist. The parent perspective should be explored in order to gain insight into the thoughts of a vital school stakeholder.

## **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore parent perceptions of elementary general music instruction. This case study sought to determine how parents perceive elementary general music, in hopes of bridging gaps between existing studies, as well as informing district practices and the advocacy efforts of elementary general music educators. The main questions for this research were:

1. How do parents perceive elementary general music?
2. What do parents believe the purpose of elementary general music is?
3. What skills and concepts do parents believe are taught in elementary general music?
4. How do students benefit from music education?
5. Do parents believe that music belongs in the school curriculum?

## **Definitions**

**General Music:** a course that is available to all students, in which basic musical concepts and skills are taught (Hedden, 2000).

**Rural:** a geographical area located outside the boundaries of a town or city, in which few people live; aka the country (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

**Urban:** a geographical area characteristic of a town or city; usually densely populated (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

**Suburban:** a geographical area characteristic of a suburb; typically a lower density area that separates commercial and industrial regions (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

**Administrator:** a person who is responsible for managing building or district operations, such as a Principal, Assistant Principal, Superintendent, etc. (Stoltenberg, 2019).

**Classroom Teacher:** a person who teaches in a general education setting; in an elementary school, one who is responsible for teaching a specific grade level (IGI Global, 2022).

**Specialist/Specials Teacher:** a person who teaches specialized subjects, such as music, art, physical education (PE), etc. (Stokes-Casey, 2019).

**In-service Teacher:** a person who has been certified as an educator and is currently teaching (Abril, 2005).

**Pre-service Teacher:** a person who is in the process of becoming a certified educator and therefore, has little to no teaching experience (Abril, 2005).

**Support Staff:** a person who provides specialized academic support and/or support to students while they use school facilities (American Institutes for Research, 2022).

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

Through numerous and varied studies, research has demonstrated the benefits of including music education in the school curriculum. Music aids in language development, which improves social skills, strengthens areas of the brain such as sound discrimination and memory recall, and improves spatial intelligence and fine motor abilities (Brown, 2013). Humans enter the world with a natural ability to decode sounds and words. Exposure to music from a young age can encourage this natural ability, thus developing the parts of the left side of the brain involved in language processing. Music can also cause brain circuits to be wired in certain ways, with familiar songs being utilized as tools to imprint new information. This linguistic development is socially advantageous, as “language competence is at the root of social competence” (p. 1).

Studies have also revealed that children who are involved in music show greater neural growth than those who are not (Brown, 2013). Simply put, when playing an instrument, more of the brain has to be used. This repetitive, wide-spread brain stimulation leads to many benefits. Students involved with music show verbal recall proficiency, resulting in an increased IQ and higher test scores. Furthermore, those who understand music are able to visualize how elements fit together, thus improving spatial-temporal skills. These skills translate to other situations in which multistep problems would be encountered, such as in architecture, engineering, math, art, gaming, and when working with computers. One study, in which children participated in fifteen months of weekly music education, demonstrated improved sound discrimination and fine motor skills as a result of music instruction and practice. The brain scans evolved throughout the course

of the study, showing changes to the networks in the brain associated with sound discrimination and fine motor tasks.

It is important to note that the benefits of music are not limited to brain development. Musical advantages include increased musicality, an appreciation for music, and respect for the process of learning a skill, such as how to sing or play an instrument (Brown, 2013). Music education also teaches children how to express their emotions and understand themselves better. Through music, students develop intrapersonal skills, such as self-esteem, tolerance, responsibility, impulse control, appropriate self-expression, creativity, and critical thinking, as well as interpersonal skills, such as, cooperation, a sense of belonging, empathy, and active listening (Campayo–Muñoz, 2017). Musical activities, such as improvisation, group performance, and connecting music to an emotion, develop these skills. Improvisation allows for students to express themselves and their emotions freely. Group performance encourages respect for peers, responsibility and accountability for music proficiency to enable successful rehearsals and performances, and the ability to listen to differing viewpoints about the repertoire, rehearsal, or performance. Finally, connecting music to an emotion fosters emotional awareness and development of the vocabulary needed to express emotions.

Participation in a musical ensemble requires individual motivation and the ability to synergize (Criss, 2010). While there is an understanding that an ensemble director will guide the group to success, students are largely responsible for practicing regularly and performing to the best of their ability. The ensemble must work as a team to achieve success, as the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In this way, students take personal ownership of their work and level of success. The philosophy of teamwork that is learned by participating in a musical ensemble can be applied to other academic areas, as well as in future careers.

Despite these benefits, music programs continue to be reduced or eliminated entirely (West, 2012). Factors, such as standardized testing, budget constraints, and the No Child Left Behind Act, have all negatively impacted music education (Abril, 2006). While efforts have been made to rebuild programs, more than 1.3 million elementary students nationwide do not have access to music education (Goral, 2018).

While 95 percent of Americans view music as an important component of a well-rounded education and 75 percent believe that music education should be mandated, this does not ensure its place within the curriculum (West, 2012). Music teachers must continuously advocate and educate their community about the benefits of music education by showcasing the versatility of skills, increasing understanding of the process involved in learning musical concepts, and presenting evidence of student learning and success (Abril, 2007).

The constant need to prove oneself as an educator and justify the importance of music education can be exhausting and frustrating. In a 2006 study, Killian surveyed 223 music educators in Texas and determined that, due to attrition, one in five participants planned to leave the profession. A more recent study (Robison, 2021) indicated that, out of 115 music teachers in a rural community in Wyoming, 12.1% intended to leave teaching. A common factor in overall music teacher job satisfaction and retention is support from school stakeholders, including administrators, classroom teachers, and parents.

In 2012, Ciorba and Seibert surveyed 2,650 educational professionals, including administrators, music teachers, teachers of other subjects, and support staff to determine how the K-12 educational community in Oklahoma ranked the importance of music education. Overall, music teachers were more likely to believe that: (a) music education holds the same importance as reading and math, (b) standardized testing should not conflict with music instruction, (c)

music should be included in the core curriculum, and (d) having a background in music influences development. When asked how to improve music in schools, administrators, music teachers, and support staff suggested an increase in funding as the key solution. Teachers of other subjects indicated that improvements in curriculum and scheduling would enhance the music program.

The way that different community stakeholders perceive the importance of music education may influence music teacher job satisfaction and retention. Existing studies have explored perspectives of different stakeholders within the school community, including classroom teachers, administrators, students, and specialists (i.e., art teachers, physical education teachers, etc.).

### **The Classroom Teacher's Perspective**

According to Abril (2005), a classroom teacher's previous experience with music may contribute to their perceptions of music's value within the school curriculum. Teachers who had positive musical experiences as a child, as well as those with musical family members are more likely to display positive attitudes towards and place greater value on music education. Factors such as personal beliefs and confidence in musical knowledge/ability also impact the classroom teachers' perspective. Pre-service classroom teachers who complete a music methods course generally have greater confidence regarding their musical skills and ability to provide music in the classroom. As a result, they typically incorporate music into their lessons more than those who had not taken the course.

Overall, classroom teachers perceive music as a means to support other content, as opposed to a worthwhile stand-alone subject. In a 1991 study, 88% of elementary educators determined that the greatest use for music was to supplement other curricular areas (Saunders &

Baker, 1991). Furthermore, teachers of upper grade levels “often felt that teaching music in school was not a priority, considering what students need to know in life” (p. 63). While classroom educators believe that certain musical skills are beneficial, the role that music plays in their own classroom is often one of recreation, transition, or support. As the overarching belief of classroom teachers is that music plays a lesser role than other subject areas, there is a need for music specialists to accurately and effectively deliver music content to students.

When surveyed about their perceptions of music education, 116 pre-service classroom teachers at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, indicated that music should be taught by a specialist, as opposed to a classroom teacher. Participants also regarded the subject as less important than others and perceived nonmusical results as more important than musical outcomes (Hash, 2010). Similarly, when exploring the values of pre-service and in-service educators in the Midwest when it comes to music education, Abril (2005) determined that both groups expressed an appreciation for the curricular objectives of elementary general music; however, there were discrepancies about which goals were most important. Pre-service teachers perceived entertainment and creative goals as more pertinent, while in-service teachers selected musical and sociocultural goals as most important. This contrast may result from the greater interaction and experience with in-service musical specialists that practicing teachers receive. Pre-service classroom educators may also have difficulty in differentiating theoretical goals for a content area in which they are not as familiar.

The understanding and appreciation of music that classroom teachers provide can increase the job satisfaction of the music specialist. Stoltenberg (2019) defines value as “the need to be an essential component to the school community” (p. 46). When music educators are given adequate respect for their content and recognition for the essential role it plays in student

learning, there is an increase in job satisfaction and music teacher retention. Being recognized as legitimate educators with a legitimate curriculum by building administrators can provide a trickle-down effect to other staff members. Stoltenberg writes, “when respect and esteem are given to a music educator by their principal, it signals to others in the building that their craft is an important part of a student’s education” (p. 46-47).

### **The Administrator’s Perspective**

While perceptions of music education are based largely on previous experiences and personal values, music is typically ranked lower in priority than other classroom subjects (Abril, 2005). In a 1972 study, Punke compared the perspectives of administrators and music teachers in Colorado regarding the role music plays in the curriculum. Music educators believed that music should be regarded as an academic subject, while building leaders disagreed. Similarly, principals considered athletic teams more effective than musical ensembles in cultivating school-community relations. In a replicated study, Liddell (1977) gathered the views of school board presidents, superintendents, principals, and music teachers. Music educators scored each area higher than the other participants, with the exception of prompts related to the role music plays in public relations.

When asked “What does it mean to value music education?” every music educator reported that financial support suggested value, while administrators listed a number of factors, including demonstrating an appreciation for music, providing financial support, attending musical events, giving music courses priority when scheduling, and cultivating the program over time. Both music educators and administrators note that building leaders play the largest role in indicating the value of the music program, as they have the most face time with parents and school personnel, thus exerting meaningful influence throughout the community. The

administration also reported that, without their value of and commitment to music, they “could easily be the demise of the program” (Major, 2013, p. 11). Administrators in the Lekbery School District in Michigan believe that they have the ultimate say in which programs are offered by the district; however, it was also noted that building leaders often respond to political influences and interests of the school board. Some of the administration in this district also indicated that a lack of community support or a decrease in quality would negatively impact the music program, resulting in cuts or the elimination of the program entirely (Major, 2013).

Major (2013) also reveals that a district’s educational philosophy can impact the role of music education. The Lekbery School District bases all decisions on student achievement and success. Their mission is “to guide, encourage, and support each and every learner in the quest to realize his or her full potential” (p. 10). A school board member emphasized these values by stating that, in their district, students receive a “quality education, with a broad range of programs” (p. 10). Music is key to fulfilling this mission, as it is part of a complete educational package in which students have the ability to experience as many opportunities as possible in pursuit of achieving their fullest potential.

In a 2010 study, Gardner determined that the perceived level of administrative support was the largest factor in both music teacher satisfaction and retention. Visibility throughout the building and in music classrooms is an important variable as well. By attending and assisting with performances, building leaders demonstrate that the role of a music educator is just as important as those of other subjects. Indications of respect for and understanding of music education increased overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, establishing an open-door policy in which educators can approach administrators with questions and concerns is key to developing

relationships. In fostering positive connections with principals, music teachers found that relationships with colleagues and students also improved (Stoltenberg, 2019).

### **The Student's Perspective**

It is common for students to exhibit negative attitudes about music as a school subject (Stavrou, 2020). As such, music educators often struggle to determine which music concepts should be given priority, while ensuring that the lessons are interesting, applicable, and relevant for students. Bowles (1998) determined that, out of 2,251 elementary students, Kindergarten through fifth-grade, 93% responded positively to playing instruments in the music classroom, with 50% reporting it as their favorite activity in every grade level, with the exception of Kindergarten.

Music educators can attempt to improve student attitudes toward music by implementing more student choice and voice into the classroom. Murphy and Brown (1986) and Nolin (1973) reported that pairing a preferred activity (i.e., playing instruments) with a less desirable activity (i.e., reading music notation) resulted in increased student buy-in, confidence, and success. Therefore, music teachers can meet the curricular requirements of their district, while also providing students with a positive musical experience.

Stavrou (2020) asked students aged 12-14 to rank their favorite subject areas. They ranked music second out of 15 school subjects; second to physical education and followed by art. Students proffered the following adjectives as reasons why music is one of their favorite subjects: interesting, fun, relaxing, creative, and pleasant. In contrast, 37 of the 749 students surveyed listed music as one of their three least favorite subjects. Participants in this category shared that music lessons do not appeal to their taste, are boring, and that the skills and knowledge that they learn will not be utilized in their later life (i.e., playing the recorder). In

general, students who participated in musical activities outside of school were more likely to rank music as one of their top three favorite subjects.

Students prefer a teacher who prioritizes students over subject. Adolescents respond well to educators who care, treat students fairly, are respectful, recognize effort, listen and communicate effectively, are readily available, have a sense of humor, and do not threaten students' sense of self. In general, students value nice teachers. In fact, Spock (1986) determined that successful teaching directly results from whether or not students enjoyed their teachers (Gerber, 1989). Despite curricular objectives and pressure from administration to meet academic expectations, music educators should seek student feedback and take it into consideration. After all, students are one of the best advocates for their school's music program, for "no policy maker, or an outside observer, can offer better insights on school music teaching and learning practices than students themselves" (Stavrou, 2020, p. 17).

### **The Specialist's Perspective**

Teachers are often grouped based on grade level or subject area; however, there are educators who serve multiple grade levels, such as librarians, art, music, physical education (PE), and foreign language teachers. Administrators often create an umbrella term for these courses, which may include specials, electives, recess time, resource, enrichment, or fine arts. Similarly, administrators may call these types of teachers specialists, explanatories, art teachers, or even by abbreviations, such as FArts (Fine Arts) teachers or RATs (Related Arts Teachers). More shocking names can include babysitter, coffee break, leftovers, and extras. These labels indicate that these subjects are considered lesser than core subjects and cause such educators to feel marginalized by their colleagues. Specialists can also feel disposable, as their classes are

frequently canceled for testing and arts teachers are regularly reassigned to substitute for other subjects (Stokes-Casey, 2019).

Although literature regarding other specialists' perspectives on music is limited, there are studies that explore the relationship between encore subjects (i.e., music, art, physical education, etc.). Barney and Pleban (2018) electronically interviewed 26 physical education (PE) teachers from seven states and 24 schools, whose teaching experience ranged from one to 25 years. When prompted as to how these teachers perceive the use of contemporary music in their classrooms, their responses indicated that PE teachers find music to be helpful in the areas of classroom management, student learning, class climate, and as a motivational tool. Furthermore, while music was playing, students were more comfortable, more focused, and more willing to participate. Even students who perceived themselves as less- or non-athletic were engaged.

Similarly, music educators can benefit from athletic philosophies. Both sports coaches and ensemble directors rely on team spirit and other positive attributes, such as motivation, respect, responsibility, and communication, to ensure success. Music and athletics are unique, in that each participant plays a specific role in the overall group. Students must hold each other accountable by ensuring that everyone pulls their own weight and seeking assistance from the coach or director when needed. Synergizing and effectively working as a team are the keys to reaching the group's goal. Criss (2010) reports that, "in a survey of one thousand Fortune 1000 companies, 91 percent used some type of team to solve problems" (p. 30). Therefore, skills learned by playing a sport or by participating in a musical ensemble, such as goal setting, effective communication, and teamwork, will benefit the student in their post-academic life (Criss, 2010).

## **Parent Perceptions of Core Subject Areas**

Although parents have not yet had a chance to offer their perceptions of music education, studies have been conducted to gather parent perceptions of core subjects, such as math, ELA (English Language Arts), and science. While research regarding parent perceptions of social studies exists, the literature is limited. Wentworth (1995) determined that parents perceive math as a key subject in education, in which experts possess complex knowledge that is shared with students. Parents believe that when math education is strong, other academic areas will be strong as well. Parents identified attitude, reasoning, and efficiency as the top three goals they had for their young children when learning math (Cheung, 2021). Each parent ranked efficiency as the least important of the three goals. Additionally, parents' perceived importance of early math standards impacted their child's motivation to learn.

Hall (2019) determined that nearly half of parents who were surveyed had little comprehension or appreciation for early writing development. Furthermore, parent perceptions of their child's writing ability did not correlate with the child's own perception of their writing ability. A majority of parents who participated in this study determined whether or not their child was a writer based on their propensity to construct letters and words and/or write their first name. Other definitions of writing include drawing, scribbling, using letter strings, using invented spelling, and using conventional spelling. While some of these methods are unconventional forms of writing, parents viewed them as acceptable ways for early writers to communicate thoughts.

Similar to math, parents indicated that reading was an important skill for their child to learn, as the ability to read is perceived to impact quality of life (Wakeman, 2021). When presented with a list of skills involved in literacy instruction, parents ranked reading

comprehension, listening comprehension, and vocabulary as the top three focus points. In contrast, phonological awareness, print awareness, and letter knowledge were the bottom three. Furthermore, parents believe that students are more engaged in reading and writing at the elementary and middle school levels, as opposed to when they are in high school. According to parents, elementary students focus on print awareness, letter knowledge, sight words, phonological awareness, and decoding more so than middle or high schoolers. Conversely, middle and high school parents reported that their children had the ability to independently read and answer challenging reading comprehension questions after reading or listening to the story. Parents noted distractions and not understanding the content as the top two reasons that their children were not progressing with their literacy skills.

When it comes to science, parents are less involved in student learning than with reading and math (Kaya, 2010). Although most parents agree that science is an essential component of everyday life, science teachers find it difficult to initiate and maintain parental involvement in their programs. In general, parents tend to have limited knowledge of what their child is learning in science due to their own negative memories of science education, lack of knowledge of the subject, or limited communication between school and home. The level of parental involvement is largely determined by the parent's perception of the role they play in their child's education and their personal sense of efficacy.

While research studies have begun to explore the perspectives of members of the educational community in regard to music instruction, certain points of view appear missing. Parents have provided their perceptions of core subjects; however, they have not had the opportunity to do so for music. Furthermore, existing research seems to explore the role music plays in the K-12 overall school setting, as opposed to focusing on elementary general music.

## **Chapter III**

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This research was a qualitative, multiple case study in which the perceptions of elementary general music were gathered from a parent from each of the three geographical areas (rural, urban, and suburban) within the Western New York region. Multiple case studies are used when more than one individual or example is studied at a time, through extensive data collection. In this research, a multiple case study was used to gain a variety of perspectives from different geographical areas (rural, urban, and suburban). The primary data source used was semi-structured interviews. This interview structure facilitates collection of data, reduces interviewer bias, and enables the comparison of participant responses. The semi-structured interview format allowed participants to openly share their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives, without being confined to specific prompts (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

#### **Participants**

This research involved a total of three participants (N=3), each the parent of a student in an elementary school in Western New York. These participants were determined using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling can be defined as “a nonrandom sample selected because prior knowledge suggests it is representative, or because those selected have the needed information” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. G-7). The three participants were purposely selected because each of them has a connection to elementary general music. In order to include a representative sample of Western New York regions, one parent was chosen from each of the following geographical locations: rural, urban, and suburban. This maximal variation sample-one that is selected to represent an array of perspectives or characteristics-allowed for comparison

amongst parent perceptions from school districts with different geographical settings, program resources, funding, etc. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board, each selected parent was formally invited via email to participate in this research. After gauging participant interest and upon completion of the necessary consent forms, a date and time was scheduled to virtually interview each participant.

Case Study One involved Sasha<sup>1</sup>, a 39-year-old female whose two daughters attended a rural school district in Western New York. At the time of data collection, her eldest daughter was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and was in elementary school, while her youngest daughter was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and attended primary school. Both students participated in general music classes in their respective buildings. Sasha noted that she struggled to read music notation and therefore, did not participate in music courses beyond general music.

Case Study Two included Wilbur, a 41-year-old male whose two children attended a suburban school district in Western New York. At the time of data collection, his son was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and his daughter was in Kindergarten. While each child attended different elementary buildings, both received general music instruction. Wilbur briefly participated in beginning band and took a guitar class in high school. He reported that playing guitar continues to be a hobby.

Case Study Three considered Angel's point of view as a 44-year-old female whose sons, at the time of data collection, were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and 1<sup>st</sup> grade at an urban elementary school in Western New York. Both children attended the same school and received general music instruction. Angel reported taking music classes throughout school but did not indicate whether or not she took advanced music courses or participated in ensembles.

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<sup>1</sup> Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym to maintain anonymity

## Procedure

Each participant engaged in a thirty-minute, semi-structured virtual interview with the researcher through Zoom. A semi-structured interview is a formal interview in which the researcher asks predetermined questions, combined with open-ended questions that arise throughout the conversation. Open-ended questions allow for increased confidence, deeper exploration of certain points of interest or value, and further explanation or clarification, when necessary. This format allowed for an organic conversation in which participants could openly share their individualized thoughts and opinions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The participants were provided with the questions via email prior to the interview. With permission, these virtual interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription. The recording began once each participant logged on and ceased once they logged off. Interviews were audio recorded using the built-in Zoom recording function.

Interview questions included:

1. Can you share a bit about your school music experiences growing up?
2. What do you think the purpose of elementary music instruction is?
3. What do you think students learn about in general music?
4. What activities do you think students experience in general music?
5. How might students benefit from being exposed to music at a young age?
6. Do you believe that music should be included in the elementary school curriculum? Why or why not?
7. Do you have any questions for me or is there anything you would like to add?

## **Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and transcripts were shared with each respective participant for member checking. Member checking is a procedure used in a qualitative research study in which participants review the accuracy of the research report. This process increases the validity and reliability of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The transcriptions dictate the entirety of the interviews between the researcher and participants, including noting body language and time stamps.

As is the case in qualitative research, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously at first, with the researcher taking notes throughout each interview. Further data analysis was achieved using grounded theory data analysis (Creswell, 2007). This procedure includes three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the first phase, the transcripts were evaluated for categories of information, which were then broken down into subcategories called properties. In the second phase, connections between categories were identified, resulting in emergent themes. In the final phase, statements to form connections between the categories were created. Primarily open-ended questions were utilized, as the researcher was not looking for only one answer. Every response was accepted as important and valid data.

Upon completion of the research, the emergent themes were presented to participants in hopes that they might gain a greater awareness of elementary general music, as well as their perceptions of it.

## Chapter IV

### Findings

While analyzing the data that was gathered from these three case studies, several themes emerged. Although each parent represented a different geographical location, there were certain attributes of elementary general music instruction that all three participants agreed upon. The themes include (a) Exposure and foundation as purpose; (b) Social and developmental benefits; (c) Expectations of music content and skills; and (d) Personal parental musical experiences.

#### Exposure and Foundation as Purpose

When questioned about the purpose of elementary general music instruction, all three participants remarked that early music education provides students with a musical foundation. Sasha described exposure as the number one purpose of elementary general music instruction. She stated, “I believe the purpose is, number one, to expose children to what music is, to learn about the different types of music, give them the experiences to create music as well.” Similarly, Wilbur spoke to the power of exposure for musical and non-musical children alike. He noted that, if children weren’t introduced to music at a young age, they might not experience some of these concepts until they were older and by then, may have missed out on opportunities. In regard to musical ability, he stated, “I mean, not like every kid’s gunna have some type of musical bone in their body, but ya know, if the ones that do and if they can identify it early on, that’s just a good thing, I would say.” He also noted the benefits of early exposure for nonmusical children, in that “it could help you kind of like explore your side of, uh, being able to open like, yourself up.”

While both Sasha and Angel referred to elementary general music as the “basics,” Angel went on to speak to the importance of establishing early musical knowledge. She expressed that the role of the elementary general music teacher is to provide the foundation, so that students are ready to be challenged when they move on to middle and high school music classes. She stated, “now it’s time for you as a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade music teacher to challenge me. Now it’s your turn to put this challenge in me. Don’t start me at the beginning because I know the beginning.” She also expressed that, “by the time they’re 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, grade and they want to try out for band, there’s nothing that that teacher probably could potentially teach them about the basics because they were already taught that,” alluding to the idea that students who receive exposure to music early on are more likely to try out for musical ensembles. Sasha concluded her thoughts on the benefits of elementary general music with the following: “I feel like, when students aren’t exposed to music or don’t have the opportunity to have music in their life, I feel like they’re missing out on something that’s so great and so powerful in ways that we don’t even realize.”

### **Social and Developmental Benefits**

Throughout the interviews, each parent highlighted social and developmental benefits that children receive as a result of elementary general music instruction. When questioned about the benefits of being exposed to music at a young age, Sasha stated, “it helps brain development.” She went on to note how music helps the brain grow and evolve, specifically in the areas of language, reasoning, and problem solving. Angel remarked that music class “break[s] up the monotony of a hard day for a kid.” Similarly, Wilbur recalled elementary music as something to look forward to. While he also noted the fun and excitement that music can provide children, he was quick to say that “there’s actually structure” in a music class as well. Angel went on to share the powerful role music played in helping her learn content from other

subject areas, specifically referencing “Conjunction Junction” from *Schoolhouse Rock*. She recalled, “it was a powerful tool that was learned by watching a kid cartoon teaching me English based through a musical cartoon. I thought it was great...I still know that song right now and I’m 44-years-old. I still know that song. It’s crazy!” She attributed her success in English, namely taking honors courses in college, to learning such concepts through music. Angel also noted the power music has over memories. She claimed that music can ground someone by triggering the thought of a good memory. She supported this claim by sharing a personal experience regarding her teenage son. Every time he hears the song “Shotgun,” he recalls listening to music while visiting his great-grandmother. Angel concluded by saying, “it gives him great memories, not sad ones.”

There was a trend regarding confidence as well. Sasha expressed that music “can help a student learn a craftsmanship and take pride in themselves, to work harder, to make things better, to become good at something.” Once students discover a skill or activity that they are successful at, such as music, it improves their confidence overall, positively impacting other areas of their education and life also. Sasha went on to discuss the role success in music can play in the life of a student who struggles academically. She stated, “it can help those students that don’t really feel they are good at something or excel at something to find, ‘oh, I am good at music’ and their confidence can grow, which then leaks into their other areas of schooling because they found that *one* positive. ‘I *can* do this.’” Wilbur shared the idea that an interest in music can build confidence. He also believes that early exposure can guide students down a path they might not have otherwise explored.

All three participants remarked that music is a powerful tool used to express emotions. Sasha claimed that music “makes a lot of us happy and it can help us with our emotions and it

can teach us how to feel and how to express how we're feeling in different ways." Similarly, Angel believes that music "soothes the savage beast." She feels as though humans are programmed from a young age to emotionally connect with music. She stated, "if your kid is hyper but you can play their favorite song and it'll calm them down a little bit." While a child may not know the power music plays in helping to regulate or process their emotions at a young age, this skill translates to adulthood. Wilbur shared that, although he didn't take guitar class until high school, it is still one of his hobbies today. He expressed that "it's like one of these things I reach for when like, it's a stress relief moment or like, just to have fun, or it's like a cool thing to share with other people." He believes that music is an outlet and that kids need as many outlets as possible, especially these days. He finished his thought by stating that, if his school hadn't offered this opportunity, he may have never found guitar, and thus missed out on a helpful social emotional tool.

In terms of social development and interaction, Sasha believes that elementary general music can help students find their "niche" and to feel like they are a positive part of something. She went on to share that music brings people together via concerts, pageants, plays, and musicals. She remarked that music "gives joy to everybody" and "can be a positive thing for a community as well." When questioned about the purpose of elementary general music, Angel claimed that "it gives all kids a chance to express themselves in a different manner." She noted the role that an elementary music class plays in allowing students to share their musical opinions, backgrounds, and experiences with each other. She stated, "another kid is more willing to learn from a different kid about why they like a particular song and the way it's being played versus trying to learn that from an adult."

## **Expectations of Music Content and Skills**

When questioned about what students learn in elementary general music, all three participants mentioned singing and exploring different instruments. Wilbur noted that the songs might be familiar, such as those that children learned from their parents, or brand new. Sasha mentioned that students practice singing individually, as well as in a group. She stated, “sometimes, one person can make this noise, but when we work all together, we can create this type of sound and music.” She also mentioned that the voice is an instrument. Angel said that students learn about “basic instruments...everything from the triangle to the saxophone to the flute to drums.” Wilbur remembered exploring the xylophone in his elementary general music class and imagined drum circles as a possibility in today’s music classroom. He also recalled learning about the different sections of the orchestra and shared a memory in which his teacher asked the class what section the piano belonged in. Although Wilbur answered strings, his teacher revealed that the piano is also a percussion instrument. He shared, “she told me why and my mind was blown. I was like, wow, that’s awesome!”

Sasha and Angel agreed that students learn about beat, rhythm, and different musical genres. Both participants happily recalled singing and listening to Christmas music in elementary general music as well. Sasha believes that children learn about “...the different elements of music. What makes music, how music is made, different types of music...” She also noted the importance of background information, so that students know where music came from, why it is so important, and how it continues to evolve. Angel spoke to learning about different genres and the role background information plays as well. She shared that exposure to different genres “gives you an outlook on the different sounds that are out there and just, you know that everything isn’t the same. It gives you a chance to find out where stuff was based from also.” As

a result of learning about various genres and their history, children become more aware and respectful of different types of music, as well as those who listen to it.

All three parents, while agreeing that these skills and concepts are taught, hesitated when considering how thoroughly they are covered and how well students learn them. Sasha shared that, although she enjoyed music class, she “struggled to learn how to read music.” Similarly, of her own elementary general music class, Angel remembered that “they were trying to teach us to read music. But ya know, we were little kids.” Wilbur recalled music being “being some place fun to go,” but noted that “the goal isn’t really to develop any skill.” He views the role of elementary general music as exposure. Later he added, “I mean, they probably don’t get too technical I would imagine... especially in a big group. Ya know, you can’t teach a whole group technical things about instruments, right, and expect them to be able to really retain it all.” Furthermore, Angel believes it takes students “a whole semester to learn the different notes from one song” and that the only concept younger students are capable of learning is “what this note means and how it sounds and what this note means and how it sounds.”

### **Personal Parental Musical Experiences**

There were portions of each interview where each parent specifically referred to their child’s music-making and experiences. Sasha concluded the discussion by noting how she enjoyed listening to her daughter play and how it has brought the two of them closer. Wilbur briefly noted that his son participates in piano lessons and Angel shared a story about the nostalgia her teenage son experiences when he hears his great-grandmother’s favorite song. Despite these contributions, a majority of the responses were based on personal experience.

While the goal of this research was to gather parent perceptions of their child's elementary general music instruction, responses seemed to largely be based on the parent's experience of their own early music education. Furthermore, these recollections often included ensemble experiences and middle/high school level music courses, as opposed to focusing on elementary general music.

There were also a few responses in which participants drew upon observations of their child's elementary general music education; however, this too was paired with recollections of their own childhood experiences. Sasha stated, "from what I have seen and what I remember too from myself..." Similarly, Wilbur mentioned, "I'm basing everything off of what I remember and what I hear my son doing." Angel is the only parent who, other than brief mentions of her children, did not reference her perception of their current general music education.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

As evidenced in the literature review, there is very little research focused on parent perceptions of music education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore parent perceptions of elementary general music instruction. There were differences amongst each participant, as they represent a variety of geographical locations (rural, urban, and suburban); however, there were also similarities. Common themes include (a) Exposure and foundation as purpose; (b) Social and developmental benefits; (c) Expectations of music content and skills; and (d) Personal parental musical experiences.

In contrast to previous literature, which revealed that school stakeholders are largely unaware of concepts and skills that are taught in the music classroom (Abril, 2007; Hash, 2010), each parent seemed to understand what students explore and experience in elementary general music. All three participants agreed that elementary general music supplies students with a foundation of musical knowledge. Parents also agreed upon the skills and concepts that are taught, including singing, exposure to a variety of instruments, beat, rhythm, and different musical genres. Although participants recognized basic musical skills, such as singing and playing instruments and mentioned specific concepts, such as beat and rhythm, more advanced musical skills and concepts, such as composition and improvisation, were left out.

While each parent had a basic understanding of what students explore and experience in elementary general music, they seemed unaware of the extent to which skills and concepts are taught and retained. All three participants reported that the purpose of elementary general music was to expose students to the subject and recalled music class as a fun place to go; however, they were skeptical regarding a child's ability to learn musical information in a timely manner and

retain said knowledge. These beliefs seemed to be based upon personal experience, as Sasha recollected struggling to read music as a young student, while Angel and Wilbur commented on age and class size as reasons for their inability to successfully learn and retain musical information. Furthermore, Angel's comment about students requiring an entire semester to learn one piece of music was shocking. Due to the nature of the subject matter, student learning is often displayed throughout the year in the form of performances. Perhaps these showcases imply that the concert repertoire is the only music that students learn in class.

Similar to school stakeholders from previous research studies (Stavrou, 2020), all three parents perceived music class as fun and enjoyable; however, unlike classroom teachers and administrators, these participants recognized its significance within the elementary curriculum. Throughout their interview, each parent highlighted the social and developmental benefits of music education, including development of language, reasoning, problem solving, and memory, increased confidence, and support in emotional processing and regulation. Participants noted that these benefits of music translate to other subject areas as well, thus resulting in a more positive and successful academic experience. Parents reported that music has the ability to foster connections amongst peers, as well as within the community. Additionally, music, along with other specials classes, gives students something to look forward to within the school day, especially those students who are not interested in or are less successful with other subject areas. As Angel stated, “[music] gives [students] a challenge, it gives them something more than math, and reading, and science, and English.” This statement is a stark contrast to the reviewed literature, which, when considering significance, places music at the bottom of the list of school subjects (Abril, 2005; Hash, 2010; Saunders & Baker, 1991). Furthermore, musical knowledge and skills can be applied to post-academic life and may even become a lifelong hobby.

In accordance with previous literature (Abril, 2005; West, 2012), there were positive perceptions of music education and adamant responses for the subject to be included in the curriculum. Although parents seem unaware of all of the details of music instruction, they are fully cognizant of the developmental, social, academic, and lifelong benefits. This brings into focus just how powerful of an advocate parents can be. According to Major (2013), “when teachers create high-quality programs, the community wants its children to experience those programs' value and to participate in their success, and administrators then ensure that the district offers (or can offer) those programs” (p. 18). Therefore, music educators must work to ensure that programs are successful, and that student success is regularly showcased, so that positive parental advocacy can continue.

Although some of the responses were based on personal experience, as opposed to observation of their child's, the parent perceptions of elementary general music were positive overall. While there were some negative comments, the perspectives were generally positive. This corresponds with existing literature, which states that perceptions of music are often positive if previous musical experiences have been positive (Abril, 2005). Each participant shared fond memories of music, both at school and in their personal lives. Furthermore, parents noted the positive interactions and experiences they have shared with their children as they engage in their own musical endeavors.

### **Implications for the Field**

The findings of this research study largely supported previous studies on this topic, in that the impressions of elementary general music education are generally positive; however, it also supports the notion that school stakeholders are largely unaware of what kind of instruction occurs in today's music classrooms. The information gleaned in this study may help to inform

district practices and the advocacy efforts of elementary general music educators. Music educators should regularly share with families what occurs during daily instruction. Musical growth and success can be shared via newsletters, classroom websites, and social media pages. Perhaps even more powerful would be inviting families into the school to observe student-led informances, music fairs, and open houses.

The efforts to enlighten school stakeholders should not stop with families. In-house performances, pep rallies, and celebrations can be utilized to highlight musical learning, so that administrators and classroom teachers better understand the purpose and benefits behind elementary general music instruction. This research study shared findings of parents who are passionate about music education and have a good grasp of the social and developmental benefits of early exposure. If music educators work to increase involvement and understanding, parents could be strong advocates for elementary school music programs.

### **Limitations of Study**

The original intention of this research study was to gather perceptions of elementary general music instruction from three different school stakeholders spanning a variety of geographical settings. The stakeholders were to include administrators, classroom teachers, and parents; however, due to the stressors of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the subjective nature of this research topic, administrators and classroom teachers were unwilling to participate. Therefore, the study was altered to only consider the parent perspective.

Although this research study considers perspectives from three different geographical settings (rural, urban, and suburban), only one parent was selected to represent each, resulting in a small participant pool (N=3). Furthermore, these parents and their families reside in the Western New York area, with their children attending schools in the region.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

While several perspectives of elementary general music instruction have been considered, as evidenced in the literature review, there has not yet been a study that compares the perceptions amongst stakeholders within the same school district. This information would be helpful in determining similarities and disparities amongst administrators, classroom teachers, parents, students, and even music teachers, in regard to the district's elementary general music program.

A study that included a greater number of participants would be beneficial as well. In this case, the researcher could compare the perceptions of multiple administrators, classroom teachers, parents, etc., within one district, in addition to those located in other geographical locations. Furthermore, different regions within New York state or across the country could be considered.

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### Case Study One: Sasha's Interview

Researcher: First question: can you share a bit about your school musical experiences growing up?

Sasha: Sure. So, it started when I was in like preschool singing songs into elementary school doing chorus. Um, music class singing songs, um playing like, rhythm sticks, learning basic rhythm and um, beat. Then, as I got a little older into elementary school we did, I was at St. Agnes' first, so we did a Christmas pageant with singing songs and some kids played instruments. I also attempted to play piano when I was younger. I struggled to learn how to read notes. I also attempted, um, drums in later elementary school. Once again, I struggled [chuckles] to learn how to read music. Uh, and we continued with music class through school and mostly chorus. Just, I remember singing songs, learning beats, learning rhythms...that was really fun.

Researcher: Alright.

Sasha: I didn't know how specific I needed to get.

Researcher: No, that was fine. Thank you. Umm, moving specifically just thinking about elementary general music now. What do you think the purpose of elementary music instruction is?

Sasha: I believe the purpose is, number one, to expose children to what music is, to learn about the different types of music, give them the experiences to create music as well. Um, so starting out with the very basics and then building on that.

Researcher: Good, thank you. Um, what do you think students learn about in general music? You kind of already said that, but...

Sasha: So, part of it...yeah, it kind of repeats that like, um, first of all learning the different elements of music. What makes music, how music is made, different types of music, musical instruments, you know, including your voice, um, how to learn to possibly read the music notes and how that correlates with the different sounds. Um, same with singing how different notes mean different pitches. Um, and I don't have very much background in music at all, but this is what I feel. And like, they learn how to make music.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Sasha: So, I feel like it incorporates a lot of background, building on like, background of where music came from and why music is important to us and continues to make growth. Does that make sense?

Researcher: It does, thank you. Um, so then, what activities do you think students experience while they're in elementary general music?

Sasha: So, from what I have seen and what I remember too from myself it's, um, a combination of singing different songs, having different genres of music to learn. Um, I also feel like they learn about basic instruments and how to make the rhythms and beats to create music as well. Work together and individual growth too. Sometimes, one person can make this noise, but when we work all together, we can create this type of sound and music.

Researcher: Yeah, that's a huge thing I stress in my class, so I'm happy you said that.

[laughter]

Researcher: Playing in an ensemble is challenging.

Sasha: Yup!

Researcher: How might students benefit from being exposed to music at a young age?

Sasha: Um, there are so many benefits. I wish I was more musically inclined. I absolutely love music. But, I feel like, number one, it helps brain development. It helps your brain grow in different ways. It can help develop language and reasoning and problem solving. It can help a student learn a craftmanship and take pride in themselves, to work harder, to make things better, to become good at something. It can help those students that don't really feel they are good at something or excel at something to find, "oh, I am good at music" and their confidence can grow, which then leaks into their other areas of schooling because they found that one positive. "I can do this." Um, and it builds with the rest of their academic career. Um, they also...I just feel like they can take more pride in themselves, yeah. I feel like I'm repeating myself, but...

Researcher: No, that's okay! Yeah, I agree.

Sasha: It's just, it does...yeah, it just it, music affects something, a different part of our brain. And I feel like, when students aren't exposed to music or don't have the opportunity to have music in their life, I feel like they're missing out on something that's so great and so powerful in ways that we don't even realize.

Researcher: Mhmm, I agree.

Sasha: And I mean, it's enjoyable, it's fun. Music is...it makes a lot of us happy and it can help us with our emotions and it can teach us how to feel and how to express how we're feeling in different ways and I just, I feel like it benefits us and a lot of people don't realize how much it really does benefit us.

Researcher: For sure. And that's where I think this research came from for me was seeing how people perceive music, its importance, and then using it to advocate for our programs, especially at the elementary level.

Sasha: Mhmm. Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Okay, um. And I kinda know what you're going to say, but anyway...

[laughter]

Researcher: Do you believe that music should be included in the elementary school curriculum? Why or why not?

Sasha: Absolutely! Just because of so many benefits of the brain development, the student growth piece, the potential for a student to find their niche, and be able to make growth and to become a positive part of something. To have their confidence grow. I've seen it happen before and it's amazing when those kids like, "I can really make music. I can do this. I'm good at this." And then all of a sudden everything else they're becoming better at. So, absolutely. There's so many things...it brings the community together too when you can have your bands and your chorus concerts and your pageants or Christmas plays or musicals throughout the school year. It gives joy to everybody. So, I think it really can be a positive thing for a community as well.

Researcher: Mhmm. Um, so that is all I have. But do you have any questions for me or anything else you want to add?

Sasha: I do not. I feel like I've repeated myself a few times. But yes, I feel that music is so important, even though I'm not musically inclined, I enjoy listening to music. I have enjoyed listening to my child play her music. It's something that brings us together, so...yeah, I just think it's a huge thing and that it never goes away.

Researcher: For sure. I agree. Well, thank you!

## Case Study Two: Wilbur's Interview

Researcher: Alright, first question: can you share a bit about your school musical experiences growing up?

[pause]

Wilbur: Huh...we're going way back now. I mean, the first thing I can remember about music in school down in Dartsville was Mrs. Kenney, my teacher, and I mean, it was just...ya know, a special like gym and stuff. I don't know, I just remember it being some place fun to go to, ya know? Like, it was something to look forward to. Um, I wouldn't say that like...it developed any type of...well, I guess I don't know. I mean it's not like... I guess when you're that young it's not like you're really...the goal isn't to really develop any skill. It's just to kind of expose kids to uh, music. So I guess in that sense, I kinda like...that's partly the reason why I liked it. It gave you the chance to open yourself up a little bit. Ya know, if you wanted to...if you started singing something or, I don't know. I remember it kind of being just like a fun environment and like kind of, you're like, "oh, I get to sing now." So, you're like...you'd either be loud or you'd be quiet. Ya know what I mean? Or you could try out the xylophones and stuff. I remember that. Just being exposed to new things. That was really cool. Um...I was in band for a little bit and I kind of got out of it just 'cause I was more like a shy kid, I guess and I kind of didn't like...being on display a little bit. You know what I mean? That's how I felt, so I that's kind of why I got out of the band and that was kind of just me as an insecure kid I think back then. Um, but then fast forward to my senior year of high school, um, ya know, I had like five study halls that I had, ya know, because all of my credits were met. And I was like, "well, I might as well take something fun, so I took guitar." And the band coordinator at the school was the teacher and she made it super fun and it ended up being like, my best thing I ever did in high school, I think, 'cause I still play guitar to this day and it's like one of these things I reach for when it's like... it's a stress relief moment or like, just to have fun, or it's like a cool thing to share with other people. Ya know, it kind of turned into a hobby for me ever since that. And if it wasn't for my school offering that, it probably would have never happened. So...I don't know, does that answer your question?

Researcher: Yeah, that was great. And those sound like really positive memories, thank you.

Wilbur: Yeah, definitely! I mean I can't even remember anything...well, I don't want to say anything negative, but um, ya know, when I was in the high school band...or, not high school, I'm sorry, it was the elementary school band, I was in the percussion, so playing I was drums and stuff and I wouldn't say that I was very confident at it. And I do remember there was one time that we were practicing, and I kept messing up the same part and she would stop the whole band to ask me why I keep messing that up.

Researcher: Aww

Wilbur: So that was kinda like..."eh, ah, aw" And I kinda just...the next day I was like, "yeah, I don't wanna do that anymore."

Researcher: Yeah, it sounds like that discouraged you from continuing.

Wilbur: Yeah, I would say it did. But, I wouldn't say I was really into it anyway. Ya know what I mean?

Researcher: That's fair.

Wilbur: I mean I don't think really it was gonna take much for me to uh...ya know, decide to not do it anymore. But on the flip side of that, ya know, if there were some type of, this is hypothetical, but if there was some type of super positive thing that happened while I was playing it, maybe I would have stayed in it. I don't know. But...not that that was that bad. I don't want to sound like the teacher was this horrible person that like ya know, yelled at me in front of everybody. It wasn't like that, but it was just like, ya know, it was kinda of like an embarrassment moment and that kinda always stuck with me. But...

Researcher: Wow.

Wilbur: Yeah.

Researcher: Alright, well thank you. That was a fantastic answer! Alright, uh, next one. Focusing more on elementary music, what do you think the purpose of elementary music instruction is? You kind of said it a little bit, but...

Wilbur: The purpose of it...well, I mean obviously the purpose would be to expose younger kids to um, music and ya know, what that could do. I would just imagine a kid like being expos-, if a kid wasn't exposed to music, there might be parts of their brain or abilities that wouldn't be um, engaged, I guess, without it. I mean, not that every kid's gonna have some type of musical bone in their body, but ya know, if the ones that do and if they can identify it early on, that's just a good thing, I would say. Umm...I mean, I think it's like, aside from just being *musical*, like if you're not a musical kid or musical person and you're that young and you're going into a music class, it could help you kind of like explore your side of, uh, being able to like open yourself up. Like, if you're going to experience something you've never seen before, it might make you open up and you'll like sing in front of a lot of people or play something in front of a lot of people. And other people maybe won't do that. I don't know. I feel like it's just exposure, like, exposing new things to a younger generation that, in other ways they probably wouldn't see that stuff until they're older and maybe they missed out on something, ya know?

Researcher: For sure. Alright. Um, what do you think students learn about in general music? Elementary general music.

Wilbur: What do they learn about?

Researcher: Mhmm.

Wilbur: Well...just judging what I can remember, I mean, obviously you learn about different instruments. Obviously, you learn, ya know, songs that you probably have already sung with your parents and stuff, maybe new songs. Umm...I would say the biggest thing is different instruments and what they're used for. Actually, I do remember once when I was in an elementary music class, the teacher asked...ya know, we were talking about woodwinds and ya know, brass, all the different sections of the orchestra and she asked, "what section do you think the piano would be put in?" And I was like, "oh, that's easy! Strings." I held my hand up and was like, "strings, there's strings in there." And she was like, "actually no." And I'm like, "What? What are you talking about? Yeah, there is. There's strings. It's a string instrument." And then she was like, "it's actually percussion." And she told me why and my mind was blown. I was like, wow, that's awesome! I don't know, I thought that was crazy. So, I do remember that. So, I learned that when I was, ya know, um, in that age group. But, I think, I mean in general, I think they, it's just uh...ya know, showing kids that music isn't just this like, ya know, fun class. Like, it's actually...there's actually structure. There's actually whole entire worlds that you can be involved in, with music, ya know?

Researcher: Mhmm.

Wilbur: It isn't just, like, going to class and singing and messing around with some bongos. It's like there's an actual, ya know, serious part of it. It isn't just...not that you're not supposed to treat it as fun, but ya know, you can be very serious too. I think that's another light that's shed on music in general for young kids like that.

Researcher: For sure. So then, what types of activities do you think they experience in general music? What types of things do you think younger students do when they're in class?

Wilbur: Umm...I'm basing everything off of what I remember and what I hear my son doing. But, obviously they sing as a group, they sing together. I could see them doing like, a drum circle type of thing, right? Exploring different sounds that different instruments make and why. Umm...trying to think what else I remember from it.

[thinking]

Wilbur: I mean, they probably don't get too technical I would imagine. Like...I mean, my son takes piano lessons and that's pretty technical and he gets bored with that real quick. So I couldn't imagine being an elementary school music teacher trying to teach everybody...

Researcher: Oh yeah.

Wilbur: Ya know, technical notes and things like that. So, you gotta make it fun on some level so it keeps their attention. So, I would imagine things like little drum circles or a sing-a-longs and stuff that makes it fun for them would be the things that they learn.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Wilbur: Right? Am I right, or no?

Researcher: Yeah, you're right that you have to keep them engaged and moving. The little ones can't handle much sitting and listening.

Wilbur: Right.

Researcher: It's pretty fast-paced.

Wilbur: Right. Especially in a big group. Ya know, you can't teach a whole group technical things about instruments, right, and expect them to really retain it all.

Researcher: Yeah, retention is...a struggle I have, for sure. Just 'cause they learn so much throughout the school day and I find myself, like, repeating throughout...

Wilbur: Yeah

Researcher: ...the year or, I have them five years, so repeating over the course of all five years...

Wilbur: Yeah

Researcher: ...so that, by the time they go to middle school they're like, "we got this!"

Wilbur: Right, yeah. And you don't want them to walk away from the class like, "ughhh! Thank gosh that's over."

[chuckles]

Researcher: Yeah. We want positive impressions! [thumbs up, both smile] Okay...um, I think you already kind of touched on this, but feel free to add anything more or you can just pass if you'd like. But, how might students benefit from being exposed to music at a young age?

Wilbur: Right, yeah. I mean, I think that's probably the...I think that's the main purpose of it, ya know? Is that if...I think a big tragedy would be if kids weren't exposed at a young age. The opportunities that you would never know...if you didn't expose them to it. Like, the opportunities that maybe some kid had, and you never realized it and you realized it earlier on. The tragedy would be if you never did that and then he found out later on in life that he liked playing piano or he liked singing or something like that. Ya know, there's how many years went by that that person didn't wasn't able to, ya know, expose themselves or, ya know, actually do that type of thing.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Wilbur: So, yeah, I mean, I think it's should be a necessity. It should be looked at as something that without it, it's...we're worse off without it. So why would someone not want to do it? Um, but I...I think that it's uh...ya know, something that if...if a young kid gets exposed to it early

on, it could push them in a direction that they might not ever see themselves doing, or maybe it could just make them more confident in general.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Wilbur: It's just an outlet, I think.

Researcher: Yeah

Wilbur: And...for...especially for today...kids need as many outlets as they possibly can, so why not attempt to discover as many as you can for as many kids as possible. So, um...yeah, that's what I think. I think without...I think music class for young kids is a super important thing because it could give them insight into what they might want to do or just a way to destress or, ya know, that type of thing.

Researcher: Mhmm, yeah. It's like you're reading my mind! You nicely addressed the next question about should it be in the curriculum or not, so...

Wilbur: Whaaat. Of course, I think so. For sure.

Researcher: Yeah

Wilbur: Sometimes I hate when I hear people say something like, "Oh, it's just art class" or "it's just music class, whatever." It's like, "okay, well, it's just math class. Can we blow that off too?" Ya know?

[chuckles]

Researcher: Yeah, and that is a big reason why I am doing this research! That's where it all started, so...

Wilbur: Right. Cool!

### Case Study Three: Angel's Interview

Researcher: First question: can you share a little bit about your musical experiences growing up?

Angel: Uh, I took music class in school growing up and I was raised by my grandmother, so everything was old school R & B. Temptations, Aretha Franklin, Four Top, stuff like that.

Researcher: Nice!

Angel: Yeah, so I became a...as I grew up it kinda stayed in that same genre: R & B, Calvin Richardson, stuff of that nature. Chris Brown, Mary J. Blige. That's pretty much what I raised the kids up on.

Researcher: Cool...Do you remember anything specific from your elementary music education?

Angel: Um, they well...even at a young age they taught us...they were trying to teach us to read music. But ya know, we were little kids. We had band. We had choir. A lot of participation, so it was really good actually!

Researcher: Good!

Angel: Yeah.

Researcher: What would you say was your favorite part of your elementary music education?

Angel: Learning the Christmas carols.

Researcher: Nice!

Angel: Learning the Christmas carols, yeah. Actually, being taught to learn, ya know, having a music teacher to take the time to teach us the Christmas carols and how they sounded, um...played in different genres. So, we would hear like, The Temptations, um...not "Let it Snow..."um... [thinking] "Silent Night!" There ya go! Yes. [chuckles] But then we also heard Bill Cosby's "Merry Christmas Mama," which was a little different from that. Uh, we heard Classical Christmas music, Country Christmas music...She tried to teach us a little bit of everything. Like I said, I was raised in an R & B household, so I kinda always swayed towards...yeah.

Researcher: Yeah...it's good being exposed to the different genres though.

Angel: Yeah, it is. It gives you an outlook on the different sounds that are out there and just, you know that everything isn't the same. It gives you a chance to find out where stuff was based from also.

Researcher: For sure. Okay, um, what do you think the purpose of elementary music education is?

Angel: It gives all kids a chance to express themselves in a different manner. So, if you don't like one thing, you can...you know, another kid is more willing to learn from a different kid about why they like a particular song and the way it's being played versus trying to learn that from an adult.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: So, one kid may not like R & B, one kid may not like Rock, one kid may not like Classical. But, I think my seven-year-old would appreciate his friend telling him, "well, I like it because my dad plays it like this. Just listen to it." And they get a chance to explain it to their friend the way their parent explained it to them.

Researcher: Mhmm. What do you think students learn about in elementary general music?

Angel: An attempt at learning to read the music.

[chuckles]

Angel: What sounds the different notes make by themselves before they're put together. I would think that 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level the only thing that they could honestly teach them is...you know, what this note means and how it sounds and what this note means and how it sounds. And it'll take them a whole semester to learn the different notes from one song. But once the teacher puts that whole thing together, the kids can appreciate from beginning to end what they've learned because they've been...the teacher was able to take the time to show them step-by-step, instead of just forcing it on them and making them research it themselves. Find out where the original song came from, but that that beat is like, 1000 years old, where, how the Hell am I supposed to know that?

Researcher: Right? Uh, what activities do you think students experience in general music?

Angel: Umm...basic instruments. So, everything from the triangle to the saxophone to the flute to drums. All the instruments that are not allowed to come into my house.

[laughter]

Angel: Umm...I don't know, hand beats. Because I know that you're taught when you, when you try out for band, they beat the table and they want you to repeat it back to them. So, they're trying to see where you're...they're taught rhythm.

Researcher: Yup.

Angel: They're taught rhythm, yeah.

Researcher: Good. Um, how might students benefit from being exposed to music at a young age?

Angel: I would say if you had a class of at least 20, at least 18 of them are paying attention. There's always going to be that one or two where music don't really interest them. But, those would be the one or two where they're more interested in sports, or they're more interested in anything else...art, or something of that nature. Music doesn't interest every person. It's a...music is a rhythm to your body, it's a feel, it's a motion, it's a movement.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: Some people just don't have it. Some people just...or, it's not that they don't have it, they may just not appreciate it at a young age and it takes them awhile to kind of catch on to find out what they do and don't like.

Researcher: Mhmm. So, would you say...the students that do enjoy music, what would be the advantage for them of learning about this avenue at a young age?

Angel: [thinking] well, I've...I've always said that music...it soothes the savage beast. And that's a real thing.

Researcher: Yeah, I like that.

Angel: That's a real thing. And, even at such a young age, you know, if your kid is hyper but you can play their favorite song and it'll calm them down a little bit. They don't even realize what's actually happening to them, but as they get older they'll know, "well, this person just made me mad. I'm about to turn my music on."

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: And it's kind of programmed into them and they don't even realize it because it's been programmed into them from such a young age that a song, a *good* song, will calm your soul.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: A good song will make you forget about all of the bad things that happened at work today. All the stupid things your significant other said. [chuckles] All the stupid things that...you're looking at your friends like, "who raised you?" [pause] The question marks we have in our head sometimes a great song will just knock all of them out because now we're thinking about a great memory that's attached to that song.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: And that really starts at a very young age. I have a thirteen-year-old and we used to take him to my grandmother's house, which was his great-grandmother. So, that's who raised me. Her favorite song was this song called "Shotgun." And it starts out with um, drums, a horn, a saxophone, and a really good bass. Gotta listen to it, it's a really great song. And every time he hears that song since she's passed away, all he says to me is, "I remember when I used to go to

my grandma's house and we would listen to this song." But, it gives him great memories, not sad ones.

Researcher: Right.

Angel: So, yeah. Any...I feel like, the younger they are benefiting from the good parts of music it'll sway them from...I don't think there really is a bad part of music. [pause] Eh...not really, no. Not really. Except head-banger rock music. That gives me a headache.

[laughter]

Angel: I think that gives everybody a headache.

[laughter]

Researcher: Yeah, I love all of that. Music is so powerful...

Angel: It is.

Researcher: ...and whether they like music, whether they don't like music, I agree with you that it can help soothe their soul. It's just naturally ingrained, it's part of our instincts, it's amazing really.

Angel: Yeah, it really is. When you hear a Christmas song, you automatically are turned on to the mood. You want to give your money away.

[laughter]

Angel: It's amazing how a song will do that!

[laughter]

Researcher: I feel like they write it a certain way to give you that certain idea and...

Angel: Yup! You hear Ed Sheeran, you instantly think about love.

Researcher: Yeah

Angel: Yeah. You hear The Temptations and the Four Tops, instantly start tapping your foot and snapping your fingers and moving your head...yeah! You'd be amazing to what music does to any and everybody. Music is what makes parties great!

Researcher: Yeah, I agree. It's everywhere in our lives too, which is...

Angel: It is, even in video games. [annoyed face]

Researcher: Yes.

[laughter]

Researcher: Alright...um, do you believe that music should be included in the elementary school curriculum? Why or why not?

Angel: I do. I really believe that music is one of the things that they should leave in elementary curriculum. One: it'll break up the monotony of a hard day for a kid. It gives them something to look forward to, especially if music is that thing that helps them express themselves better. Some kids look forward to art, some kids look forward to gym, some kids look forward to music. You'll find that, even at a young age, if they can learn the music, they've started from the bottom, so by the time they're 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, grade and they want to try out for band, there's nothing that that teacher probably could potentially teach them about the basics because they were already taught that. They've already mastered that part. Now it's time for you as a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade music teacher to challenge me. Now it's your turn to put this challenge in me. Don't start me at the beginning because I know the beginning.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: My basic teacher, my basic elementary teacher taught me the basics. It gives them a challenge, it gives them something more than math, and reading, and science, and English. But, you can also put math, and reading, and science, and English to music.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: As a kid, my favorite song was the "Conjunction Junction" song.

Researcher: Yes!

[laughter]

Angel: So, I know that you can teach English through music. When I graduated college, I was taking Honor's English classes.

Researcher: Wow.

Angel: It...it was a powerful tool that was learned by watching a kid cartoon teaching me English based through a musical cartoon.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: I thought it was great. As a kid I thought...I still know that song right now and I'm 44-years-old. I still know that song. It's crazy!

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah and I think a lot of...this could open other teacher's eyes as to the power of music. It's memorable. Even just making up a little rap or a little song to help kids with their math or like you said, English, would be huge. So...I think getting back to that, the School House Rock era.

Angel: People are so quick to give up on the basics, but the basics is the foundation of everything.

Researcher: Mhmm.

Angel: And you're trying to skip over the basics and go straight to the end of the alphabet, but if you don't teach me A, B, and C, I'm never gonna learn X, Y, and Z because you skipped all the other stuff. How do I know what that means because you skipped over that part and tried to go straight to that part, I don't know what you're talking about.

*Personal conversation from 14:25 to 17:35, omitted due to lack of relevance*

Angel: Because they want to skip over the basics and you should never skip over the basics. It's fun to teach me Mozart, but who the Hell was Mozart? If I don't know who he was, why does it matter that he created this music? Why do I care?

Researcher: Exactly.

Angel: But if you teach me about him and give me some background, maybe I'll understand that he was like, nine when he wrote this. Like, "Oh great! I'm nine, I could write a song!" That's encouraging for a kid.