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Placed-Based Music Education: A Case Study of a Rural Canadian School

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The purpose of this research is to examine how one music education program strengthens students' sense of place. Enhancing students' understanding of the people and places that surround them is integral in creating 21st century citizens. Making music allows people to be part of their culture; and engaging in group music-making activities provides opportunities to strengthen relationships. Using a case study methodology, this research profiles the music program in one rural Canadian community. Using interview, questionnaire and observation data from teachers, students, and parents the extent to which the ensembles, repertoire, class activities and performance opportunities helped students connect to others were examined. Opportunities provided in music were unique in this community and allowed students to gain musical and interpersonal skills that enabled them to connect to both the classroom, local and provincial community.

Keywords: rural education, place-based education, secondary school

The purpose of the research study was to examine the features of music education programs in rural Canadian communities. Lack of funds, instructional time, and teachers with appropriate backgrounds, are challenges facing music education in Canada (Hill Strategies 2010; People for Education 2013). Many believe that music programs are most viable in large urban centres where there are funds to support the hiring of specialist music teachers and/or buy expensive instruments. Rural centres, many assume, cannot afford the luxury of a music program. A survey of Ontario schools found that 62% of schools in the Greater Toronto Area have formally-trained music teachers while in only 32% of elementary schools in eastern Ontario and 26% of elementary schools in northern Ontario employ music teachers with this background (People for Education 2013). This finding suggests that in Canada's most popu-

lous province, urban students are more likely to receive music education from a teacher with a formal music background, while those in rural and remote areas, such as the North, are less likely to have access to a teacher with this background. However, in other provinces there seems to be more equitable access to specialist music teachers. A survey of 1,204 schools across Canada conducted for the Music Education Coalition of Canada found that Manitoba, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Alberta showed strong support for music education, as evidenced by appropriate funding, specialist teachers who have formal education in music, appropriate instruments and space, as well as supportive principals and teachers (Hill Strategies, 2010). Thus rural music programs may be thriving in parts of Canada.

Similarly, Hunt (2009) interviewed nine adults, including music teachers, administrators, and parents involved in urban and rural music programs to elicit their perceptions and experiences school music programs in rural and urban programs in the USA. She found that rural teachers had unique experiences compared to their urban counterparts. In particular, rural teachers were encouraged to have their students perform in the community because community support was an important aspect of attracting students into the programs. The rural music programs were largely promoted through performance, which was viewed as an important way to emphasize the importance of the music programs' relevance to their respective communities. Some rural teachers interviewed indicated that the support for or attention on the music program could be suffocating, but, at the same time, they valued the relationships that were established with their students that allowed them to see the students emerge as musicians.

Wilcox (2005) documented the importance and value of establishing long-term relationships with students by describing the life of a rural American music teacher who provided music instruction. Developing a supportive relationship with students, community members, and administrative personnel was integral to the development of a music program that was valued by students and community alike. Findings from these studies exemplify some of the supports and constraints that are found in rural music programs: supportive communities, opportunities to develop long-term meaningful relationships with students and community members, teaching assignments that include a number of grades and classes, long hours, and few colleagues.

Bates (2011) argued that the music program in the rural school in which he

attended privileged presentational school musicing over participative school musicing and further acknowledged that the repertoire presented in the school context was not reflective of the music heard out of school. This disconnect between in-school and out-of school music is well documented in other research literature (e.g., Sloboda 2001; Jaffurs 2004). Regelski (2009) noted that “for most students, then, ‘school music’ is directly at odds with ‘real praxis’ (of many kinds: e.g., pop, church, ethnic, dance, music, etc.) that is usually an important feature of their ‘out-of-school’ lives” (72).

Some research has found that some genres became part of the students out of school experience after being exposed to it in a school context. Mercer (2012) documented an experience where music learned in school provided opportunities for students to become agents of change in their rural communities. In this study, the researcher/teacher documents how students in rural Newfoundland used online interactions to become more proficient at blues guitar and to connect with other people with similar interests. Students then shared the knowledge gained from their online interactions with their peers.

The body of research surrounding rural music education is small and more research is needed that examines the depth and breadth of music education programs in Canada. Music education research has been criticized for merely describing music programs rather than “ground[ing] theory and inform[ing] practice.” Sandra Stauffer (2009) suggested that curriculum research in music education needs to expand its scope to include the examination of social contexts and institutional priorities that impact music programs. She further suggested that the theoretical framework of place could guide such research. Accordingly, this study examines music education programs in rural Canadian contexts as experienced by teachers, students, and community members, and relies on place-based education as a theoretical framework. Research related to place-based education is explored in the following section.

Place-Based Education

Place-based education research suggests that our society consists primarily of relationships between and among people and places, and that our educational system should facilitate the development of positive relationships with the land as well as with others (Bowers 1995, 2001; Gradle 2007a, 2007b; Gruenewald and Smith 2008; Noddings 1984, 2002; Shevock 2015). A place is a space that

has meaning and emotion attached to it through our connections to the people and the spaces around us (Malpas 2009). Malpas (2009) suggested that our identity is intimately connected to our location, our place. This connection to place includes connection to the care of the natural world and the desire to remain part of this location. There is not the desire to live anywhere, but to live somewhere and feel at home within these surroundings and strengthen connections with these people (Corbett 2005).

Building identity is an iterative and recursive process as we shape our places and our places shape us. In this way, we are inextricably connected to place. Thus, if we are indeed inextricably linked to the places around us, the manner in which we educate our children must recognize that our actions and ideas affect our spaces and places, just as these spaces and places impact us. This emphasis on the local may seem counter to the need to educate children to be global citizens and thus to be mobile; however, Noddings (2005, 2007a, 2007b) argued that by emphasizing the local, we offer our youth the experience of caring for the things around them, which enhances their understanding that caring requires work, rather than just talk (Noddings 2005).

At the core of place-based learning is the emphasis on preparing students to live and flourish in their local community by becoming citizens who positively and respectfully relate to the places and people around them. By emphasizing that we live within a place, teachers make explicit the impact that our knowledge and decisions have on the places that surround us, and they help to create relationships between students and other agents within the community. In this way, education is not simply about learning facts or knowledge out of context, or about training a workforce. Rather, place-based education considers the development of community and the role that our knowledge, actions, decisions, and ideas have on the people and places that surround us. Theobald (1997) argued that currently, the purpose of school seems to be to accumulate knowledge, acting as a vehicle to transport kids to their future jobs. Arguably, the contents of the curriculum presuppose a middle-class life and preparation for urban-based jobs, which may negatively affect one's developing sense of place (Corbett 2006, 2007, 2013; Gibson 2008).

The aforementioned research on rural music programs both supports and challenges the role of education in rural communities. Research into rural music programs that highlight the long-term connections to teachers, connecting to the

community through concerts (e.g. Hunt 2009; Isbell 2005; Prest 2013) illuminate some of the principles lauded by place based theory. Other research profiling musical experiences in rural schools has demonstrated a disconnect between the repertoire that is privileged in schools and the music that is part of students' out-of-school lives, and also shown that the rehearsal structure with a presentational, rather than participatory, focus prevents students from developing music ideas with one another. Further, Mercer (2012) has shown how learning new styles (e.g., blues) allows students to share these ideas locally, thus broadening the musical landscape of the rural community. Together, these findings suggest that both the content of music programs and how students use their new knowledge/skills may influence their ability to connect to the people and places that surround them.

Exploring the extent that music education incorporates place-based ideals can also provide a model for integrating traditions and experiences that support the strengthening of students' sense of place (Brook, 2011; 2013). In many rural communities, the school is often the main social network for the community, and it therefore has a significant role in supporting the transmission of its cultural identity (Brook 2011; Cochrane 1981; Sher 1977). Music programs in these rural communities not only offer opportunities for students to become musicians, but also provide musical activities that include community members, thereby facilitating the development of reciprocal and interactive relationships among the music teacher, the students, and the community (Brook 2013; Hunt 2009, Isbell 2005; Prest 2013; Spring 2014; Wilcox 2005). These practices have the potential to impact positively both the students in the school as well as the community at large and the principles that underpin these experiences have the potential to inform the development of music education programs in other communities. Research is therefore needed to examine the features and infrastructures of these programs. This study begins to address this question and aims to begin to meet this need.

Method

The purpose of this case study (Yin 2009) was to characterize the nature of a school music program in one rural Canadian community, exploring how the program contributed to a sense of place for the students. Specifically, this study

aimed to examine features of the music program and its place within the local context, possibly supporting students' sense of place.

Three main research questions guided this study. Secondary research questions are embedded within them, as follows:

1. What are the features of each of the music programs and how do they interact with the local context?
2. What kinds of resources are required to support the music programs?
3. To what extent can place-based education theory describe the music programs and the interactions among and between the music program, the school, and the local and provincial communities?

Community Selection

Rural communities that enjoyed a reputation for outstanding music programs, as indicated by recommendations from other music teachers or community members, were recruited. Prior to recruitment, ethical clearance was received from Queen's University and the school district. Ethical clearance included permission to name the schools and the communities, which was requested for two reasons. First, naming the school and the community allowed me to present more detail about the community and discuss particular features that were associated with participants' sense of place. Second, it seemed unethical to suggest that it was possible to keep the identity of a place confidential when describing a small community that often only had one school and a well-known music program and when providing rich detail of the communities and the music programs. The teachers and principals were informed that their schools would be named. They were given the option of either having their names used in the description of the study or being identified by a pseudonym. Adults consented to having their names used in this study. The identity of the students remained confidential. Bella Coola, British Columbia, was selected, as it represented a primarily secondary music program (Grades 6-12) located in a non-metropolitan-adjacent rural community in a remote location.¹

Data Collection

In order to gather an understanding of the contents and context of this music program, data were gathered from teachers, students, and parents using interviews, observations, and questionnaires during a site visit. I interviewed Steve, the music teacher, and Jeremy, the principal, individually. Two focus groups were

conducted in which the ideas and experiences of 13 students registered in the secondary music program were gathered. I also observed music classes for four days. Questionnaires were distributed to students in the music program as well as their parents. During the site visits, I travelled around the community and collected relevant documents such as concert programs and pertinent newspaper articles and books written about the community.² These documents added richness to my understanding of both the music program and the community.

Data Analysis

Observational data, open-ended questionnaire data, and verbatim transcript data were uploaded into the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti (Version 5.5) (Muhr 2007). Analysis procedures for the qualitative data consisted of coding the data for emergent themes as well as for *a priori* themes combed from music education curricula and place-based education literature. The codes were grouped into families and I examined the co-occurrence between the various family themes, which allowed me to examine their interactions. For example, I examined how the music features related to the students' sense of place. This analysis resulted in a rich picture of the music programs and how the experiences in these programs enhanced participants' sense of place. These themes structure the Findings section of this paper.

To ensure trustworthiness of the data, two types of triangulation were employed. Methodological triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple data-collection tools, including observations, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups (Patton, 2002). While the teachers' perceptions of the music program were the primary focus, data triangulation supported these perceptions by gaining perspectives of other stakeholders, including the students and community members in each of the rural communities. Investigator triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple researchers when analyzing data. Another researcher, who was familiar with music and rural education, read my analysis and confirmed the coding of the transcripts of one teacher and one principal, as well as one focus-group interview. Any anomalies between the codes were discussed and a consensus was reached. Each of these strategies increased the trustworthiness of this study's findings.

Findings

Connecting to the Bella Coola Valley

The Bella Coola Valley is located off the Central Coast of British Columbia, Canada and encompasses the villages of Bella Coola and Hagensbourg. The Valley has long been home to the Nuxalk people, and was settled by Europeans in the late 1800s. The people in this community rely primarily on its natural resources for economic and leisure activities. Most people have a long-standing commitment to remaining in this region as evidenced by the fact that most parent respondents were born in the province and adult and students respondents indicated that they hoped to remain in this region for the next several years. Similarly, when students were asked where they see themselves living as adults, they named this community or its surrounding places.

People in this area value their relationships with one other and work hard to preserve their individual and collective history and to maintain the integrity of the land as they do their work. Leisure activities often take place outdoors, as many adults and children enjoy fishing or hiking in their spare time. Many students enjoyed playing outside at their homes, building forts, jumping on trampolines, biking, or horseback riding. This finding underscores the notion that students in rural areas are connected to nature. Students were also engaging in activities that are common to youth across Canada: watching TV, talking on the phone, chatting, and playing computer or video games.

Students also indicated that they sang and made up music in their free time alone or with others. For example, a guitarist and two percussionists in the Senior Jazz Band had also formed their own rock band. “My band, a 3-piece high school rock band ... We do a bunch of our own compositions. Play when we can, a couple of school dances. Play for fun mostly” (Senior Band student). Another Senior Band Member also mentioned that she played in a band out of school “I’ve got my own band, I play with my grandpa, my dad, [and] my mom.” Similarly, students in the Junior Band also spoke about playing their instruments with family members and their friends. For example, one person noted: “[My dad] plays the guitar and his friend plays the harmonica and his other friend plays the drums and I play the clarinet.”

Music was a prominent pastime: some adults played a musical instrument or sang, but most preferred to listen to music. Several Nuxalk carvers and artists living in the area participated in the traditional ceremonies in the area.

The School

There is one public high school (Grades 6-12) in the area that has an enrollment of 80 students. This school population allowed for eight full-time teaching positions, and a combination of 13 full- and part-time teachers worked at this school. The school offered a varied of elective courses including carving, Aboriginal education, home-economics, drama, and music. The inclusion of electives is dependent on both staff knowledge and the needs of the community for students to learn skills outside of the required content areas. Having a teacher who is able to teach music was important to principal and the parents. “[W]e can only offer so many electives,” noted Jeremy, the principal, “so it’s integral in being able to offer it as an elective.”

Similarly, as one parent commented, having music in the school was important to allow students to develop their music abilities in order to enjoy life. As one parent noted, “[through music education, students are] able to honor gifts you are given and to learn and enjoy life.” Another parent stated that, “[music provides] a creative outlet and forms strong relationship on solid values.”

The school aims to meet the divergent needs of the community by balancing the local culture and the delivery of provincially mandated curricula. Balancing these two sometimes divergent interests, especially with only a limited budget, requires careful use of human resources, which most often results in combined grades for elective classes. This is the case for the music program, and there was a concerted effort by the principal to ensure that music remained part of the curriculum.

The big thing is making sure that we have space in the timetable.... [when] enrolment goes down, that means that we have to use Steve’s time to cover off other subjects.... For example, next year we’re looking at Band 6-10, which we’ve never tried before, but now I need Steve to teach Grade 8 Math because I’m losing part of the Math teacher, so, you have to pick up certain things, so that’s a big struggle making sure it still survives. (Jeremy, principal)

The secondary music program is open to all students in the school, regardless of their playing background. Given the small number of students in the school and the value of having a music education, it is both irrelevant and against the values of the community to hold auditions for entrance into the program. Steve explains, “[T]here are no auditions here. There’s the one band and if you want, you’re in.” Students in Grades 6-12 are combined into just two classes, Junior

Band and Senior Band and of the 80 students in the high school, 35 are enrolled in one of the Band Classes.

The Music Program

The music program provides the main source of music instruction for the community as students learn instruments as they perform in an ensemble. The course is structured around performance, with some opportunities to compose music and to gain a deeper understanding of music history.

Connecting Within a Small Ensemble

The small size of each of these Bands impacts the opportunities for the students in terms of how they go about learning their instruments and the types of musical experiences that they have. There are 25 students in the Junior Band, which includes students who have just begun playing their instrument as well as those who have been playing for up to 5 years. Within this ensemble, the class works as a collective, where everyone has a role in one another's progress; sometimes, this role is explicit, as evidenced through the mentoring process, but at other times it is a byproduct of moving together, where the rate of progress is about the pace of the majority of players. Supporting learning for students' diverse needs within the performance-based context of a concert band is difficult as Steve attempts to find repertoire that can be challenging to all levels. Therefore, students are often called upon to help one another, with the more experienced students providing advice to the novices. This mentorship is an example of the opportunity that is given to students to use their skills and knowledge to help one another. Students interacting in this way not only develop their musical skills but also strengthen their relationships with their fellow musicians. However, this situation makes it difficult for students who want to progress faster than the collective as well as for those who move more slowly. The differences in years of experience (from 0 to 5) result in divergent skill levels within the ensemble. As one student observed:

I'm in Grade 8, and I've been playing in the red book for 5 years. And there's these little kids, and we have to help them. So we have to keep playing in the red book. It's kind of frustrating [because] we want to move on to something harder. And we haven't done that yet.

The teacher recognizes this dilemma. "If a student is interested in taking trumpet to the next level, there are really no options for them to [do] it." Students who develop proficiencies cannot set the pace of the class; thus they must pursue

additional learning on their own. Although there are scholarships for students to go to music camps, few take advantage of this opportunity.

Although some students catch on quickly to the concepts and skills presented in class, there are also those who are not engaged in this process. While most students are in this program to make music; for some even attending school itself is difficult. The teacher attempts to make allowances for these students and is sensitive to individual issues. He said:

[O]ut of the 25 kids in the band, 22 or 20 are putting in a pretty solid effort and reporting back practice time and remembering their instrument every class. And there will be five that just kind of linger in the room and are staying out of trouble. But they're absent a lot, and [just] having them in the room, I know is a good thing.... [Y]ou know, [I tell them] "I'm happy you're here, so, stand behind your instrument and pay attention and join in when you can. And I'll get back and help when I can, and I'm available at lunch..."

The variation of commitment levels can limit the type of interactions that can occur within the rehearsal. Being responsible to the ensemble and understanding their role within the group allows students to strengthen their sense of place. At the same time, failure to commit to the ensemble has implications for others. Steve understands that, for some, just coming to school is a goal in and of itself and, for these students, learning a musical instrument happens at a different rate and pace. This understanding of the variation in community needs contributes to his understanding of both the musical and social needs of his students and reinforces the idea that all are welcome in this program.

Sharing Ideas through Musical Expression and Improvisation

A respectful rapport has been established in this program, where students feel free to express their ideas, allowing for new possibilities, such as new or deepened friendships or feelings about belonging at school, to emerge through their social interactions. For example, during the rehearsals I observed, Steve was always striving to allow students to have a voice. This tendency was demonstrated by asking students to name particular pieces they wanted to play. When students are playing jazz charts, space for improvisation is indicated in the score. Steve allows students to suggest pieces they want to practice, giving space for them to improvise musical ideas within a particular piece.

The Senior Band is also small in size with 16 students in this class. However, the characteristics for this ensemble are different than the Junior Band as stu-

dents in this class have similar skill levels: all have gained some experience playing their instruments, working within an ensemble, and reading music. This common skill level and understanding of the rehearsal process is indicative of a greater level of coherence among students in the ensemble, which then can allow for a common goal of focusing more on musical items. This ensemble has made the switch to playing more jazz music that includes improvised soloing. The focus on jazz charts allows students the opportunities to improvise; often more than one musician will improvise within a piece. Through the improvisation process, students can create their own ideas, which naturally influence the ideas of others in the ensemble. One musician enthused, “I really like [improvising]. I just make it up until it sounds bad. You can make it up on the spot and [then] go back and make changes.” This type of music-making allows the students to use their musical knowledge, generating their own ideas that are explored through sound and valued by others. This notion of improvisation as a means of generating new ideas is supported by other scholars who examine how students generate new ideas through improvisation (Green 2013; MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell 2012).

In addition to opportunities to create their own music through improvisation, students inject their own expressive ideas while performing notated music. One of the benefits of a small program is that playing in the ensemble demands a level of responsibility and allows for a level of expressivity that is highly visible within the ensemble. This commitment to the ensemble is evident in their expressive playing as the teacher explained:

[M]y kids play with more heart than any other band out there—that’s an adjudicator comment. [There are] two trumpets [in the ensemble]; you can’t hide. I have one clarinet; you can’t hide. And so these kids need to know their parts and they need to play with authority. They are the [whole] section. If I have an alto saxophone, she’s the section. So they can’t hide behind a third or a fourth. [The students] are really there for the music.

The interdependence that is required for this ensemble along with the number of years that Steve spends with his students creates the conditions for rich relationships to be formed. As the only music teacher in the public schools, Steve works with his students for several years, and beyond the classroom hours, he spends time with them in performance and travelling. As Steve explained:

They’re with me from Grade 5 to Grade 12, [which includes] 7 or 8 years of classes, plus four or five trips [that are] 4 or 5 days long, so we get a lot of connection going in there, [as well as during] different fund-raising events [and] our concert. Things that we do together really build on [our relationship].

Repertoire

Music is chosen from the school's repertoire collection and from the method book. The pieces include traditional and contemporary concert band repertoire, which consists of music written specifically for this type of ensemble that incorporates elements from different types of music. For example, the Junior Band plays contemporary repertoire for young concert band, which includes original work for this ensemble (e.g., *The Tempest* by Smith); they were also learning an arrangement of *Rock Around the Clock*. The Senior Band repertoire is a combination of standard jazz charts, such as *Jumpin' at the Woodside* by Count Basie as well as jazz repertoire composed for beginning or intermediate jazz bands, such as *Burritos to Go* by Lopez. Selection is based on what is technically feasible and what is interesting to play. Students' interests reflect their personal preference and represent a broadening of musical genres.

The repertoire listed above is not representative of the Bella Coola students' ethnic background. For example, while many have a Norwegian heritage, Norwegian music is not part of the program. Further, students receive three hours a week of instruction from an Aboriginal Education teacher about the Nuxalk culture, which includes the language, the culture, and the songs and dances. There has been some discussion among some teachers to work together to incorporate ideas from different subject areas. Steve has attempted to collaborate with the Aboriginal Education teacher by having a clarinetist and oboist from the band play Aboriginal dance music, mimicking the traditional reed box instrument that was originally used to accompany the dancers. However, these teachers' other responsibilities prevented them from exploring the idea of having a concert featuring the band playing Aboriginal dance music.

Composition

Throughout the year, students have opportunities to compose music and study composers. Composition activities include writing a jingle for a TV or radio ad and examining the life of a composer of their choice. The compositional activities allow students to apply their musical skills in a new way within a format that is common to them. It also underlies that notion that their musical ideas are valued and can be explored in this educational context.

Performances

Through participation in school-based concerts, students interact with the community at large; families, friends, and neighbors act as both organizers and audience members. While these interactions are not as strong as those that occur among students within the ensembles, they are still important as they serve to reinforce and show appreciation for the students' efforts. For example, the All School Band Concert involves ensembles from the public schools (elementary and secondary), private school, and Nuxalk school in the area. This event provided an opportunity for all the students in the community to participate in a shared experience and for the people in the community to be entertained while supporting their young people. As one parent noted, these concerts "bring the community together," and another recognized that these concerts allowed students to "communicate with other schools." Steve described a community concert:

That All Schools Concert, held at Lobelco Hall, was packed. It was funny because the lady that rented us the hall [said], "Oh you'll never fill the hall," and it was. It was absolutely packed. Just about every student in the valley, K-12, that was involved in music was in there. We had a mass band and a mass choir. And everybody [showed-up], brought their family and clapped, and wanted it to happen again next year. (Steve, music teacher)

The participation of all the schools and all the students in the community allowed for unique musical interactions; all of the instrumentalists played pieces together. As participants in a large ensemble, students were able to interact with different people and work together to make the big sounds that are unattainable as individuals or even within their individual groups. As Steve observed:

Because it's a small program, you know, my senior band's usually 16 kids. It is pretty tough to get the right instrumentation. And even though the younger kids can't play as well technically, with the [repertoire] we chose, we sounded like a big Concert Band. And it's a good clean sound and I think that everybody gets a thrill out of that.

The Senior Band participates in festivals outside of the Valley. Each year, this ensemble makes a trip to a provincial festival, usually located on Vancouver Island or in Southern British Columbia. Students pay \$150 each and then the remaining costs for transportation and accommodation are covered by fundraising events such as selling wood and pizza sales. Affording travel can be a barrier preventing students to traveling to other places, and thus, reducing the costs to participate in provincial activities and school-based fundraising initiatives are important. Costs were further reduced when the school started taking school

buses on the trip rather than coaches. During the time of data collection, the Senior Band had returned from Nanaimo, BC, where their ensemble performed for an adjudicator who, as part of the adjudication process, gave them a short workshop. Both Steve and the students spoke highly of this experience, and some students even mentioned it as the highlight of their music experiences. They spoke of how helpful the information they received from the adjudicator was to them. This exchange of ideas, first with the ensemble performing, and then hearing suggestions about new and different ways to play, exemplifies how this experience creates opportunities for diverse ideas and to experience things they would have otherwise not encountered. As one of the students explained, “[The adjudicators] are extremely helpful. [T]hey gave us good feedback and there’s a lot of stuff to work on.” In addition, the students attended a live concert; during this past trip, the concert was by a jazz trio. Again, attendance at this concert presents opportunities for the students to hear and see new musical ideas and techniques. “[M]y favorite part of the trip was] watching the jazz professionals play,” explained one student. “The bass was good. The bass was really good.” Students are eager to know more and by attending these events their musical skills are enhanced as is their motivation to keep improving. Their participation in such events also allows them to be ambassadors of their community to others.

Here, as Mercer (2012) noted, we see the students wanting to develop their musical skills and taking advantage of all resources to gain these skills. Later these students can apply their new learning to playing music within the Valley and sharing their new knowledge with their peers. Unlike Bates (2011), there does not seem to be the same distinction between performance-based ensembles in school and participatory music outside of school. Rather the small size of the ensemble in the Junior Band and the improvisational aspect in the Senior band require students to be agents of creation and share their ideas with others. The Senior band is not solely directed by the teacher; rather, the teacher sets parameters and expects students to contribute their knowledge to help one another and contribute to the group sound. The students used the knowledge and skills learned in this music program in their own out of school music making activities, with their friends and family.

This trip was one of the few times that most had been to the Southern part of the province. They could interact with different surroundings and maneuver their way through urban landscapes, experiencing the traffic, menus, and bank machines. As the principal noted, “We have kids that have gone on trips and they didn’t know how to use an ATM machine. They know how to use a debit machine,

but they didn't know how to use a bank machine. We have one bank machine in town." The students live the urban life, for a short time, on these trips, which gives them a different lived experience. Travelling to other places provides experiences of other locations where they may have to maneuver in the near future.

By participating in a festival in a more urban community, the students begin to develop a provincial sense of place, and realize that they also have a place within a provincial or national music festival. It would seem that a provincial festival would want to include all residents within its jurisdiction, so having students being able to participate and connect with people from other places in BC was important to students, teachers, and parents. Further, students interested in post-secondary education would need to travel outside the Bella Coola valley to a larger community in the province. Thus, the school and parents wanted to provide opportunities for students to understand how they might fit in these places. Having the opportunity to taken experiences from one place and adapt or alter them for another context important. As one parent noted "Having a music program makes it possible for rural communities to be able to participate outside of the valley." The desire to be part of both the local and the provincial community underscores how our sense of place can be nested, that is, we belong to several places that are distinct, yet not mutually exclusive. In this way, students want to connect to one another in their local community and feel important by another community (e.g., provincial community, national community). The skills and knowledge that students possess can have value and be celebrated in more than one place. Similarly, students, teachers, and parents want their students to connect to those within their province and to be recognized for their ideas and abilities in this larger context.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research case study was to characterize the nature of school music programs in one rural Canadian community, exploring how the programs contributed to a sense of place for the students. Specifically, this study aimed to examine features of the music program, the types of resources that supported this program, and the extent to which place-based education theory can describe the program and the interactions among and between the program, the school, and the local and provincial communities.

How the Features of the Music Program Interact with the Local Context

The use of student expertise helped define these music programs as place-based, since place-based programs promote finding assets within the community, and emphasize the importance of interdependence (Brook 2013; Gruenewald and Smith 2008; Hunt 2009; Isbell 2005; Wilcox 2005; Prest 2013; Spring 2014). In Bella Coola, the Band program combined grades, wherein experienced students were required to help novice students develop their technique. The improvisatory nature of the jazz music in the Senior Band supported the exchange of ideas between students, as they explored musical ideas influenced, in part, by their peers' music making. Working in small groups creating musical elements allowed ideas to be shared among students, and for these ideas to be incorporated into the musical artifacts. In this way, students' ideas were used to enhance the repertoire. The use of students' ideas and knowledge to support others and to enhance the musical product strengthened their interrelationships and created a positive association between the students and the program. This idea of performance underscores findings from some previous research on rural music education, but perhaps blurs the line between participatory and presentational performance (Bates, 2011). In Bella Coola the school ensembles exhibited both performance and participatory attributes. While the bands were presentational in the sense that one group (the band) performed for another (the community), the tone of the rehearsal process was participatory as all students were welcome, students suggested pieces and improvised during the rehearsals. The students were active agents in the learning process as they prepared for performance. These performances brought the community to the school and also provided a community tradition. Similar to the findings by other research in rural music education, where performances were an important component of the rural music programs and were, in and of themselves, cultural artifacts. Through these events, students in Bella Coola came to realize that their musical abilities are respected and appreciated, thus deepening their sense of place. In this sense, the band program was not merely preparing students for the future, but were providing opportunities for them to contribute to their present contexts.

Previous research has indicated that performance demands have prevented teachers from pursuing perhaps more participatory music-making (Hunt 2009; Isbell 2005; Wilcox 2005; Spring 2014). Findings from this research study illuminate how various musical activities allowed the teacher to align pedagogical aims with performance expectations. By performing, students showcase their

abilities to the community, establishing their roles in the community as musicians, and thereby strengthening students' sense of belonging within the communities. Students were cognizant of the support that audiences provided, and they appreciated their interest in them. As well, for many parents, these concerts provided opportunities for them to come to the school. The schools gained a presence in these communities through these events where students' learning contributed to the local culture by providing enjoyment for others.

Students also applied their school musical experiences in their leisure time by playing music with friends and/or family. One student ensemble played for other school events, while other students played with family members. This finding illuminates how the instrumental skills developed in the music program aligned to the music-making in the community and allow them to connect with others through music.

The Senior Band travels to Southern British Columbia annually to attend Band festivals. They perform and are adjudicated at these events, listen to others play, and experience other areas of the province. These trips enhance relationships among the band members through the shared experiences of travelling and performing. They also allow students to experience and contribute to the musical culture of another near-by community. This experience allows the band members to be ambassadors of their community in other places, and it enhances their understanding that what they do in remote Bella Coola also has a place in these urban areas within the province. Being able to participate in musical events in other parts of the province was a great asset to the community, who wanted their students to know that they could belong to both their rural and also be visible in a provincial context. The extent to which the school could focus on more locally based music (e.g., Nuxalk music) and still participate at the provincial or national level requires further investigation. The interest or extent to which provincial organizations recognize the music that is particular to various rural locations or support the smaller ensembles such as a 16-piece concert band in provincial festivals requires further investigation.

Place-based education theory

Place-based theory illuminated the lack of music that is germane to the ethnicities represented in this community. While classical music was not prominent, other Western musics formed the basis for the entire repertoire and like most music programs in Canada had little, if any, focus on non-Western musics. This

music program could not focus on transmitting Nuxalk music even though the teacher was supportive and interested in incorporating this repertoire. His reliance on other people made it impractical, however, to do so. Similarly, the instruments that were most readily available, as well as the professional development opportunities and music festival options, center on various Western musics. This lack of supporting structures for other music makes it difficult for teachers to incorporate non-Western musics and incorporate music that is pertinent to the history of the place.

Gruenewald and Smith (2008) acknowledged that place-based education must consider and incorporate diversity (Gruenewald 2003, 2008; Gruenewald and Smith 2008). The teacher, Steve, desired to acknowledge and support diverse ideas. However, his ability to incorporate diverse repertoire and traditions that were germane to the local place but different from universalized Western music was limited due to resources and limited understanding of the sacred practices associated with the performances of some of the music. Nevertheless, skills and ideas learned in the music class enhanced students' after-school activities. The skills learned in music class and performance advice gave students skills, and advice from the teacher supported students' participation in home-bands with friends and family. However, the extent to which this music program could support the transmission of traditional music was limited.

Learning repertoire and developing music-making skills allows students to experience and create traditions in a real way that can impact their present and future lives. Distance to other urban areas and limited resources were not limiting factors. The music education program was vital and essential, and the music program is highly valued for the opportunities that it provides to strengthen both the students and the community.

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About the Author

Julia Brook is an Assistant Professor of Music Education at the Dan School of Drama and Music, Queen's University. Julia grew up in rural Manitoba and began her teaching career in Brandon, Manitoba as an elementary music and studio piano teacher. Her primary research program examines the interactions between curriculum and community contexts, specifically in relation to the arts

and rural education. Julia's research has examined music education programs in rural areas in Canada, and has explored the educational experiences of self-taught Indigenous artists who grew up in Canada's North. Julia's research program also explores how children in an after-school music program learn music and the extent to which these musical experiences influence their sense of belonging and self-concept. Julia remains active as a collaborative pianist.

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Notes

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