

Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

I S S N 1 5 4 5 - 4 5 1 7

A refereed journal of the



Action for Change in Music Education

**Volume 15 Number 4
August 2016**

Rural Music Education Special Issue

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Digital Object Identifier

<http://dx.doi.org/10.22176/act15.4.76>

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The Power of Metaphor in Rural Music Education Research

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There are few studies that investigate rural music educators' lived experiences in relation to 'place', particularly from an Ontario, Canada context. Yet in small rural schools, the music program is often seen as the catalyst for interaction and bonding with community as music educators strive to build and foster student involvement and a sense of pride in relation to 'place.' In this study, four participants described the contexts of their elementary rural music education experiences using a literary and music metaphor to better express their attachment to place and the relationships they have developed with their students, school, and local community through music. Through their stories of lived experiences inspired by their metaphors, participants discussed the issues related to the multifacetedness of their teacher roles, the lack of a place-based curricular focus, the need for a rural voice, and the important role that music plays in their rural communities.

Keywords: rural music education, sense of place, metaphor, community, arts-informed, narrative stories

Place is a construct that influences and guides individual perspectives in relation to everyday lived experiences. It is important to consider, particularly in education, where schools are located in distinct areas and serve diverse communities. People react differently in contrasting environments. 'Places' shape and transform viewpoints and mold teacher and student perspectives. Studies that utilize an arts-informed approach using literary devices such as the metaphor may provide a creative and innovative approach to embody the lived experiences of music teachers who live and teach in these different 'places.' A metaphor is a descriptive image; it can be a word, phrase or musical composition that creates a mental picture or meaning. It is "a tool for explaining what teaching is

like, and for describing some of the less easily evoked parts of the teaching/learning context” (Dolloff 1999, 206). A metaphor often precipitates a story of experience, which further informs the writer and reader about connections at the classroom level and in communities in general. The resulting narrative account thus enhances the author’s metaphorical imagery through descriptive text.

Objectives

This study is based on a larger collaborative narrative research study (Spring 2014) of the lived experiences of four rural music educators, investigated through the conceptual framework of ‘sense of place.’ Collaborative narrative methodology is based on the philosophical perspectives of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Connelly and Clandinin (2006) with an emphasis on the importance of “personal, practical, and scholarly knowledge” (Beattie 2009, 29).

There are very few studies that investigate the importance of ‘place’ from Canadian rural music teacher perspectives, despite that in rural community schools, the music program is often seen as the catalyst for interaction and bonding (Brook 2011, Isbell 2005). In this study, four participants described the contexts of their elementary rural music education experiences in terms of a literary device—a metaphor or image—to better express their attachment to their ‘place’ where they teach, and the relationship they have with their students and school community. They provided two metaphors; the first is a music metaphor—a piece of music and/or performance that exemplifies their rural music education praxis from an arts-informed perspective. The second is a word or object that best represents their feelings in regard to their music education role in their rural community schools. Participants make connections they believe exist between their rural ‘place,’ their music education praxis, and their personal emotions and sentiments related to the teaching of music through their stories, precipitated by their choices of metaphors. Bennett (2004) makes an important link between narrative stories, the study of ‘place’ and music. He states, “Music plays an important role in the narrativization of place, that is, in the way in which people define their relation to local, everyday surrounds” (2). Three frameworks thus guide this study of ‘rural place’—the use of the metaphor from an arts-informed framework, narrative ways of knowing through the stories of lived experience, and ‘sense of place.’

Theoretical Frameworks

Arts Informed Framework: Metaphors of Experience

Literary devices such as images or metaphors are valuable tools to describe the educators' perspectives related to the classroom, the learning environment, and special moments and circumstances that occur in a general teaching context. Imagery is part of the narrative process that allows professionals to gain further and deeper understanding of their praxes. It provides an assistive tool as they come to understand more about their teaching praxis through critiquing and categorizing their work, in the daily delivery of curriculum, and in their day-to-day interactions with students. Clandinin (1985) describes imagery in a classroom situation as “an experiential construct” (367), which serves to connect practical experiences to theoretical concepts, and informs and enlightens a teacher about her own praxis. Metaphors from an arts-informed lens are very personal in nature, evoking passion and emotion that allow others to better understand how we feel. Eisner (2008) remarks that metaphors also “enable us to recognize our own feelings” (8) and learn from them. They act as a vehicle of inner discovery of the self and are a creative mode of expression. As a music educator chooses a particular composition to represent a context, a special sentiment, or link to her music education praxis, she may select a particular metaphor for its “artistry, design, creativity, tradition, emotion, narration characterization, culture, ideology, [and] community” (Elliott 1995, 158). She may also choose it for sentimental reasons, or as an image to recall a particularly moving, upsetting, or exciting event. A literary metaphor choice such as ‘allegiance’ and resulting story may describe the sentiment this author feels represents her interconnectedness she has built with her rural community. Likewise, describing a band performance through story that relates to a performance of a piece such as *Celtic Air and Dance*¹ provides the reader a context—a place or culture, and sentiment related to a creative event. The arts-informed metaphorical device is recounted in a narrative way.

Narrative Research as a Framework: Stories of Experience

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss narrative methodology as a framework, stating, “We keep in the foreground of our writing a narrative view of experience, with the participants’ and researchers’ narratives of experience situated and lived

out on storied landscapes as our theoretical framework” (60). They add that narrative “names the structured quality of experience to be studied and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study” (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 2). Individual stories of experience assist “in understanding the old and new feelings and emotions of individuals, simultaneously transforming and filling in the missing pieces of an individual’s life experiences” (Spring 2014, 36).

‘Sense of Place’

The ‘place’ where we live and teach influences our personal lives as well as our professional lives—our teaching praxis, pedagogical decisions, interpretation of curriculum, interactions with parents and students, and in our involvement with the local and global community. Yet ‘places’ are open to individual interpretation and can be considered a geographical, demographical, sociological, cultural, historical, or emotional construct. Gieryn (2000) states, “Place is remarkable and what makes it so is an unwindable spiral of material form and interpretive understandings or experiences” (471). Spring (2014) contends that, “Emotional experiences and sentimental attachments make places noteworthy.” In order to have a ‘sense of place,’ a person must have some kind of personal experience or emotion attached to it. The music educator is able to facilitate a ‘sense of place’ in her students, parents, and local community through the study and performance of music. They can introduce students to the global community, and also promote the “global sense of the local, a global sense of place” (Ladson-Billings 2009, 9). The music educator is therefore well equipped through the study and performance of music to facilitate a ‘sense of place’ in her students, parents, and local community.

Methodology

Background Context

The participants are four rural music educators who live in different areas of Simcoe County, a large rural, agricultural area north of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Georgian Bay borders Simcoe County to the north; it is a popular tourist destination. North-west Simcoe County, close to Georgian Bay, is home to one of Canada’s first settled Francophone communities. In the early 1600s, the French explorer Samuel de Champlain founded the region. French and British families soon settled

in the region, which was home to indigenous Huron, Mohawk, and Iroquoian peoples. Simcoe County is known as ‘Historic Huronia².’

Participants

Four participants were selected through snowball sampling (Creswell 2002) and by association, as I was teaching in the same public school board³ as three of the participants. Few music teachers can be found in the region, so I relied on those with whom I was familiar. I initially approached Lenore to pilot my research questions; she expressed interest in participating. I had previously taught in the same school as Lenore. I then contacted Natali, for I was aware that she was teaching music in a small rural school to the north of my school. Two other music teachers—Anne and Germaine—heard of my study and expressed interest. My association with the participants who all taught in the same county as me created a bias, yet I believe that it provided me with greater understanding of their teaching praxes and contexts, and “greater depth of conversation due to shared experience” (Spring 2014, 13). All participants chose to refrain from using pseudonyms for their names and places. They believed that making ‘place’ and their names anonymous would not have properly represented their meta-narratives.

Natali, Lenore, Anne, and Germaine are elementary educators, teaching in different rural junior kindergarten to grade 8 schools. Each teaches music in some capacity; Germaine is the only full-time music teacher who works in the French Separate (Catholic) School Board⁴, where there is a designated music teacher in each elementary school. In Ontario, only students who are of French first language heritage are permitted to attend a French Catholic school. In Natali, Lenore, and Anne’s English public school board, there are very few (if any) teachers hired to teach music. Music is only taught in elementary schools that have a qualified music teacher, or someone who is interested in teaching the subject; it is not prioritized in the public board, despite the fact that regular classroom teachers are expected to teach music and follow curriculum expectations. Yet many teachers do not feel comfortable teaching music due to their lack of qualifications and/or training in the subject. However, the participants are all qualified, well-accomplished musicians who received formal music training and who continue to be involved in music in various capacities in their schools and communities.

Data Elicitation and Analysis

The larger inquiry included extensive interviews, conversations, journal writing, email conversations, and culminated in a collaborative focus group session. After interviews, conversations, and email correspondence were transcribed and verified, and the collaborative session was completed, participants were asked to provide a literary metaphor to represent their music education praxis in a rural community. I also requested they write a narrative story or recount an incident to provide the reasoning and background as to why they chose their metaphor. In addition, each participant provided a music metaphor selection—the name of a composition they had taught their students at any time in their teaching career and one that was either a favourite of their own, or their students'. I then requested that they recount or “write a narrative to tell how their lived experience related to the composition” (Spring 2014, 50). Literary and music metaphors of experience and the accompanying narrative therefore form the basis of this study

To facilitate analysis of the vast amount of transcript data that was collected, I utilized the Carp (2008) interpretation of Henry Lefebvre's (1974/1991) *Production of Space*. In this document, Lefebvre deconstructed how 'space' is used in a physical, mental, and social capacity (16). As I expanded Carp's (2008) analysis chart and coded the themes that emerged from the metaphorical narratives, I placed them in the appropriate fields. The physical field contained data that referred to demographic and spatial themes, the mental field contained participants' definitions of concepts and their explanations in regard to curriculum and school board policies, and the social field included participants' interpretations of their lived experiences (Spring 2014, 316).

Findings

Each participant taught in different parts of the county and assumed varied roles in their school, including music education instruction during the regular instructional day and in an extra-curricular capacity. The following summaries provide the teaching context for each participant, their rural music education metaphors, and their stories related to their metaphorical choices.

Natali

Natali was the teacher librarian in her school and also taught primary and junior vocal music in the library's small space. She directed the primary, junior, and intermediate school choirs, as well as a junior and intermediate French choir. Natali also assumed the role of principal assistant. She fulfilled this duty as she carried on with her regular teaching responsibilities.

Natali's Rural Music Education Metaphor: Jan Brett Picture Book: The Mitten. I asked Natali to provide a metaphor—either an object, phrase, or word to describe her rural music education praxis. She answered:

I would fancy my story represented in a picture book like Jan Brett's books⁵ ... you remember the picture books with the main story in the centre of the page and other little stories written at the bottom and at the sides of the page, encircling the main story? That's how my metaphor would be represented. Take the picture book *The Mitten*, with the beautiful illustrations. Jan Brett's books are full of those beautiful illustrations of animals, of landscapes, particularly snow, and of nature, and all representing what is going on concurrently as the main story unfolds. I can see me represented in the middle of the page, as a teacher-librarian, and my other roles at the bottom and sides—as the music teacher, planning time teacher, administrative assistant, choir director, choral festival helper/organizer, mom, and homemaker. All of the parts of my story are running alongside each other because I fulfill so many different roles during the school day. So I think a story, in the same form as Jan Brett portrays it, would be a relevant metaphor. The story of *The Mitten* takes place in winter with lots of snow, that's me! I grew up in a snow belt, and now live in a snow belt. (Spring 2014, 142)

Natali's metaphor of a Jan Brett picture book clarifies her role as a multifacilitator. She believes that she provides a refuge in her music room for students; it is a meeting place, as she and her students prepare for concerts. She was involved with the whole student body as she assisted teachers in preparing for assemblies, concerts, and providing a music mark for their assessments. Natali discussed how she chose the choral repertoire as her groups prepared for the annual music festival, held in the neighbouring rural town each April. She remarked:

I taught them music through ... not just the choir—through working with a class ... on what they were doing for Christmas concert, so it usually meant singing a song and doing some kind of performance with it ... Actually I did that for quite a few people even if I wasn't doing music for them [during that semester]! They would come for library twice a week ... for choir repertoire ... I like to be unique. I liked Broadway pieces ... And again it was music that kids never did in school. I borrowed from a local adult choir and you could really get lovely, two part harmonies ... some of the Rutter⁶ ... something different. I really thought that if we

were going to spend a lot of time practising and performing that it should be something that they hadn't heard before ... it should be something different and special and have a bit of a wow factor to it! "Oh wow, I didn't know that Grade 3s could sing in three part harmony," that sort of thing? I always chose something that I knew that the kids would be confident with. That was my choice and I just did that as a professional. You find something that you know your group is going to excel with. (Spring 2014, 160–63)

Natali discussed her role with the French choir as she prepared the children for the music festival. These rehearsals were after school; students from the neighbouring school would attend if parent transportation was available. She borrowed French choral music from the French school approximately 20 kilometers away. She remarked:

I had access to good material ... And I knew that it worked for choirs of that age in the French system so I would borrow them for [my school] ... The practices ... would be after school and a small group ... teaching the French pronunciation. And then there would be ... an accompaniment tape so they could sing along with it afterward ... send them home with the kids. (Spring 2014, 164)

Natali discussed how her role as a multifacilitator gave her the opportunities to bond with her students and community, and how through music classes, she and her students explored music of her own choosing. In this way, she could expose students to repertoire that they might not necessarily know and through this investigation, develop her and her students' sense of place. She commented:

I think in [my school], I carved a niche for myself: a sense of being in my place. And that was pretty important ... I love music and I love sharing it. Because the bulk of music instruction was left to me, I was able to choose my own music and sheet music most of which I purchased myself ... No one else really cared, so my own tastes were reflected in music that we sang—my sense of self—Broadway, pop music from radio, choral pieces culled from my own choir at the time ... Music was the Rutter, Willan⁷, etc., folk music, classical music for listening, rhythms from other nations. I loved sharing these with students. (Spring 2014, 180–81)

*Natali's Music Metaphor: Une Colombe.*⁸ Natali discussed her teaching praxis as one with many different responsibilities, yet fulfilling, as she interacted with students and her rural community through music. I asked her to recall a teaching moment or event that exemplifies her rural music education praxis – a metaphor of rural music education experience. She chose a composition that her French choir had performed at the local music festival, a piece that has historical, religious, and cultural significance to her area of 'Historic Huronia.' Celine Dion performed *Une*

Colombe (Baillargeon and Lefebvre 1984) in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in 1984 for Pope John Paul II, to represent the children of the province of Quebec. Pope John Paul II also visited the National Historic Site of Ste Marie Among the Hurons in Midland⁹, Ontario during this Canadian papal tour. Natali chose *Une Colombe* as the entry for the music festival many years later to celebrate our French, British, and indigenous heritage. She reminisced about this event:

We had a reputation, in choir in particular, of bringing such emotion to our pieces that, especially the French pieces where ... there would be some grandmother with tears in her eyes in the audience. And it actually got to be a joke; the kids would always look for somebody that ... would get emotional. And ... one of our performances that I really loved was ... We did a piece by Celine Dion called *Une Colombe* ... I included from Grade 2 up, who would be willing to memorize the song and ... they did a beautiful job. I think she [Celine] was 12 when she [originally] sang it so it is in that range, a perfect range for kids to sing, and it's a beautiful song and ... the kids really put everything they had into it. I think it was one of my proudest moments that number one, you could get these kids to memorize a song in another language and they did a really lovely job. (Spring 2014, 184)

Natali chose a piece of music that was meaningful to the audience, and one that she and her students enjoyed performing. It also evoked emotion and passion, as it related to the history of the area and was embedded in the culture of her area—her place.

It is interesting to note that Natali's choices of metaphors—the Jan Brett picture book and the performance of *Une Colombe* in French, both relate strongly to 'place' and to the geographical and demographical aspects of her rural community. They demonstrate Natali's strong commitment to history, culture, community, and to her students through music.

Anne

Anne was born and raised on a farm in a small rural community in Simcoe County. As a dedicated community member she was not only involved in teaching music at the many different rural schools where she taught and/or was an administrator, she also instructed private piano and was the organist and choir director at her rural church. Although she assumed roles as a regular classroom teacher, as vice principal, and later in her career as principal, Anne taught music in each school. She offered many extra-curricular music opportunities for students in her school choirs and bands.

Anne's Rural Music Education Metaphor: Pyramid. Anne discussed her strong connection to teaching music, particularly in a rural capacity, where she believes music builds strong community bonds. Anne feels the metaphor of a *pyramid* exemplifies her rural music education praxis.

I see myself as a pyramid, where I lay the foundation of music for children ... Music is a community experience ... each block represents a musical skill ... At one particular school I did planning time so I taught Kindergarten to Grade 6 music; I got to see every child, I got to learn their names... At [that school] I was instrumental in starting a band program there, getting the instruments ... I had a girls' glee club ... the grade 7 and 8 boys got upset that it was a girls' glee club ... And so we got a boys' glee club going and we competed at Festival! ... I accompany and I direct. During most of my leadership in music, I didn't have help, especially at school! ... (Spring 2014, 199–201)

Anne also believes that in her capacity as a music educator, and for any music educator in a rural community, they play a valuable role in the culture of the community.

The music teacher is a major leader in the community and something they get respect for and everyone seems to value ... everyone knows you, you are out there with everyone ... taking an active leadership role in activities within the community. They see your face, and it's showy ... public relations for the school. You are representing the teachers ... the school, the school board ... and the positives for the kids, it is just learning, learning music for an instrument, to sing, learning harmony, theory, all that they can carry all their life ... a very positive experience and music is something also that ... stimulates interest in community, interest in the area. When they go out in the area they feel more value for their community ... they call on the children to come out and sing and perform and play instruments ... you know all of those things serve them well through their life. (Spring 2014, 203–04)

Anne believes that as a *pyramid*, she was a not only a builder of musical talent, but she instills a sense of pride in her students for their rural community. Participation in music encourages students to become involved and interested in their rural 'place.' Anne further qualified the importance of her role as a music educator:

The networking of music is incredible. It is as vast as the teaching profession. The people you can meet are diverse. It truly is an international language. I have connections with bluegrass jams and people who come wearing overalls and guys in ponytails, to people involved in classical symphonies and orchestras wearing tuxedos. It ranges from solo voice or instrument, to many voices and instruments. You can play by yourself or play with a large group at any age. Music is able to

convey all of the emotions of the human spirit—everything from anger, joy, surprise, sadness, mystery, and calmness. I truly feel that music is something that needs to be shared. And as a teacher of music I can do that. (Spring 2014, 191)

Anne contends that through her music education praxis and as a *pyramid*, who “builds on each level of accomplishment” (Spring 2014, 191) she connects students to their rural community, the rural community to the school children and their musical accomplishments. Doing so gives her a sense of pride and achievement. She said:

I get totally involved with rural spaces because ... I love rural. I love that whole thing with community and so I would always get involved with music performances ... I contacted churches to see if they would like performances ... retirement homes, was also really big because the seniors loved having the children there. I was involved with anything that was going on in the community... And it gives the children a purpose to perform; it provides knowledge for the community, for the students ... that can be carried on ... Rural spaces encourage involvement in different ways than urban spaces because rural schools and communities are quite often smaller; everyone knows everyone else, and helps to pull everyone along for a common purpose. There is more opportunity for everyone to take part and get involved. That is why I enjoy my rural place. (Spring 2014, 215)

*Anne’s Music Metaphor: At the Hop.*¹⁰ I asked Anne to provide a music metaphor to exemplify her rural music education experience. Anne chose an instrumental piece that both she and her band students loved to perform—*At the Hop*. She remarked:

I can tell you one that the kids loved performing the best. And that was *At the Hop*. It was nice, three chords, jazzy, easy to learn, and the kids loved it and the parents loved it and it was showy. Isn’t it funny that there is a returning theme here – one that kids like! Isn’t it funny Germaine and Natali picked the more difficult piece and I picked one that was easy to learn, feel good, easy to learn right off the bat! A totally different scenario! (Spring 2014, 221)

Anne’s choice demonstrates her keen sense of pride and enjoyment of getting her students involved in the rural community, and having fun with a piece that is easy to perform. She believes that the study of music instills a sense of accomplishment in her students, teaches them discipline, and the importance of risk-taking in learning and performing, but she feels that teaching students community responsibility is significant. She says, “Music bonds students to their ‘place.’”

Lenore

Lenore was born and raised in a rural area. As a primary classroom teacher, she taught the majority of her curriculum through music. Lenore maintains that music is one of the most important subjects in teaching. She remarked, “No matter where I ... taught, whether it was in a large or small city or in a village, I always used music as a way to interest the children in what we were doing” (Spring 2014, 123). Despite Lenore’s strong commitment to teaching through an arts-informed musical approach, she was never referred to as ‘the music teacher.’ Yet she was often recruited to accompany music presentations, musicals, assemblies, performances, and to assist as band conductor. In addition, she assumed the role of the music educator when the regular music teacher was on a long-term leave. Lenore therefore considered herself as a ‘background music person’ who was there when needed.

During her early teaching career (Lenore is now retired), music was a protected subject in her board of education and one whose delivery was closely monitored and supervised. Every kindergarten teacher was required to have music qualifications and provide a comprehensive music program. However, over time, Lenore witnessed a decline in music education; music specialists were eliminated and regular music teachers became a thing of the past. Nevertheless, Lenore continued to provide music in her classroom and assist other teachers where she could.

Lenore’s Metaphor of Rural Experience: Music. When I asked Lenore to provide a metaphor, she remarked:

When you say that word *Finlandia*¹¹, I can hear that music in my head. We played it with the band. It was such a picturesque piece of music that I could picture Finland from the music ... I am guessing that music does the same thing to people. When children hear certain pieces of music they are transported into a different place and if they played a certain piece in school, they remember it and perhaps the time and the place. Music inspires ... it transports you to a memory, or a place or a person. It takes them out of today and into the past somewhere, and then later where they have been involved with that music somewhere through their learning experiences. Or maybe it gives them a look into the future, some way. So music is my metaphor for community ... and [rural] place. (Spring 2014, 112)

Lenore surmises that her choice of metaphor—*music*—relates to her belief that “Teaching is learning ... her metaphor relates back to when she was a music student many years ago” (Spring 2014, 111). She has a strong sense of presence through

music; she was very involved in music in her community, and in the delivery of her primary core subject through music. Lenore stated:

I wasn't the music teacher. I was the kindergarten teacher, which is almost the same thing because in my program I used music as reinforcement for practically everything I taught. We sang the alphabet; we sang songs about numbers ... about the seasons. Music was based on different times of the year, different important occasions, and different seasons. Always, the music was the way to educate the children in other subjects—to draw their attention to the things that are going on around them. (Spring 2014, 126).

Lenore explained, “That was my place within the community because any way I was involved with the community it was always through music, through kindergarten, through the band, through the local choral society.” Lenore “made ‘her place’ in her community through her music and her talents” (Spring 2014, 123). She also contends that through music, she reached out to the rural community, building a “musical ‘sense of place’” (Spring 2014, 127).

Related to her metaphor of *music*, Lenore discussed the future of music education, particularly in rural schools. Lenore believes that music education plays a very important role in children’s lives from an educational perspective in terms of being an agency for celebrating our Canadian culture and history through singing. According to Lenore, students do not know the songs that they should; and teachers do not have the expertise to deliver a proper music program as mandated by the Ministry of Ontario *Arts Curriculum*¹². Lenore explained her view:

Let’s go back through those old songs that celebrate our British, Scottish, Welsh, Indigenous, and European backgrounds and teach the children through music about the history of our Canadian culture that somehow and for many reasons has been lost ... They seem to be absent from any new resources (if teachers even have the monies to purchase any new resources) and many of the old music books have either been tossed away or frowned upon! Remember the good old *High Road of Song*¹³? Just because a song is old, doesn’t mean that it is not a good one! When they were replaced with songbooks like *Song Time*¹⁴, students were singing American folk songs, and leaving the Canadian heritage songs behind. Of course they have to get the music back first! Music is in the curriculum but not in the schools! (Spring 2014, 137–8)

Lenore’s Music Metaphor: Morning Has Broken. Lenore provided a music metaphor to represent her rural music education praxis.

Do you know what I would say right off before you even finish the question? *Morning Has Broken*¹⁵! It’s a song about beginning. It is the start of everything ... and ... represents my outlook on my life ... my teaching and personal life. You

start fresh every morning and start the new day with the students, forgetting the sad parts, and running with the students' accomplishments. It relates to the environment, the birds, the sun, rain, ... all of the things we sing about in Kindergarten. That kind of defines what I think about rural. (Spring 2014, 139)

Lenore's musical metaphor represents the importance of enjoying the positives of living in her rural environment, enjoying nature and honouring the close bonds that exist between student, teacher, and community. She also believes that singing is a positive experience that encourages her school children to celebrate their accomplishments. It also stresses the significance that music can play in everyone's lives.

Germaine

Germaine was born and raised on a farm in the Francophone community of Lafontaine, located in the northwest area of the county; in this region there are approximately 1000 French-speaking Ontarians. She and her family are bilingual; their first language is French. She is a strong advocate of her Francophone history, heritage, culture, and faith and has taught for many years with the French Catholic Board as a music educator. When she began teaching, Germaine was placed in three small rural French schools in her district. Later she assumed a full time music educator role at one school in the neighbouring village. In 2000, Germaine formed an adult Francophone choir that performs throughout the region; the choir's repertoire is predominantly of French origin. She is also the church organist at the first Roman Catholic Church in Ontario¹⁶, dating back to the early 1800s. This area is steeped in historical significance for in 1610, the French explorer, Samuel de Champlain, landed on the shores of Georgian Bay very close to the village of Lafontaine. He brought Jesuit missionaries and fur traders, who later built Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons¹⁷, the headquarters for Jesuit priests. This area was also home to the Huron Wendat people. Later French families arrived and settled in this area. Germaine's ancestors were one of these early farming families.

Germaine's Metaphor of Rural Experience: The Wolf. Every July, Germaine's rural Francophone community hosts a cultural event—Festival du Loup¹⁸—Francophone musicians, artisans, writers, and historians celebrate their distinctive Francophone culture and heritage. The symbol of the festival is the *wolf*, which relates back to a story about a wolf that supposedly terrorized the community of

Lafontaine, yet in the end, saved the life of the parish priest. There was great unrest among the four different agricultural immigrant families who settled in the area. After the wolf saved the life of the priest, the priest urged the community to settle their disputes. He remarked that, “just as the wolves move in packs and protect each other, creating a safe and cohesive group, so should this small rural community” (Spring 2014, 59). The community then rallied together. Today, “the small community of Lafontaine has encouraged and embodied togetherness, peace and love through their church parish, their French cultural activities, and through the strong agricultural ties they still share” (Spring 2014, 59).

Germaine chose the *wolf* as metaphor that embodies togetherness in her community. She contends that the story of the *wolf* reminds residents that they must continue to work as a cohesive group to protect their French Canadian language, heritage, history, culture, and faith. Germaine also believes it is of utmost importance for her to celebrate Francophone legends and culture in her music program through her choice of repertoire.

It is good for them to know their roots, where their people come from, especially in Grade 4 when I speak of the legends ... in drama, *Le Loup de Lafontaine*, where the francophone families come from – Quebec and from parts of Quebec. And so they all get that from their story in Grade 4! Another year, another story. That is what I like about teaching all the grades is that I make sure that ... every year they have something historical that links with the choir program as well ... I talk about the deportation of the Acadians when I do Celtic music. They would make the links to music and history; music links a lot of aspects of life! (Spring 2014, 80)

Germaine believes that music education not only links students to many different aspects of life, but it instills a sense of rural pride and culture in her students. As a teacher and leader of worship in her role as a church organist, she continues to see her past students outside of school in different capacities. Her students are connected to their rural roots and many return to live in the community. Particularly exciting to Germaine is the fact that some of her former students come back to sing in her adult Francophone choir. The ensemble performs French repertoire that celebrates Francophone faith, community, history, and culture. Germaine is very pleased that her choral group now extends beyond her community of Lafontaine, attracting members living as far away as 50 kilometers. They are either of French descent or English-speaking members who wish to be reconnected with the French language and music¹⁹.

Germaine's metaphor—the *wolf*—reminds her of the importance of continuing to advocate for French Canadian culture as many non-Francophone families are moving into her area. They move to her rural area for many reasons—or a rural experience that offers cheaper housing, a more peaceful environment, the chance to be reconnected to their 'lost Francophone heritage', or simply for the wish for their children to learn the French language and attend Francophone schools. This opportunity to educate their children to become bilingual may improve their future opportunities, but according to Germaine, they must be completely supportive. However, Germaine believes that some do not embrace all aspects of their Francophone community. She therefore fears that assimilation will weaken their strong community bonds in school as well as those in her rural community at large.

Germaine maintains that it is very important for her to teach French repertoire in her school music program that relates to historical and cultural events, particularly music that celebrates French Canadian culture. Yet she finds that it is difficult to find repertoire and to stay focused on French heritage. This creates another cultural tension as she tries to select repertoire for her students to satisfy curriculum expectations from a multicultural perspective. She stated:

We might lose our own culture, our own Canadian culture! ... I do a lot more Canadian cultural music than anything else. I am expected to teach world music ... songs from world cultures and I think, "I can't do that," because I will be losing what the kids need. They need to know their own roots! And I find that I don't have enough time to do French folklore, when I teach music of many cultures ... I am busy teaching the curriculum and trying to diversify and get a little bit of multiculturalism in there ... I only have so many minutes ... A conflict [occurs] between the curriculum – multiculturalism and our own Canadian heritage of our area. (Spring 2014, 102)

Germaine also discussed the important role of her music education praxis to celebrate culture from a place-based perspective and to build students' sense of being in their place—their 'sense of place.' She remarked that her students are sometimes unaware of their Acadian and Métis roots. and she hopes that through music she can encourage students to inquire into their own backgrounds and heritage. She remarked:

I did a concert one year and it was all about Acadian culture with the choir. I ... taught it to the school so that I could give my lessons to everybody about how the Acadian people felt and what happened, because I think that it is important to know that atrocities like that have happened in our country, and where Cajun music comes from ... we do some Cajun music sometimes for the music festival.

I taught about Creole music and where it comes from and then I went back into the deportation and where they settled in Canada, parts of the States—Louisiana. Students are unaware ... It is so important, so a place-based curriculum is desperately needed so that the children know their heritage! Even when I ask who has Métis²⁰ heritage, at least half of the school would lift their hands ... and some will say, “I don’t know.” ... And I say, “It is important that you know that!” But they need to know how that ties into where they are now ... They need to know about our history as well because it’s not just them bringing their culture and their heritage here but how they can live in our society. (Spring 2014, 104)

Germaine believes that the music educator plays an important role in a rural community as an advocate of local and world culture. Through music, she has the ability to inform as well as celebrate, thus advocating for and developing a ‘Francophone sense of place.’

Germaine’s Music Metaphor: Prayer of the Children. Germaine chose a music metaphor that symbolizes many important aspects of rural music education; sense of community, belonging, celebrating culture and embracing others’, reaching out to the global community, togetherness, instilling emotion, bringing her amalgamated choirs together to celebrate community, and building an attachment to rural place through music. Although she was not usually permitted to use English repertoire, she included *Prayer of the Children* because she felt it very important. She explained her metaphor choice:

I always had one piece that was ... going to be a hit and the kids would think was fun ... and then one very inspiring ... But when we rehearsed them, it was always that one piece, the kids would say, “Ah I love that piece!” They would always watch and when they saw a Kleenex come out, they would say, “Ah yes!” *Prayer of the Children*²¹ ... we did that right after September 11th, and it was an English piece. I sent a note home [for permission to perform it in English] ... it was written for children who have perished [in war] and when I read through that piece I couldn’t sing it. And I thought ... I would love to do this even though it is in English. And September 11th happened. We did it in conjunction with an adult choir ... I had it in SA [soprano, alto] and I had it in SATB [soprano, alto, tenor, bass] so the adult choir sang the SATB part in the middle when they were talking about angry guns. We started off a cappella. ... “Can you hear the prayer of the children?” You know at the end of the piece, when there is that silence, people wait for the applause? ... It was a deadly silence for a good minute. It was ... the best piece I have ever done! The MC had mentioned that it was for all the children who lost their parents ... for all who suffered because of the bombing and she said, “Tears are permitted.” Then the children started. “Can you hear the prayer of the children?” It was probably one of the better pieces because of how important children are and what the decision some adults take that have an influence on the children ... And it had that contrast with the adult choir doing this angry part in

the middle. And then the children who are doing the soft, prayer ... they were excited because it was in English because I was never permitted to do anything in English and because they were singing with the Ste- Anne's choir ... it was something new and it had a meaning to it. When the kids started singing the adults were all choked up ... because I had the three schools at the time ... there was close to 100 ... my combined choir. And when the children started singing, there was volume in that church! (Spring 2014, 106)

Germaine's narrative account illustrates the cultural tensions that exist as she chooses repertoire for her choir. Because she is usually denied the use of English compositions, she must seek permission to do so. She feels that she is under scrutiny with strict cultural expectations, yet must choose repertoire that is also related to world issues and events. Her audiences are also divided in their beliefs; some embrace the few English compositions she introduces while others demand repertoire only sung in French.

Discussion: Co-Constructing Knowledge

An investigation of the perspectives of four rural music educators through the varied conceptual frameworks has highlighted important aspects of rural music education. The participants stressed that music teachers should be aware of certain aspects that inform their music education praxis and be encouraged to move forward for betterment in the future. To be aware of one's place, the issues that influence the delivery of the music curriculum, and the choice of music repertoire, effect positive change, and influences policies for future. Writing narrative stories guided by metaphors from an arts-informed perspective highlights the concerns that rural music teachers face in their unique rural music contexts. As participants gathered for a final collaborative discussion, they identified the following themes as being significant in their music education praxes of the present and future.

Variation of Frameworks

Participants noted the variation in frameworks that guided their literary metaphor choices representative of 'place.' Natali related her music education praxis through a metaphor that was demographically based. The Jan Brett picture book, *The Mitten* demonstrated that a music educator is in many different 'spaces' at once, yet

fulfilling different roles. Lenore's metaphor of *music* tends to view a music education praxis sociologically speaking, where *music* connects Lenore to her students, parents, and community and the relationships she forges with them. Anne's metaphor of a *pyramid* represents her professional teaching praxis, as she prepares students musically for the future, and teaches them the importance of connections to their rural area. Germaine's choice of the *wolf* relates specifically to her Franco-phone heritage and culture and the role of music in establishing connections to that culture. Her discussion also raises concerns of colonial struggles that still exist between English and French speaking Canadians.

Music Educator as a Multifacilitator

One of the themes of concern that emerged from discussion is the multifacetedness of the rural music educator—expectations that the music teacher satisfy various teaching duties in addition to extra-curricular responsibilities. The participants all fulfilled multiple roles in their music communities. In Natali's teaching context, her metaphor of a *Jan Brett Picture Book: The Mitten* demonstrated Natali's multiple roles in her school and the issues she faced. Not only was she the teacher librarian and the relief administrator, she was the music teacher and choir director who was responsible for teaching the music curriculum to multiple grades, and for extra-curricular choirs. These practices were held outside of the regular school day. Bates (2011) remarks on the expectations of music educators to fulfill many different roles during the school day. He states, "Teachers in small rural communities, as they say, 'wear many hats'; they serve in multiple roles especially when teaching K–12 music (and sometimes additional subjects) or serving in leadership positions within the school or district" (92). Anne also was a multifacilitator as she assumed many roles in the school as a regular classroom teacher and as an administrator. Her keen interest and enthusiasm prompted her to teach music during the school day, as well as provide extra-curricular music opportunities outside of her regular responsibilities, such as choir, band, and glee club.

Music Education: The Hidden Subject

Lenore discussed the issue of being a multifacilitator as well as a music educator who was not classified as such, but as one who was 'behind the scenes.' Participants

described her as being an ‘on call and demand’ music teacher who volunteered her musical expertise when needed, in addition to teaching multiple subjects in her regular classroom. In many rural public boards, music is not a protected subject. Music educators are often taken for granted; yet their involvement in music activities such as serving as accompanist at assemblies, assisting with musicals, and assuming the role of assistant band director often go unnoticed by administrators and/or board officials. Countryman (2008) comments on the status of music education that exists in many school boards in Ontario stating, “Music education is now, and always has been, a marginalized subject” (1). Despite the fact that the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum document, *The Arts*, outlines music education curriculum expectations, music does not always happen. Countryman (2008) remarks further, “The increasingly complex sociocultural milieu within which education exists compounds the issue of music’s perennial shaky status as a school subject” (289). She also calls for further research that bridges the gap between what is noted in academic research and the actual state of affairs in music education in schools. She remarked, “The separation between music education research and practice is especially troubling” (1).

Demographics and Space

Another issue that surfaced was the lack of music facilities in small rural schools. Natali observed that rural music teachers often are relegated to teach music in areas that lack space and that are insufficient to house the music equipment necessary to meet the expectations of the music curriculum. This is particularly troubling, especially in small rural boards that lack the monies to provide proper facilities (Irwin 2012) and/or specialist music educators (Bates 2011; Countryman 2008; and Spring 2014). These issues may also occur in urban areas as well, yet in rural areas, a changing population is somehow marginalizing the little rural school that was built decades ago. Either rural areas are expanding as urban dwellers move in for varied reasons, or cash strapped school boards are closing the small rural schools due to physical structural issues. Jorgensen (2008) relates that many teachers bring to light issues of “broken down school buildings, absentee students, and disheartened teachers working in Third World conditions” (xi). Natali, Anne, and Germaine in the larger study (Spring 2014) discuss these issues of poor facilities and how this situation not only marginalizes their music programs, but also

seriously discourages teachers, their students, and parents. Irwin (2012) discusses these specific problems in greater detail as he investigates the state of affairs of rural school closures in Ontario.

Music Educator as Community Liaison and Community Builder

Participants' metaphors of *'pyramid, multifacilitator, music, and wolf*, and descriptive narratives support the notion that in a rural area, music programs are often the liaison between the school and community. The music educator assumes the role as the intermediary in a positive way (Jorgensen 2008). All participants believe that their music programs enhance the relationship that exists between the school community and rural. They also feel that the rural community fully supports the school endeavors, and in Natali's case, if her music program were in danger, the community members would rally their support. Lenore also believes that the music program in her school could not survive without the support of the community; the rural residents and community groups heavily funded the band program. All participants understand that the music educator is a key person in the community, not only as a school music teacher, but also one who builds positive feelings of belonging and cultivates students' sense of being in their community—their 'sense of place'—hence their strong connections to their rural area.

Another important aspect of rural connections according to Germaine is her musical affiliation to the church and faith. Germaine believes that her interactions in her many roles as music teacher, choir director, and church organist connected to her faith, bonds the French Catholic community members together. She interacts with her students on different levels, as they learn and perform music related to faith, and absorb religion through music in the Roman Catholic Church. Germaine remarked, "I could not imagine teaching without being able to involve religion in it ... faith, you know because almost every lesson I teach, revolves around who we are as Christians" (Spring 2014, 102). Germaine feels that these sentiments bind community together and connect all people to their rural place. Hudson (2006) remarks:

There is no doubt that music—in both its production and consumption—can be an important influence in shaping the typically hybrid identities of people and places, of engendering a sense of place and deep attachment to place. In this sense

it can help contribute in important ways to the well being of people and places and this is not without practical significance. (633)

Emotion and Passion for the Rural Musical 'Place', Heritage, and Culture

The Local. Through music performances, the rural music educator connects her students to the local community and beyond. She also instills a sense of pride and interest in her students to continue to perform. Germaine commented that the relationships she forged with her students through music education prompted them to not only return to their community as an audience, but to actually perform in her adult choir. This refutes Jorgensen's (2008) comment that, "Too many high school graduates do not play their instruments or sing after they leave school and become, instead, passive consumers of music" (xi). Germaine believes that her strong commitment and attachment to rural place influences her students, and her repertoire choices are often linked to place. Bates (2011) remarks, "As local musical cultures are understood, embraced and brought into the life and identity of the teacher, a space [is] created for these same practices in the classroom" (93). Germaine's music repertoire choices are embraced by her students in the classroom and later in life, bringing them closer to their culture and rural environment.

Natali also discussed her students' enjoyment, emotion, and passion for her repertoire selection of *Une Colombe*, and her students' connections to the feeling of the audience. As the audience was moved by the performance, so too were the students, as they experienced a connection between their delivery of *Une Colombe* and with the listeners. This composition also served as a connection between the French, British, and Indigenous cultures of the area. It also highlighted the historical significance of religion, faith, and the issue of marginalization due to colonization of place; *Une Colombe* was a statement of cultural expression. As stated by Bennett (2004) previously, music is a significant tool to accent people's local and global perspectives in their "narrativization of place" (2) and in the case of Germaine's students and residents, a connection to their Francophone roots and struggles of the past, present and future.

Germaine's metaphor of the *wolf* is a strong representation of her local Francophone culture. The *wolf* symbolizes togetherness in terms of her Francophone culture, religion, faith, and community, as she teaches the significance of culture

in her music lessons and repertoire choices. The account of the *wolf* and its representation in the annual local festival tells a story, and most importantly, symbolizes a culture that to Germaine, brings the community together with music, artisans, and literature, protecting the assimilation of the Francophone language and culture. Yet her discussion triggers colonial sentiments and struggles that still prevail between French, English, and Indigenous peoples, along with the desire to expose students to world cultures and to minority groups that are moving out of urban areas to settle in rural communities.

The Global. Germaine's musical composition—*Prayer of the Children* is a music metaphor selection that exemplified the importance of teaching “the value of music, culture, religion, community, and children” (Spring 2014, 106) from both a local and global perspective. Not only did the performance of this piece of music generate an emotional response from the audience, but the performers and conductor were moved by it as well. As she brought all of her choirs together—children and adults—her composition choice brought the global issues of the world into the perspective of the local. Nigh (2011) discusses this important issue stating, “Place includes the notion that an individual feels a sense of being called or drawn forward into fulfilling their responsibility in the world” (5). Germaine believes that in highlighting this performance in a narrative story, she was able to explain the deep-seated issues that music education—through performance—brings forth, unlike any other subject in the curriculum. Very little dialogue needs to occur afterward; the message is implicit. This metaphorical experience allowed Germaine to articulate her deep and personal desire for global peace.

Celebrating and Deconstructing Music Praxes for Rural Music's Sake

Participants remarked that this metaphorical exercise gave them an opportunity to discuss and deconstruct their views on music education in rural areas, and to celebrate their music education praxes and repertoire choices – to celebrate for music's sake and enjoy their students' accomplishments. They all contended that in a busy music teacher's life, there are very few chances to meet to consider pertinent issues and to talk through their successes and struggles. In rural boards, there are often few opportunities for music teachers to collaborate because they work in

isolation (Bates 2011). The neighbouring music educator may either be non-existent or many miles away, making face-to-face personal learning communities very difficult to organize and execute. Participants therefore enjoyed their metaphor celebration, as they described their experiences with these compositions: *Une Colombe*, *At the Hop*, *Morning Has Broken*, and *Prayer of the Children*. They also call for further narrative arts-informed research so that music educators can voice their feelings, beliefs, and emotions, as they educate their rural students in different contexts and from varied perspectives, while sharing a common goal.

Participants discussed at length the importance of getting together with other rural educators to celebrate and highlight positives aspects of their music praxes that embrace a place-based approach. The participants maintain that their music programs put ‘place’ first, despite its omission from curricular documents. Germaine stated, “The Ontario Ministry curriculum documents consider every place and student as being the same. That’s why they have standardized ... curriculum” (Spring 2014, 172). They assert that new steps must be taken to celebrate local rural successes through a place-based educational approach.

Conclusion

The metaphor is a very useful literary tool to deconstruct participants’ concepts and beliefs in regard to their rural music education praxes. Higgs (2008) contends that, “Dance, music, poetry and other arts all provide metaphors for lived experience, allowing us to see ways to live and grow and new ways to know” (553). Participants all remarked that the metaphor was an excellent medium, not only to express their reasoning, sentiments, and emotions in narrative form, but also to describe the connections they believe exist between their students, themselves and their audience. In addition, they deduced that listening to their fellow participants’ metaphorical stories allowed them to reflect on their own stories, and on their teaching praxes and teacher beliefs.

The metaphor serves to stimulate further discussion—to celebrate music education successes and inadequacies, and most importantly, to interrogate the politics of rural education and critique the state of affairs affecting music educators in all areas of the province. Metaphorical discussion also brings the topic of ‘place’ to

the forefront, as the participants believe that the current Ministry of Ontario curriculum documents lack this focus. As a result, participants call for continued arts-informed research to advance perspectives in rural music education and promote a place-based curriculum that will perhaps establish greater equity for rural students, teachers and community.

About the Author

Janet Spring teaches elementary music education in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University, Orillia Ontario. Janet taught elementary vocal and instrumental music for 30 years in rural community schools in Simcoe County. Her recent collaborative narrative doctoral dissertation investigates the perspectives of rural music educators through the framework of 'sense of place.' Janet continues her research on rural music education, examining how 'place' influences rural teacher and educational leadership perspectives.

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Notes

¹ A performance of *Celtic Air and Dance*, Hal Leonard Concert Band may be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IlAoy7RL2PY>

² Information on Historic Huronia may be retrieved at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/277327/Huronia>

³ A school board is comprised of a local group of elected citizens (trustees) and school officials that are responsible for the administrative and financial affairs of operating schools in their area. For more information on school boards in Ontario, refer to the Ontario Ministry of Education website, found at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/>

⁴ A Separate School Board is a publically funded Catholic School Board. In the province of Ontario, both English and French public boards, and English and French separate school boards are government funded. Further information on public and separate school boards in French and English may be retrieved from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/educationFacts.html>

⁵ For a list of Jan Brett's books for children, refer to: <http://www.janbrett.com/>

⁶ Information on John Rutter's music may be retrieved at: <http://www.johnruter.com/>

⁷ Information on Healey Willan's music may be retrieved at: <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/healey-willan-mn0001872905/biography>

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⁸ A performance of *Une Colombe* may be found at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXMpmOcex6o>

⁹ More information on the history of Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons can be found at: <http://www.saintemarieamongthehurons.on.ca/sm/en/Home/index.htm>

¹⁰ A recording of the original artist:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwCGW58DTE4>

¹¹ Information on the composer, Jean Sibelius and the composition may be retrieved at: <http://www.favorite-classical-composers.com/sibelius-finlandia.html>

¹² Ontario Ministry of Education *The Arts* may be retrieved at: edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts.html

¹³ The *High Road of Song* series is out of print.

¹⁴ The *Songtime* series is out of print.

¹⁵ A recording of *Morning Has Broken*, original artist Cat Stevens is available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5sSEkZ86ts

¹⁶ Further details about the church may be found at:

<http://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/CMSImages/9d/9dd6b7a3-e00d-46ac-8192-3c8c562b239b.pdf>

¹⁷ More information on the history of Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons can be found at:

<http://www.saintemarieamongthehurons.on.ca/sm/en/Home/index.htm>

¹⁸ Information on the festival may be retrieved at: <http://festivalduloup.on.ca/>

¹⁹ As French is one of the two official languages of Canada, children in Ontario take French as a compulsory subject from grade 3-4 to grade 9, depending on the school board of education they attend.

²⁰ Information on the Métis may be retrieved at:

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/metis>

²¹ A performance of Kurt Bestor is found at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkqqrCcXhl8>