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The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student’s Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

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CAN YOU HEAR MY VOICE? STUDENTS’ REFLECTIONS REGARDING ACCESS TO MUSIC PARTICIPATION DURING SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

Paulette Terry Sigler

Under Direction of Patrick K. Freer

ABSTRACT

This research was purposed to discover how students perceived the impact of participation or lack of participation in school music classes on their global school experiences during secondary school. The research stemmed from concern that recent focus on state and federal mandates may have resulted in a return to educational policies that discount consideration of student experience. All choir students (N = 160) at a large university in the southeastern United States comprised the participant population for the initial screening questionnaire, with 135 students returning completed surveys. Questionnaire results informed the purposeful sampling of 16 students in six focus groups. The focus-group responses guided the selection of the six students from the focus groups to participate in one 30-45 minute individual interview. The researcher-designed screening questionnaire was a structured survey with open-ended and closed questions (Creswell, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986). The interview instruments had
guiding questions based on the phenomenological suggestions of Moustakas (1994). The resulting information is in narrative form. Analysis, beginning with the data generated by the questionnaire, was ongoing throughout the study. Hallam’s (2002) motivational model positing the malleable aspects of the personality such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, possible selves, and the ideal self anchored the final analysis. Students reflected on the overarching question, “Did involvement or lack of involvement in school music affect students’ perceptions of the global school experience and extra-musical success?” The findings support the premise that participation in school music can have a positive affect on students’ comprehensive school experience extending to a sense of community, increased self-confidence and leadership, enhanced learning in non-music classes, and a time of relief from academic stress. At-risk students described the ameliorating effects of music participation on their challenging life situations. An ancillary finding was that many students were advised to discontinue music classes to take advanced academic classes, rather than for remediation. These results of this study may provide a useful tool for advocacy. Future research could investigate whether participation in music classes promotes learning and memory consolidation of academic knowledge by providing divergent learning tasks that stimulate new modes of thinking.

INDEX WORDS: Access, Academic, Advocacy, At-risk, Music, Education, Extra-musical benefits, Pressure, Secondary school
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by

Paulette Terry Sigler

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of

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in

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

... if somebody with a terrible self-concept who is struggling academically ... [if]
you put them with the right instrument and [they] immerse themselves in that, then
they can become a fluent learner ... they will feel relaxed enough to take the risk of
participating in certain arenas that were really more difficult ... 

Grace (2011)

Grace, a middle-aged adult, spoke these words during a study (Sigler, 2011) on the
importance of music experiences during adolescent years as she reflected on her participation in
high school band. Her personal recollections highlighted the positive effects that can result from
involvement in a school music program. This individual was at-risk academically and as a
consequence began to demonstrate inappropriate behavior in and out of the classroom. Grace
pointed to her participation in band as a defining moment in her life. Her experience
demonstrated the positive effect of music education at its best. The premise of this present
investigation is that participation in music classes may impact the global school experience for
students, and as a consequence, may enhance learning particularly for those who are at risk.

At-risk students include those who struggle to learn in traditional school settings (Shuler,
1991) and also students who act in socially inappropriate ways. Such students are often found in
low socioeconomic status (SES), immigrant, or other marginalized communities. Students’ social
and academic problems may stem from a precarious home life caused by socioeconomic
difficulties (Goodlad, 1987; Jenlink, 1993; Sava, 1987; Shuler, 2012; Shields, 2001). The
circumstances inherent in low SES may affect students’ attention to homework and classwork,
putting students at-risk academically. However, children from affluent communities are not
immune from learning difficulties, family dysfunction, and other societal problems that may
result in poor performance in school. Unfortunately, school music opportunities may be denied to this at-risk population in order to schedule academic remediation.

The music experiences during the school day may result in extra-musical benefits to students, particularly to those who are at-risk. Extra-musical benefits are also referred to as instrumental benefits. Music classes may stimulate new ways of thinking while providing group identification (Allsup, 2012; Davis, 2009; Scripp & Meynard, 1991). They can be a safe place where self-esteem can be repaired, self-confidence can be nurtured and where all students can enjoy contributing to group success (Hourigan, 2009; Kinder & Harland, 2004). Often students develop an identity that sustains them in other more challenging areas of school and life (Goodlad, 1987; McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004; Sava, 1987). Shuler (1991) reminded us of the:

- critical role music plays in the development of whole human beings, whose wholeness motivates and enables them to succeed in school and, we hope, in life. This wholeness is not just affective . . . This wholeness also encompasses truly basic skills, skills that transcend the three Rs, skills that are essential for human as well as economic success. (p. 23)

My interest in this topic was transformed into a passion by my daughter’s experience in high school. Administration and counselors scheduled her for remediation in mathematics in an upcoming semester. The mathematics class time conflicted with her participation in chorus class. I watched as her self-esteem deteriorated, her self-confidence was eroded, and her sense of self-efficacy diminished in anticipation of the loss of her chorus participation. She began to lose interest in school and her choices of friendships and activities leaned toward
those that were less than ideal. She became at-risk socially as well as academically. As a parent who is also a musician and an educator, I was uniquely positioned to advocate on her behalf. With the collaborative help of her school counselor and her chorus teacher we found other ways to provide for her academic needs so that she could remain in music classes.

In response to this experience, I became acutely aware of those at-risk students in my own classes who were suffering in similar situations. Not all of these students were destined to become music professionals, but the intangibles of the music classroom are available to all and are meaningful to many (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Davis 2009; Hendricks, Smith, & Stanuch, 2014). Allsup (2012) reminded us that music rooms could be “social spaces apart from mere instruction, marked-off places where friendships are deepened, ideas are argued over lunch, and identities are formed and protected” (p.179). I could advocate for these students as the music teacher, but most of them had little support from family or administration for their hopes to remain in music classes.

Sava (1987) spoke to the challenge and necessity of educating the at-risk child in music, despite the inclination to schedule remedial instruction at the expense of musical experiences. He stated:

Yet for many children struggling with reading, writing, and arithmetic, this may be precisely the wrong medicine. . . . what many at-risk students need above all is a taste of success--proof that they can perform well in a school-related endeavor. Music and the other arts offer such youngsters another chance to succeed. . . . the self-confidence and renewed aspirations a child develops by doing well in painting, drama, singing, or playing an instrument often carries over into the more traditional scholastic areas of the curriculum. (p. 54)
Boyer (1987) added, “Music education, then, is not a frill, but a necessary part of our lives” (p. 54). Could access or lack of access to music education experiences during the school day have a lasting impact on students’ lives? Are at-risk students particularly vulnerable when music classes are not available?

**Statement of the Issue**

The lack of access to music classes has been attributed to the emphasis on academic success currently permeating educational policy decisions in the United States (Beveridge, 2010; Dunkle, 2011; Richmond, 1997; Shuler, 2012; Winner & Hetland, 2008). Administrators, legislators, and other elected officials may have lost sight of the role of arts programs, specifically music, in educating the whole person. Although the U.S. compulsory education system was instituted to provide equal educational opportunities for all students, in recent years, critics have expressed concern about the equity of instructional opportunity (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lehman, 1992; Shuler, 2012; Stein, Kaufman, Sherman & Hillen, 2011).

The concerns about equity extend through research identifying differing patterns of student access to music and arts classes (Baker, 2012; Elpus, 2014; Salazar, 2012). Students may be denied access to arts classes for a number of reasons, including the need for remedial work in non-arts courses (West, 2012). Such remediation is often scheduled during the time normally allotted for arts classes where need for remedial work often prevails when a scheduling conflict arises. As one author lamented, “We’re headed for a day when public education . . . is little more than constant drilling on the three Rs all morning, and nothing but testing after lunch” (Lopez, 2012, “subheading”). Where are music and the arts? If they are present, who is enrolled in those classes? And, perhaps more importantly, who is not?
Over a decade before the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Title IX Part A Sec 9109 (11)) defined core subjects and mandated testing, educators expressed concern that emphasis on “the basics” might disenfranchise marginal populations (Boyer, 1987; Sava, 1987). According to Goodlad (1987) schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students were pressured to improve test scores resulting in strict adherence to the routine teaching of the basics. He noted that remediation in mathematics and language arts often stifled elective course offerings. Goodlad suggested that the factors that lead to students being labeled as “in need of academic assistance” are the very considerations that should guide administrators to involve these students in arts classes (1987; Sava, 1987). Arts classes often incorporate alternative strategies that address multiple learning styles. These strategies have the potential to ameliorate learning and societal issues often found in at-risk populations (Collett, 1991; Kinder & Harland, 2004).

The burgeoning at-risk population was noted by Congress, with Senator Paul Simon expressing the thoughts of legislators when he said, “At-risk students can include dropouts, the economically disadvantaged, and the handicapped” (1987, p. 55). He continued, “High school dropouts have higher rates of unemployment, welfare dependency, illiteracy, incarceration, and teen pregnancy” (p. 61). He sounded a warning when he reminded legislators that, “The one potential drawback to current reform efforts is the lack of consensus among legislators and educators on the educational components necessary to develop the ‘whole person’” (p. 61). Simon concluded, “We cannot forget that music and the arts are integral parts of a student's educational development” (p. 61).

Governmental and educational policy leaders anticipated the escalation of the high-stakes testing paradigm and understood the danger it represented to the availability of school music participation for select populations. They consistently recognized the disservice to disadvantaged
or at-risk students who are denied the opportunity for success often found in the school music experiences (Lehman, 1992; Duncan, 2012; Shuler, 2012). For instance, a recent case study (Heilig, Cole, & Aguilar, 2010) documented the progression of events in Texas surrounding the emphasis on high-stakes testing and subsequent policy decisions limiting arts education. More recent research (Baker, 2012; Salazar, 2012) echoed and updated this concern, with particular regard for those who are “academically low-achieving” (West, 2012, p. 75).

Although the at-risk designation may include students with an inability to learn, there is also a population of students who have lost interest in learning and are labeled “disaffected” (Rusinek, 2008). When learning and teaching styles do not match it may result in a lack of academic success. A lack of academic success may lead to a shift in student attitudes resulting in disaffection with the total school experience. Researchers (Collett, 1991; Hanson, Silver, & Strong, 1991; Kinder & Harland, 2004) posited a rise in the rate of learning when the teaching style matches the learning style of the student. Shuler stated, “Students must be present and motivated in order to learn. The primary reason that at-risk students fail is not that they do not get enough instruction, but rather that they do not get the right kind of instruction” (1991, p. 23).

In their groundbreaking meta-analysis of studies investigating the relationship of arts education to academic gains in other subject areas, Winner and Cooper (2000) found that:

it is certainly possible that studying the arts leads to the development of cognitive skills that in turn lead to heightened achievement in academic areas. It is also possible that studying the arts leads to greater engagement in school, which in turn leads to greater academic achievement. (p. 32)
A number of empirical studies provide evidence that instrumental or extra-musical benefits accrue to students as a result of participation in the arts. The evidence is strongest for cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral benefits (McCarthy et al. 2004). Researchers worldwide have noted a positive correlation between participation in music and students’ interest in and enthusiasm for school (Rusinek, 2008; Shuler, 1991; Spychiger, 1998).

The above evidence points to a relationship between arts participation and enthusiasm for the global school experience, particularly in at-risk populations. However, it is this population that is often denied the opportunity to engage in music and arts classes. Although at-risk students may be found in greater numbers in low SES or marginalized communities, other factors can contribute to the at-risk condition. A complete definition of “at-risk” as operational in this document can be found on page 15. Students’ SES will only be considered as it affects circumstances that lead to academic difficulties.

**Rationale for the Study**

Music teachers and researchers have observed the direct relationship of student involvement in music classes to school success (Morrison, 1994; Spychiger, 1998). As national and state mandates have compromised the number and quality of music programs (Salazar, 2012) educators have acknowledged that they felt pressured to comply with “teaching to the test” (West, 2012). Although Baker (2012) examined the effect of high-stakes testing on the availability of arts education, he suggested further research to determine the effectiveness of academic remediation that results in the denial of arts instruction to select students. Other research in music has explored the lifelong impact of school music experiences (Arasi, 2006) and the meaning of music to various student populations (Carlow, 2004). The
importance of music to at-risk students’ school success was targeted in research conducted by Jenlink (1993), Rusinek (2008), and Shields (2001).

I have listened as many current music teachers recounted examples from their own classroom experiences regarding the removal of at-risk students from school music classes. They noted the apparent negative impact upon students’ perceptions of the global school experience. However, the effect of removal of at-risk students from music participation has not been investigated from the perspective of college students as they reflect on their high school years.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Epistemology**

Two terms are important for understanding the epistemological stance for this study. Constructionism, the making of meaning, is the overarching concept. Vygotsky’s work laid the foundation for the current conception of societal and contextual influences’ importance in the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next (Ormrod, 2012). The definition of constructionism according to Crotty (1998) is that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Constructionism posits that each person’s perception of the meaning and truth of a given circumstance is based upon his/her pre-existing perspective of and interactions within a particular situation (Bruner, 1985; Crotty, 1998; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006).

While constructionism focuses on the creation, understanding, and transmission of meaning within a given context, a second term to consider is constructivism. Constructivism, in Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, focuses on how the individual mind learns
Crotty suggests that the term constructivism is appropriate when focusing exclusively on the “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (p. 58).

Constructivism, rather than constructionism, was my word of choice since my research focused on individuals’ perceptions of their lived experiences. I included the term “social” since the area of investigation concerned individual perceptions of actions within the social context of the classroom and the school. Thorough research of my topic necessitated the methods inherent in social constructionism/constructivism. This reality compelled me to adopt a form of social constructivism as my epistemology.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

Interpretivism is an overarching theoretical perspective that seeks to understand human behavior rather than to explain it in an objective way. A teacher’s understanding of a particular circumstance may differ significantly from the internal response of a student to the same event. Interpretivism focuses on understanding these two perspectives and their effects on each individual.

Two aspects of interpretivism, symbolic interactionism (SI) and phenomenology, utilize methodologies appropriate to the type of research intended in this document. These methodologies situated my research for a more complete understanding of the participants’ meaning making. In the context of my research and throughout this discussion I considered situations and experiences as the “things” (Crotty, 1998) with which we interact.

**Symbolic Interactionism.**

Crucial foci of symbolic interactionism (SI) include the act of learning to self-define, developing an understanding of interpersonal perceptions, growth, and awareness of how others view the “self.” Symbolic interactionism posits three basic assumptions that are important in the
The present study. The first assumption is that human beings respond to situations based on the meaning these situations have for them. The second assumption is that meanings attached to situations grow out of the social interactions one has with others in a particular circumstance. The third assumption is that meanings are constructed through the perspective of the participant as he/she interprets fluctuating life circumstances (Blumer, 1969; Bruner, 1986; Crotty, 1998). The perspective of the assumptions of SI supplemented the accumulation of detail in the participants’ reflections that were generated by the interview process.

**Phenomenology.**

Phenomenology invites us to intentionally construct our own meanings, without preconceptions, through our interactions with situations that exist or occur as independent events. We should try to divest ourselves of cultural understandings into which one is born (constructionism), instead approaching individual experiences (constructivism) without preconceived notions (phenomenology). It is in this conceptual framework that phenomenology and constructivism intersect (Crotty, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The “aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Efforts to see the world through the eyes of participants encourage phenomenologist researchers to also listen without preconceived ideas and to faithfully transmit narratives that lead to an understanding of the participants’ experiences. These aspects of phenomenology, along with the emphasis on lived experience, provided a solid basis for my research.

**Positionality**

I am both emic and etic. I am a musician, a music educator, the parent of a musician and the parent of a child for whom music is not a profession but an enriching activity. I have taught
chorus in a middle school setting and in a community choir. When teaching, I try to engage students in myriad ways and to provide a variety of opportunities for participation. As an observer and interviewer I brought all of these insider experiences with me. I believe my emic stance enabled me to fully understand experiences as they were recounted to me and enhanced my ability to render a faithful representation of the participants’ perceptions of their experiences in school music.

I am etic in that I strived to dispassionately observe circumstances and situations about which I had no prior knowledge. I endeavored to give voice to the participants, rather than to use my voice. At the time of the research I was not experiencing school music as a student.

**Conceptual Framework**

As I examined the literature related to this topic I was struck by the interconnectedness of the variables that influence self-perception and motivation in individuals. Process theory, a more contemporary theory of motivation, acknowledges that the variables affecting motivation are mediated by cognition. The six components of process theory are expectancy, equity, attribution, self-efficacy, goal setting, and autonomy. Process theory will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Hallam (2002) incorporated the six aspects of process theory to construct a motivational model that she applies specifically to musical motivation. I adapted a segment of her motivational model as the conceptual framework for this study. As significant musical encounters emerged from the narrative data they were analyzed according to their effect on the malleable aspects of the personality that are contained in Hallam’s model of motivation.

**Purpose of the Study**

This research was purposed to discover how students perceived the impact of participation or lack of participation in school music classes on their global school experience during
secondary school. This study was designed to deepen understandings regarding the importance of school music-education opportunities in the lives of young people. To this end, this study included the voices of individuals who were denied access to school music experiences or were counseled to discontinue music classes. This study illuminated the effect the denial of involvement in the arts during the instructional day had on the global school experience of disaffected students, the exploration of students’ possible selves (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Freer, 2009a; Freer & Bennett, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986) and the implications for their life-altering decisions.

Research Questions

A review of the literature surrounding this topic augmented by my personal experiences led me to consider the following questions as a foundation for my research. The primary research question was:

How did the removal of at-risk students (see definition on page 17) from in-school music education opportunities affect their overall school experience?

The subsidiary questions were:

1) How did those students who valued school music participation but who were denied access to music classes perceive the impact of the resulting situation on their overall school experience and subsequently on their lives?

2) How did those students who were able to remain in their chosen musical activity in spite of administrative or academic difficulties perceive the impact this participation had on their overall school experience and subsequently on their lives?
3) Did students perceive that participation in these music classes led to success in other areas of school life such as academic performance, improved citizenship, and increased possibilities for the future beyond high school?

4) Did students perceive that lack of participation in music classes led to negative effects on their lives as described above?

**Significance of the Study**

Teachers, students, and administrators may benefit from the information gleaned from the answers to the research questions. With the help of administrators, counselors, and teachers, at-risk students may be identified and directed to activities that can serve as an anchor for their entire school experience. It is possible that educators will become more aware of the relationship between arts participation, an enjoyable global school experience, and successful learning. Arts teachers may become more cognizant of their contributions to at-risk students and may adjust their teaching strategies to ensure positive arts experiences. Administrators and teachers may use this information to facilitate discussions within the profession. It is hoped these conversations will enhance corrective action for the benefit of current and future students who will then impact society in a positive way.

**Delimitations**

The constructivist epistemology of this research necessitated a qualitative design. Data was drawn from the narratives generated from interviews with students who were participating in a college music program as an elective. The number of in-depth interviews resulting in narrative data was small. A survey was administered to all of the members of a college choral program.
Focus groups were formed based upon the responses to the survey. Six individuals were selected from these focus groups for in-depth interviews.

The two criteria for inclusion in the interview process were originally that (1) these students reported that they were “at-risk” during secondary school (see definition on page 17) and/or (2) students were previously enrolled in secondary school music classes but administratively removed or strongly advised to discontinue music classes in favor of remediation in non-arts academic subjects. During the course of the study it became necessary to add a third criteria: that of students who were advised to discontinue music classes for advanced courses. There were participants who remained in music classes in spite of administrative recommendations to the contrary.

**Organization of the Document**

This chapter presented a statement of the issues surrounding lack of access to school music classes and highlighted an area still in need of investigation: asking the students *themselves* about their perceptions regarding this situation. This chapter also presented the philosophical, theoretical and conceptual grounding for this study.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature. It highlights prior research on the influences of music on intelligence and the meaning music has in students’ lives. Additionally, the literature addressing at-risk populations and targeted teaching strategies for that demographic is included. Finally, the effect of music participation on at-risk populations and theories of motivation are examined. Chapter 3 details the methodology including the participant selection, data collection methods and procedures, and the analytical processes. Chapter 4 contains the results of the investigation emphasizing the themes identified from the surveys and focus groups while
Chapter 5 extends the analysis through the individual narratives. Concluding thoughts and implications of the study are found in Chapter 6 along with the reflections of the researcher.
Definition of Terms

Academic Subjects and the Arts

The conception of academic subjects in secondary school has changed in recent years. The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* recommended five new basics: “(a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 24). Although the language of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* included the arts as a core subject, a course in the arts is, often, not required for graduation.

According to the Arts Education Partnership (AEP, 2015) the fine and performing arts are offered as core academic subjects in only 27 states (including Washington, DC). Graduation requirements in only 26 states include the arts (AEP, 2015). However—and critically important for this paper—22 of these states consider the fine and performing arts as but options on lists of many possible elective courses that could fulfill the arts requirements for graduation (National Center on Educational Outcomes [NCEO], 2014). For the purposes of this paper, “academics” and “traditional academics” connote courses that, in practice in secondary school curricula, constitute the core and are currently required for graduation in a majority of states. The term “arts” implies courses in the fine and performing arts, often an array of offerings in the visual arts and design, music, dance, and drama. In the state where this study was situated, and in its five bordering states, requirements in the fine and performing arts for graduation, according to the state education websites are: (a) nonexistent in three states; (b) optional, as described above, in two states, and (c) may be waived in the one state that lists a requirement.
At-Risk

Shuler (1991) posited this definition. “At-risk” students are those who are in danger either of dropping out of school or of graduating without mastering the knowledge and skills that are necessary to be effective citizens and contributors to the economy” (p. 22). Throughout this paper the term “at-risk” is used as a designation for students who may struggle in school due to a variety of circumstances. Circumstances leading to academic deficits or disinterest in school include: low socioeconomic status, family dysfunction, immigrant status, or alternative learning styles.

Global School Experience

The accepted definition of a comprehensive school experience includes participation in extra-curricular activities in addition to academic pursuits. The National Federation of State High School Associations “believe(s) that interscholastic sports and fine arts activities promote citizenship and sportsmanship. They instill a sense of pride in the community, teach lifelong lessons of teamwork and self-discipline and facilitate the physical and emotional development of our nation’s youth” (2001, p. 1).

For individual students the global school experience included interactions with teachers and friends, the level of academic achievement, participation in extracurricular activities and students’ perceived success or failure in their endeavors.

Extra-Musical Success or Instrumental Benefits of Music Participation

“Extra-musical” and “instrumental” benefits are often used interchangeably in the literature and have been so used throughout this paper. These benefits are positive effects that accrue to students as a result of music participation. Students may experience increased self-confidence and a sense of belonging that will transfer to other areas of schooling and life. A study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation
(McCarthy et al. 2004) used the term “instrumental benefits” to refer to cognitive benefits such as improved academic performance, improved reading and writing skills, enhanced creativity, and learning how to learn. Other categories of instrumental or extra-musical benefits listed are attitudinal and behavioral improvements that lead to self-efficacy, self-discipline, reduced dropout rate, and teamwork. McCarthy et al. noted that these qualities are particularly beneficial for at-risk populations. They found that the strongest evidence from empirical studies supported the benefits of enhanced engagement in school for at-risk students, rather than a concern with a deficiency in their economic status. Current literature may define these terms more narrowly but this paper uses the broader definition described above.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Select students may be denied opportunities for music classes and experiences during the school day. A thorough consideration of this topic required a multifaceted approach. An examination of the research presented four main areas of interest that intersect at myriad points. While each topic is worthy of study alone, it is the convergence of these influences in the lives of individual students at the intersection with musical experience that presented an area of research that was unexplored. These areas of interest are: first, the influence of music on intelligence; second, musical meaning; third, at-risk populations and targeted teaching strategies; and finally, theories of motivation.

This literature review examines previous research that explores the aspects of learning delineated above and their relationship to music experiences for at-risk students. This review is limited to the most relevant scholarship of the past twenty-five years regarding the confluence of these factors as found in the educational system of the United States. Additionally, this review includes references to foundational works in the fields of intelligence and motivation. Scrutiny of the literature reveals a significant omission. This topic has not been explored from the point of view of at-risk high school students who were affected by the decisions of school administrators and those who decided educational policy at county and state levels.

Educational leaders have long been concerned that music might lose its foothold in education. Futrell (1987), then president of the National Education Association, stressed that music should not be considered a frill; music may insulate society from a populace that has information, but not understanding; that has skills, but not true education. She referred to music as the language of emotion that has been tamed by intellect, “emotion rendered articulate” (p.
What was striking was that this sentiment was expressed not by a musician but by an educational leader who recognized the imperative to provide music education for all.

At first glance a review of the state of music education offerings in the United States seemed positive. Surveys (Richmond, 1997) had shown that music was available in over 90% of schools with a broad array of offerings. However, the quality and availability of programs may have varied by locality and the availability of music in the schools seemed to be declining nationwide (Beveridge, 2009; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lopez, 2012; Winner & Hetland, 2008). Further, offerings that did exist may have been denied to certain segments of the student body based upon administrators’ perception of students’ needs for alternative instruction (Abril & Gault, 2008; Baker, 2012; Buzzelli-Clarke, 2008; Elpus, 2013; Gerrity, 2009).

While some students may find satisfactory arts participation outside of school, there are many who might never have the opportunity to participate in a fulfilling musical experience unless it is offered during the school day as part of the curriculum or as an elective. Researchers cited evidence that learners who lacked access to musical activities may miss an important intellectual developmental component (Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 1983, 1999, 2004; Rauscher, Shaw & Ky, 1993; Rauscher & Zupan, 2000; Wallick, 1998; Winner & Hetland, 2008; Wong, Skoe, Russo, Dees, & Kraus, 2007). Other researchers were concerned with the development of emotional and expressive capabilities through experiences in music as students attempt to situate themselves in the world and experiment with future, possible selves (Baker, 2012; Coatsworth, Palen, Sharp, & Ferrer-Wider, 2006; Davis, 2009; Freer, 2009a, 2010, 2012; Stipek, 2002).

However, concern over lack of access to musical involvement is intensified when one considers marginal or poor academic performers or other at-risk students who may be required
to give up music, even when it is offered, for remediation in English or mathematics. Will denying struggling or disaffected learners access to music in school, however well-intentioned the rationale, result in better academic performance and overall school experience? Or would this action result in students’ lack of motivation to improve in nonmusical areas?

**Influence on Intelligence**

One contemporary approach to understanding intelligence and learning styles stems from the work of Gardner (1983, 1999) with his theory of multiple intelligences. Gardner suggested that an “intelligence requires two specific prerequisites.” To be labeled as such the “intellectual competence must entail a set of skills of problem solving . . . and must also entail the potential for finding or creating problems . . . (for) the acquisition of new knowledge” (1983, p. 60-61). In 1983, these intelligences were considered to be seven in number: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and the personal intelligences-interpersonal and intrapersonal. Gardner has since added an eighth (naturalistic intelligence) and has considered existential intelligence as a potential ninth component (1999, 2006). This theory of multiple intelligences supports the recognition of different learning styles and emphasizes the need for alternative teaching and learning strategies (Winner & Hetland, 2008).

Research concerning the influence of music and other arts education on developing intelligence compelled the U. S. government to declare “the term core academic subjects means English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography” *(No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Title IX, Part A Sec 9101 (11))*. Music falls under the arts as defined in this act. Even as emphasis on testing causes programs to be discontinued (Abril & Gault, 2008; Elpus, 2014; West, 2012), evidence continues to mount regarding the positive impact the study of arts, music in particular,
has on overall school performance (Gerrity, 2009; Heilig et al. 2010; Melnick et al., 2011; Salazar, 2012).

Early research hypothesized a causal relationship between music training and spatial ability. Promising results in original research (Rauscher et al., 1993) led to further studies (Rauscher, Shaw, & Ky, 1995) that examined whether passively listening to music would yield a similar finding. The increase in spatial IQ achieved while listening to Mozart proved to be short-term. A follow-up study investigated the effect of music training on the spatial temporal reasoning of young children (Rauscher et al., 1997). Children who received keyboard lessons demonstrated significant improvement in spatial-temporal reasoning: an increase in time of a factor of over 100 times the length of the effect found in the 1993 study. Criticisms of the finding of increased spatial-temporal reasoning led Rauscher and Shaw (1998) to publish a defense of their methods that suggested the choice of dependent variables in subsequent replications of the initial study may have led to a different result.

Rauscher and Zupan (2000) sought to verify the hypothesized relationship between music and other reasoning abilities by brain imaging and IQ testing pre-school children before and after they participated in a series of musical experiences. Although the investigation used a small sample it lasted eight months and demonstrated that music education is important for optimal cognitive development for all students, not just the gifted and talented. The results supported the premise that music education may be especially valuable for at-risk students.

Morrison (1994) analyzed statistics gathered from 18,000 high school sophomores by the U. S. Department of Education as the first follow-up to the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (Ingels, Scott, Lindmark, Frankel & Meyers, 1992). He compared the academic information of those who identified themselves as music students with students who did not
participate in music. Of the students who agreed to answer the necessary questions for further analysis, only 22.3 percent self-identified as music participants. One outcome of the study noted the high percentage of music students who were recognized for academic achievement and other honors in contrast to the expected number. This study also pointed to the under-representation of minorities in music classes, particularly those with lower SES. Possible reasons for this circumstance included language barriers and additional costs associated with participation in band and orchestra.

*Involvement in the Arts and Human Development: General Involvement and Intensive Involvement in Music and Theater Arts* details a study conducted by the Imagination Project at UCLA by Catterall et al. (1999). The discussion of the interactions between arts involvement, human development, and human achievement was based largely on the results of the *National Educational Longitudinal Survey* (NELS:88), “a panel study which has followed more than 25,000 students in American secondary schools for 10 years” (p. 2).

Catterall et al. (1999) conducted a further study in the Imagination Project, which deepened and corroborated the results of the NELS:88 study and the first follow-up in 1990 (Morrison, 1994). Consistently, more positive outcomes were shown for students involved in the arts, “higher achievement, staying in school, and better attitudes about school and community” (Catterall et al., 1999, pp.2-3; Melnick, Witmer & Strickland, 2011; Salazar, 2012). Catterall et al. (1999) extended their study to focus on those students who were involved specifically in musical and dramatic arts. They found that musical decoding skills for pitch and rhythm were correlated with students’ positive test scores. These results were presented as objectively measured student gains in achievement.
The preliminary findings of an investigation (Wallick, 1998) into the effects of a pullout beginning orchestra program on student achievement in the writing, reading, mathematics, and citizenship sections of the Ohio Proficiency Test (OPT) supported the idea that music instruction does not hinder, but rather enhances other academic endeavors and leads to overall success. It was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference between the two ability-matched groups of fourth graders; equal numbers of students participated in pullout string programs while a matched control group had uninterrupted classroom instruction. The results revealed a significant difference in favor of the string students’ achievement in reading and citizenship, with no significant difference between the two matched groups in the writing and mathematics sections of the OPT (Wallick, 1998).

Johnson & Memmott (2006) conceived a study that filled a perceived gap and made a significant contribution to the literature addressing the quality of the music programs in which students were enrolled. This study analyzing tests scores of 4,739 students consisted of multiple parts. One strand of the study involved third and fourth-grade students from across the United States who participated in either high-quality or deficient music programs with all other factors being equal. Another strand of the study compared standardized test scores of students in eighth and ninth grades with the music-program quality in their school or whether or not the students were involved in music at all. The test scores of students in high-quality music programs were higher than the scores of students in deficient programs. Researchers reported, “...it is evident, based on the results of this study, that rather large differences exist between the test scores of students in the excellent and deficient music programs” (p. 303). Even after accounting for other variables these researchers note that the “differences are difficult to ignore” (p. 303). They did
not claim causation but rather a strong relationship between the quality of the programs and the test scores of the participants.

Other quantitative research (Wong et al., 2007) examined brainstem encoding that occurs during musical activity, finding a positive correlation. These studies support the hypothesis that participation in music may enhance language learning. “Musicians show more robust and faithful encoding compared with non-musicians” (p. 420). Given these results it appears that the removal of a child from musical training in favor of academic remediation may be self-defeating. The positive influence of musical experience on the development of intelligence is supported by this study.

Recent research into the connection between music experiences and intelligence has emphasized the effect of arts education on cognition. Melnick et al. (2011) based their research on the work of Kienzl, Boachie-Ansah, Lanahan, and Holt (2006), a longitudinal study that looked at the availability of in-school arts instruction to first- and third-grade students. Melnick et al. analyzed the data from more than 8000 fifth-grade students, but the extension of the study included data regarding arts influences from both school and home. For this study teachers were asked to rate the students in reading and math proficiency. When all the variables were considered researchers found that students who were involved in the arts outperformed those who were not. Those students who had arts influences outside of school and in the home rated higher than those who only experienced music in school.

Research continued regarding the effect of music participation on the components of the brain that are linked to the ability to learn information. A 2011 study first demonstrated that children’s training in music listening transfers broadly to improved performance on a measure of verbal intelligence (Moreno et al., 2011). Could the study of music positively impact reading
skills? Researchers who focused on creative musical activities for five months with second to fourth-graders investigated this question (Cogo-Moreira, de Ávila, Ploubidis, & de Jesus Mari, 2013). They found a positive correlation between music training, improved reading skills, and academic achievement.

Does the benefit of music training for learning end with the onset of adolescence? Researchers found that adolescents from low SES neighborhoods may receive the same benefit to their neural processing of speech from low-cost in-school music training that is usually associated with expensive one-on-one private music lessons (Tierney, Krizman, Skoe, Johnston, & Kraus, 2013). They suggested that improved neural processing of speech enables students to more quickly understand what is being communicated in the classroom and may result in improved educational outcomes.

Researchers continue to study the efficacy of music lessons for improved neural development in at-risk populations. Scientists from Northwestern University investigated the impact of music lessons on the development of neural pathways for speech processing in children, ranging in age from 7-10 years old, affiliated with Project Harmony in gang-reduction zones in Los Angeles (Kraus et al., 2014). Children who participated in active music lessons showed improved response times for auditory stimuli as opposed to children who only participated in music appreciation classes. According to the researchers these results have been linked to reading ability and may point to the importance of active engagement in music experiences, particularly for at-risk populations.

The effect of group music instruction on the development of language and reading skills in low-income children has been similarly investigated. Recent findings from a one-year longitudinal study suggest that children who receive musical training maintain their level of
reading literacy when compared to children who do not receive musical training (Slater et al., 2014).

**Musical Meaning**

Music is a universal experience. Societies incorporate it into their lives, rituals, and celebrations naturally, without outside stimulation or encouragement (Blacking, 1995). While researchers seek a definitive cause for this phenomenon, perhaps it is enough to know that music conveys meaning to the deepest parts of the human spirit (Gary, 2001). Gary restated and expanded upon Futrell’s (1987) thoughts regarding emotional expressiveness as a new millennium began. He exhorted music educators to “see that students have an experience with music that can make a difference in their lives” (Gary, 2001, p 52). Catterall et al. (1999, pp. 2-3) documented the importance of music to complete human development and the positive influence of arts education, particularly music, in achieving global gains. These studies consisted of surveys, questionnaires, and observations.

The ability to find meaning in musical experiences was explored by Stickford (2003) through case studies of three high school musicians. She described her participants as insiders, drifters, and fringe dwellers. Her participants were a bassoonist and pianist, a singer, and a guitarist who agreed to a series of interviews regarding music’s place in their lives. Although these young men were very different they each fit all of the above descriptors at different times in their lives. Throughout the changes in their circumstances, music was the constant thread, the motivating force that kept them engaged. The guitarist, a drifter in a very real sense, remarked “Music has probably saved my life more times than I can remember” (p. 267). Each of these students envisioned a future in music and credited their musical involvement during their
adolescent years as important in helping them to construct ideas for the future as they considered possible selves (Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Freer, 2009a, 2010).

Bailey & Davidson (2005) discovered that displaced individuals with little or no training found “considerable emotional, social, and cognitive benefits” (p. 269) from singing in a group setting. These singers were unconcerned with the usual Western performance expectations and reveled in the sheer enjoyment of the activity. Their interviews reflected a developing sense of “family” and belonging they had not found in other areas of their life experience.

Johnson and Memmott’s (2006) quantitative methodology produced a conclusion that supports the idea that music has intrinsic value for the “quality of one’s life through the myriad opportunities and experiences that music study provides” (p. 305).

Freer (2007) used boys’ own comments to discuss retaining boys in the choral program through the voice change. Further qualitative research (Freer, 2009a) yielded moving narratives of young men who had experimented with ‘musician’ as one of their possible selves. These young men discussed aspects of choral performance including opportunities and struggles with the self-image. In another series of interviews (Freer, 2009b) investigated boys’ perspectives in choirs, in other school music experiences and in activities outside of school music. He identified common elements among these young men such as a transformative experience or “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) during choral rehearsals and the importance of relationships in the choir, whether with teachers or friends. Freer noted that a sense of belonging is important as adolescents begin to develop their identities. When nearly 100 European adolescent boys from four countries shared their perspectives about the voice change and school choral singing (Freer, 2015), 84.6% of singers cited friendships as an important facet of their continuous participation in music.
Campbell, Connell, and Beegle (2007) conducted additional research regarding perceived musical meaning in the lives of young people. One thousand one hundred and fifty-five teens responded to a national survey sponsored by *Teen People Magazine* and themusicedge.com with short essays that expressed the meaning music gave to their lives. The researchers conducted a content analysis of the responses identifying common themes: “(a) identity formation in and through music, (b) emotional benefits, (c) music’s life benefits including character building and life skills, (d) social benefits, and (e) positive and negative impressions of school music and their teachers” (p. 220). Among other findings, “teens believe that music is an integral part of American life, and that music reflects American culture and society” (p. 227). They also believe that “playing music provides a sense of belonging . . . ” (p. 230).

Do middle-school students find meaning in general music classes? Davis (2009) used an open-ended survey to investigate whether students in grades 6 though 8 valued their non-performance music classes. Her sample consisted of 762 students from nine middle schools across eight states. The responses to the survey instrument indicated that students did find music classes meaningful. Four overarching categories of responses in order of importance to students were as follows: vocational (possible future careers), academic (learning about music history and theory), belongingness (social interactions with peers and teachers), and agency (development of self-esteem and increased motivation). Davis (2009) concluded that music classes are important for all students including those who do not choose to participate in a performance ensemble. General music classes are uniquely situated to meet this need. The findings suggested that educators should consider that meaningfulness in school seems related to students’ ideal functioning in school and to a positive global school experience.
McFerran (2010) discusses the important role music plays in the move from concrete to abstract thinking in adolescents and how that development factors into the way they deal with grief. Participants in her study reported the importance of music in writing expressive lyrics, letting feelings out and re-igniting enjoyment in their lives.

**At-risk Populations**

In addition to an expanding population and budgetary constraints, demographics are changing around the world. Part of that change is the identification of increased numbers of students who are labeled at-risk or disaffected (Kinder & Harland, 2004; Rusinek, 2008). At-risk students have been defined as “those who are unlikely to succeed in traditional school settings” (Shuler, 1991, p 21). Factors affecting the current definition of the at-risk student include contemporary family and societal structures as well as economic trends with the resulting employment pressures on parents (Robinson, 2004).

In the burgeoning field of qualitative methodology, stories abound detailing the development of musical meaning in the lives of participants (Arasi, 2006; Campbell et al., 2007; Davis, 2009; Freer 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; McFerran, 2010; Stickford, 2003). Including the experiences of students who are labeled at-risk or disaffected presents another dimension for consideration (Jenlink, 1993; Shields, 2001; Kinder & Harland, 2004; Kinney, 2010; Rusinek, 2008). Might there be a connection between musical experience, particularly in a group setting, and the encouragement of struggling learners or otherwise at-risk students (Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson 2012)?

The reality of at-risk students’ lives was poignantly addressed by Shuler (1991) as he noted that, “An alarming percentage of America's children are limping through life with a . . . sense of incompleteness” (p. 22). He suggested that due to the harshness of their actual existence,
many students “never achieve wholeness.” (p. 22). Although a new century has begun, this situation still exists and may be exacerbated in current society.

Kinney (2010) investigated the extent to which non-musical factors affected student choice to participate in band and to continue in band through eighth grade. He found that family structure was second only to academic achievement as the greatest predictor of a student’s intention to remain in band. Higher academically achieving students were more likely to remain in band, as were students with higher SES. Although this study found significance in family structure, the extent to which family structure can be delineated from SES remains in question.

More recently, Catterall et al. (2012) utilized the statistics and information found in four longitudinal studies from the years 1988-2002 for an analysis of the benefits realized by at-risk youth who participate in arts activities. They found that at-risk youth who are involved in intensive arts participation close the achievement gap found between students of low SES and those of high SES. Additionally, while all students improved in civic engagement, the positive academic outcome was found only in students who were designated as at-risk.

In 2006, Youth Music, an organization in England, presented a proposal for a music-mentoring program to the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport as part of the Government’s Respect Agenda. Lonie (2010) presented interim results from phase two of the study. Although the study was designed to improve musical ability, an additional component assessed the development of agency in the participants. A stated purpose of the program was to “increase agency and encourage greater levels of active citizenship among disengaged children and young people” (p. 2) and further “to improve the life chances of young people in challenging circumstances through music based mentoring” (p. 3). Hallam (2010) noted the personal and
social benefits that can accrue to individuals from music making. She suggested that these benefits might be particularly noticeable in young people who are disadvantaged.

Rhodes and Schechter (2012) examined the contributions of the Artists Collective, located in Hartford, CT, to the development of resilience in inner-city youth. In addition to providing a safe and attractive physical space, the authors hypothesized that “learning about and participating in the arts fosters resilience through the development of person-level protective factors such as self-efficacy, improved emotional regulation, social skills, coping skills, and ethnic pride” (p. 2). A by-product of arts participation in this setting is the formation of “pro-social relationships and social capital,” attributes that enhance resilience. This community effort highlighted the benefits of music and arts education for at-risk students.

Hendon and Bohon (2007) found that music experiences surpassed play experiences as a catalyst for improving mood among children who were in a high-stress environment. Other researchers within the field of resilience advocate activities that play to the strengths of an individual and they encourage arts-based activities as strategies that produce positive results in at-risk populations (Coholic, Fraser, Robinson, & Lougheed, 2012).

Researchers targeted at-risk children in a study investigating the effects of music therapy or piano lessons on the academic achievement, classroom behaviors, and self-esteem of study participants. Piano students showed a statistically significant improvement in pre- and post-test reading scores while music therapy students showed no academic improvement. Researchers theorized that piano students’ improvement in reading scores might be linked to the skill of learning to read music notes. Classroom behaviors and self-esteem were impacted, as noted by the instructors during the study. They observed changes in the social and emotional behaviors of the students. They reported:
students demonstrated increased confidence as they progressed through training, as evidenced by behaviors such as: increased assertiveness when singing and playing self-composed songs; increased smiling and verbalizations as lessons progressed; decreased resistance and increased initiative in learning more songs than were required; increased positive self-statements and desire to play for others; pride taken in songs learned; improved walking posture and increased volume of speech (Li, Miller, & Ruiz, 2014, p. 34).

Teaching Strategies for At-Risk Populations

During the decade of the 1990s researchers began to expand the question of music’s effect on intelligence. Music contributes to enlarging the human spirit, celebrating diversity and engaging the mind. However, music’s ability to stimulate learning by utilizing many modalities is less often recognized (Winner & Hetland, 2008). Collett (1991) introduced the Learning to Read Through the Arts program as a model for multisensory learning. She theorized that at-risk students might especially benefit from this approach.

Hanson, Silver, & Strong (1991) identified four learning styles that are based on the Jungian classification: sensing thinking, sensing feeling, intuitive thinking, and intuitive feeling. These authors focused on those styles most often exhibited by at-risk students: sensing feeling and intuitive feeling. Additionally, they itemized symptomatic presenting behaviors and provided suggestions for classroom strategies to counteract these behaviors. Hanson et al. suggested, “a student who can correctly perform, understand, interpret, compose, and personally value music in its many forms is a student who has developed a robust intelligence as a result of being . . . challenged in each of the four learning styles” (p. 35). Further, they asserted that music teachers “are extraordinarily qualified to . . . balance . . . the curriculum because their teaching styles tend
to mirror the learning styles of at-risk students . . .” (p. 35). Seven master teachers offered suggestions for effective strategies for reaching at-risk students in the music classroom (Robinson, 2004). Robinson summarized these strategies in three overarching concepts: 1) recognize the uniqueness of each student and treat them with respect; 2) design a curriculum geared to diversity in all of its manifestations; and 3) celebrate and expand upon even the smallest successes.

Kinder and Harland (2004) positively compared the attributes of effective arts pedagogy with a “style that mirrors the kinds of interpersonal behavior, techniques and values evident in those professionals who work effectively with disengaged and excluded young people” (p. 54). Six factors were identified as those that might “not only raise the quality of arts education, but also help some of our young people to re-engage with learning – or indeed not become disaffected in the first place” (Kinder & Harland, 2004, p. 54). These key considerations included: the status of the arts at the national level, adequate provision of the arts at crucial educational and developmental junctures, enjoyment and perceived relevance of the arts, internal and external support for arts and arts teachers, highly qualified arts teachers, a praise culture, practical task-based activities, performance or display and celebration of the product, and pupils’ recognition of the significance of their contribution to the end product.

The Positive Youth Development (Coatsworth et al., 2006) model asserted that all youth have “strengths, talents and interests that will help them thrive, develop a sense of well-being and create a positive future” (p. 157). Although participation in self-defining activities, such as sports, arts, and clubs was central, researchers’ findings supported their hypothesis that “expressive identity” mediated the relations between self-defining activities and wellness” (p.157). The arts are often the medium for expressiveness. These self-defining activities enhance
positive identity formation when they are goal-directed, allow for expressiveness, and create flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Achievement goal theory (Green & Hale, 2011) supports guiding students to strive for goals based on the internal rewards such as self-fulfillment as an aid to involvement in music classes. Music teachers can effect a change in classroom atmosphere to one of encouragement and acceptance. In 2001, Brumister suggested that all teachers ask themselves daily, “What am I planning to teach today that goes beyond the skill of performance?” (p. 45).

Kinder and Harland (2004) posited “three basic tools of repair” for re-engaging disengaged or disaffected youth. According to Kinder and Harland (2004) arts educators fulfill requirements of all of these ‘tools’ by providing opportunities: for a mentoring relationship with an adult who is a positive role model; to achieve academic or vocational success that delineates a path for the future; and for leisure activities which provide enjoyment, a sense of achievement and self-worth. These ‘tools’ echo the finding of Stipek (2002) regarding development of self-respect as important to individuals who are learning to process experiences in their lives.

Little (2014) suggests three main considerations for teachers, particularly those in urban classrooms which may have a high percentage of at-risk students: 1) understanding the student and the environment, 2) understanding that all students want success, and 3) understanding the need to foster a safe environment.

**Effectiveness of Interventions on the Re-Engagement of At-Risk Populations**

The above recommendations posit the effectiveness of music and arts instruction as a tool to enhance global educational gains in a school setting. Yet, students must have the mental mindset and attitude to benefit from the concepts presented during the activity and to transfer those skills to other learning. The term at-risk often encompasses more than learning disabilities.
The term at-risk can refer to students who have low-self esteem, a faulty self-concept, or may envision limited possibilities for their futures. Myriad factors, separately or combined, may conspire to create students who become disaffected in school because they are discouraged (Jenlink, 1993; Rusinek, 2008).

Jenlink (1993) examined the effect of music on the self-esteem of at-risk elementary children who participated in a select musical group. This qualitative study followed sixteen children who were part of a performing ensemble. Narrative, interviews and observations with students and staff provided insight into the thoughts and feelings of these individuals and the parents of the participants as the study progressed. As hypothesized, music participation, especially in the select group, had a positive effect on the children’s self-concept and, additionally, on parental involvement and support for school activities.

Expanded research examined the effects of music education on the self-perceptions, opinions and attitudes of urban at-risk adolescents (Shields, 2001). The participants were sixth graders in a newly established alternative school for the arts. These students participated in performance classes with mentoring in either choir or percussion for 16 weeks. They completed pre- and post-test surveys and participated in structured interviews. With some inconsistencies, the outcomes were generally positive and demonstrated that many at-risk students can benefit from an experience that includes performance and mentoring. The mentoring aspect was particularly successful and may have helped to “mediate the cumulative potentially negative effects of contingent debilitating factors in at-risk students lives” (Shields, p. 284; Jenlink, 1993).

Unfortunately, the circumstance of being at-risk does not end with the passage from adolescence into adulthood. Might musical participation provide a pathway to self-efficacy even for adults? To investigate this premise Bailey and Davidson (2005) conceived a study that
targeted marginalized singers who participated in amateur ensemble singing performances. Two choirs of homeless or otherwise at-risk individuals shared their perceptions of the experience. A focus group of middle-class singers served as a control group. Although the emotional benefit was similar for all groups, the marginalized singers experienced greater interpersonal and cognitive benefits. The middle class singers seemed “inhibited by prevalent social expectations of musicianship” (p.269). This study supported music involvement as a factor in the development of self-respect and expanded possibilities for alternative futures.

Dillon (2006) sought to discover the components of music education that are transferable to community development programs. *Aim High*, a program instituted for this study in Brisbane, Australia, involved a high school with a large proportion of socioeconomically disadvantaged students for the second of three phases. The culminating activity for the project was the composition and performance of music in a “new style” (p. 271). The number of returned surveys, possibly due to the demographic of the population in the study, was too limited to suggest causation for the cautiously optimistic results. However, teachers’ and music coaches’ anecdotal experiences supported the attitude of optimism. Dillon suggested that the artifacts in video and audio form demonstrate “a potential to provide compelling evidence and examples of the positive and transformative effects of musical experience” (p. 271).

To understand why students who fail in all other subjects can be highly engaged with music learning, Rusinek (2008) conducted an enlightening case study in a compulsory music class at a Spanish public secondary school. Twenty of the 24 participants 14 to 15 years old were failing in all other subjects and were recognized by administration as disinterested and disaffected in school. However, they were quite enthusiastic about music classes. This general music class used Orff instruments extensively and performed up to 10 concerts a year. Rusinek
described this pedagogy as having a subject narrative. Key components of the narrative included a visible goal, such as a concert, and active engagement in music making. Each class was structured as an orchestra practice and strove for authentic music making experiences in the praxial (Elliott, 1995) tradition. The structure of this secondary general music class stands in contrast to music classes in other schools and to the lecture found in other subjects in the same school. These results highlighted the success of an activity-based approach as a way to reach an at-risk population.

Dawes and Larson (2010) designed a longitudinal study using a grounded theory model to examine the effects of participation in ten community organizations on the development and motivation of youth. Specifically, they interviewed those adolescents who reported a “turning point” in their motivation that resulted in the development of future goals or a defining purpose (p. 263). The study included participants with a cross section of ethnic backgrounds and a high number of youth who were economically disadvantaged. An interesting finding was the positive impact on adolescents who were engaged in activities of shorter duration, such as preparation for a performance or the creation of an art product. Although participation time was shorter these students still exhibited a positive result.

**Theories of Motivation**

The importance of music classes as intervention and sources of motivation has a wealth of anecdotal support. The foregoing studies, while demonstrating a positive relationship between music interventions and improved self-concept, also reference the confluence of environmental factors that help to create the at-risk circumstance. These factors are more difficult to overcome. “Consistent with the literature . . . the study also revealed that being at-risk was an individual
issue, connected to each individual student’s configuration of assets and deficits, which could vary over time” (Shields, 2001, p. 248).

Effective mentoring and motivation requires an understanding of the variety of ways students may respond to differing stimuli. According to Hallam (2002), theories of motivation “fall into three main groupings: those where the individual is perceived to be motivated by environmental factors, those which emphasize motivation as deriving from within the individual, and those where motivation is seen as a complex interaction between the individual and the environment, mediated by cognition” (p. 225).

**Environment Theory**

The environment theory posits motivation as a response to outside stimuli (Skinner, 1950) with studies of reward and punishment. Criss (2011) notes that Skinner’s theory is also referred to as a reinforcement theory: reinforcing desirable behaviors with rewards and discouraging undesirable behaviors with punishment. Extrinsic reinforcement, although successful for a while, may ultimately be short-lived (Ormrod, 2012).

Green and Hale (2011) explored the two stimuli found in achievement goal theory. These two prongs are performance-oriented and learning or mastery. The performance goal is most often achieved with external rewards such as a grade or other public notice. A learning or mastery orientation fosters a love of learning for its own sake and is associated with internal rewards. Achievement goal theory suggests that students who are motivated by performance may be more likely to disengage from an activity if the external reward system does not meet their expectations, whereas students who are intrinsically motivated by learning or mastery develop a lifelong appreciation for the activity.
Content Theory

A second set of motivational theories falls under the category of content theories. Criss (2011) defines content theories as those that “focus on human needs and on identifying why people behave in certain ways” (p. 62). Motivation is attributed to humans working through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs toward self-actualization (Maslow, 1970, pp. 35-47). In this humanistic theory the fulfillment of these needs is the impetus for action.

Process Theory

A third category of motivational theories may be referred to as process theories. Process theory utilizes the previous elements of environmental and content theories while additionally noting the role of cognition in motivating humans to choose one option over another. Hallam, incorporating Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Theory, “suggests that our behavior is not so much affected by our actual experiences but by how we perceive and interpret them” (p. 226).

Criss (2011) referred to the broad category of process theories as those that highlight intrinsic motivation to improve within a given situation or within certain parameters. Six aspects of process theory have been delineated: expectancy, equity, attribution, self-efficacy, goal setting, and autonomy. Social cognitive theory mirrors achievement goal theory and process theory in that it attributes personal agency (intrinsic motivation) to actors as their positive self-evaluation reinforces rewarding behaviors (Stipek, 2002). Therefore, self-respect is an important component of process theory. As stated in Criss (2011) “one of the premises of process theory (the mediation of cognition) is that people value self-respect and self-satisfaction more highly than they value material rewards” (p. 63).
The Austin, Renwick, and McPherson model of motivation.

Austin, Renwick, and McPherson (2006) adapted Connell’s (1990) work to develop a dynamic, integrative process model of motivation. Randles (2011) adapted this model to analyze students’ beliefs about the characteristics of a good musician. He also examined how these beliefs affected their ability to envision a future, possible musician self. This motivational model, which demonstrates identity formation, has four interactive systems: the self-system (which incorporates perception, thoughts, beliefs and emotions); the social system (consisting of family, peers and teachers); actions (e.g. purposeful behaviors); and outcomes (in the form of learning and achievements). As individuals shared their experiences, whether instigated by family or society at large, and their emotional responses as an impetus for future actions, it was demonstrated that these systems are inseparable.

The Hallam model of motivation.

Hallam (2002) identified how the components of process theory might work to influence motivation-particularly musical motivation. She adapted these components to construct a motivational model that she applies specifically to musical motivation. Her model centralizes cognitive processes as the overarching construct incorporating factors such as: enduring behavioral characteristics, cognitive characteristics, environmental characteristics, malleable characteristics of the personality/self-concept, and related goals and aims. All of these characteristics motivate individuals to behave in particular ways or undertake particular tasks as they interpret input from the environment and formulate attributions of success or failure. Of particular interest to this present study are the malleable aspects of the personality and self-concept contained in Hallam’s (2002) motivational model pictured below (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Musical motivation. The interactions between individual and environmental factors in determining musical motivation. (Hallam, 2002, p. 233)

The contributors to the malleable aspects of the personality and self-concept are the ideal self, possible selves, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The following paragraphs discuss these subheadings.

The ideal self.

Individuals often experiment with a number of possible selves during the search for the ideal self (Dunkel, 2000; Dunkel & Anthis, 2001). The ideal self may be realized when one or
more of the possible selves experiences feelings of self-efficacy resulting in the development of self-esteem.

**Possible selves.**

Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory naturally extends to the concept of possible selves (Dunkel, 2000; Dunkel & Anthis, 2001; Freer, 2010). Markus and Nurius (1986) remarked that, “possible selves are linked to the dynamic properties of the self-concept to motivation, to distortion and to change, both momentary and enduring” (p. 954). Students’ ideas of their personal possibilities are contained in the reflections of their secondary school music experiences and how these experiences affected their conception of their future possible selves. (Campbell et al. 2007; Freer, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2015).

**Self-esteem.**

Individuals’ current self-esteem, how they feel they are valued as individuals, became evident in their discussions of their reactions to various influences in their lives (Dunkel, 2000; Dunkel & Anthis, 2001). Chandler (1999) defined self-esteem as an evaluation of self that results from feelings about the self that arise and change during the complexities of relationships with others. This idea supports research that posited a sense of belonging and acceptance as powerful reasons for individuals to choose music participation (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Davis, 2009; Freer, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2015; Hendricks et al., 2014).

**Self-efficacy.**

Although music experiences in school may not be performance-centered in the traditional sense, there is often a performance or activity-based component (Jenlink, 1993; Rusinek, 2008; Shields, 2001). Chandler (1999) states, “a sense of self-efficacy gained from performance
accomplishments tends to generalize to other situations in which performance may have been stunted by preoccupation with personal inadequacies” (p.73).

When educators recognize that students are continually refining their identity, they realize that students’ self-concept can be enhanced by perceived success and enjoyment in the music classroom (Campbell et al., 2007; Freer, 2007, 2009a & 2009b; Jenlink, 1993; Shields, 2001; Rusinek, 2008). However, teachers should remain aware of all students and not allow less-assertive students to become “invisible” (Hourigan, 2009). As students are in the process of constructing their realities and seeking future possibilities for success, the music classroom must remain a place of acceptance and belonging (Adderley, 2003; Allsup, 2012; Freer, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2015; Hendricks et al., 2014).

**Conclusion**

In thinking about the importance of musical experiences in the schools, and also considering lifelong impact, Allsup (2012) referred to the benefits that cannot be measured. His discussion of band programs notes that a significant facet of music participation concerns the intangible benefits to the student: his/her participation as a “cocreator of a larger musical goal” (p. 179). Students function within a “cross-section of the student body, a collective of young individuals” (p. 179).

Schonert-Reichl and LeRose (2008) note that, “A variety of evidence converges on the importance of belonging as a critical component of doing well in life: that is, the feeling that one is a competent, contributing, and valued member of a group” (p. 14).

These aspects of music involvement are especially important for students who are at-risk (Adderley et al., 2003; Hendricks et al., 2014). Music and arts experiences create a safe space of belonging where children who are marginalized can take risks that will enable them to fulfill
their potential. “Perceiving positive and strong connections to school has implications for current school functioning as well as future educational plans. Moreover, children’s engagement or disengagement in institutions, such as schools, depends largely on whether children’s fundamental needs for belonging, autonomy, and competence are being fulfilled” (Schonert-Reichl & LeRose, 2008, p. 14).

Having investigated the literature surrounding the many factors to be considered in the choice of music education as an important vehicle for learning and personal development, once again the problem of access to music classes arises. In a best-case scenario music classes would be universally accessible by all students in the public schools, regardless of their status, whether they are at-risk due to socioeconomic or environmental factors, alternative learning styles, disaffection, or designation as a struggling learner or whether they are academically advanced.

Investigators continually add to the body of research that supports the premise that music participation can contribute to the development of intellectual capacity. Researchers recognize the positive effects of music participation on self-esteem and as a vehicle for the reengagement of disaffected students (Allsup, 2012; Catterall et al., 2012; Jenlink, 1993; Rusinek, 2008; Shields, 2001). Additionally, the music classroom is often a place that fosters belonging, safety and the courage to take the risks necessary for growth and success (Adderley et al., 2003; Allsup, 2012; Hendricks et al, 2014; Hourigan, 2009; Kinder & Harland, 2004; Robinson, 2004).

One focus of the present study was to give voice to at-risk students regarding their perceptions of the importance of music classes in their lives. It was informative to explore the reactions of students who were engaged and excited by music participation when the opportunities for participation were threatened or removed.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The selection of the methodology used in this study can be traced to my experiences as a researcher. A 2011 qualitative research project I designed utilizing the long interview investigated the meaning individuals ascribed to music experiences through the life span. During the spring and fall semesters of 2012, the opportunity to assist Dr. Patrick Freer in two qualitative research projects introduced me to the practicalities of multifaceted qualitative research. All of these studies utilized elements of the qualitative methodologies and methods that were employed in this present study.

This study is grounded in the epistemological stance of constructivism that refers to the making of meaning by the individual and in the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. The methodologies utilized in this investigation are compatible with those theoretical stances. The data collection methods included a preliminary questionnaire and aspects of phenomenology such as phenomenological interviews with open-ended questions resulting in narratives.

This chapter delineates the overall study design as well as data collection techniques and vehicles for analysis.

Research Methodology

The methodology of narrative inquiry flows naturally from the epistemology of constructivism which suggests that, in one sense, meaning and truth for each person is affected by the pre-existing perceptions, or lens, through which he/she views the events of life (Kelly, 1955; Crotty, 1998). Riessman (2008) posited that narrative is central “when personal lives and social institutions intersect in the ‘ruling regimes’ of schools, social welfare departments, workplaces, hospitals and governments” (p. 3). She stated that only in rare instances could the
transformation of lived experience into language be accomplished without an accompanying understanding and mediation of the vocabulary of the culture surrounding the occurrence. Rarely can the storyteller achieve the clarity that demands but one interpretation of the spoken words.

Narrative is historically understood to be sequential, with a beginning, middle and an end (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009; Riessman, 2008). While Riessman (2008) emphasized that there must be a linkage of events, this organized sequence may be interrupted resulting in another path. Although Barrett and Stauffer (2009) suggested that all narratives are not sequential, particularly in the arts, there is agreement that “narrative is everywhere, but not everything is narrative” (Riessman, 2008, p. 4).

Narrative can be far-reaching, encompassing the experiences of a lifetime, or it can flow from dinner-table conversation. Narrative inquiry can be narrow when the focus is on the “microanalytic picture-individual stories-rather than the broader picture of cultural norms . . . or abstract theories” (Creswell, 2012, loc 13860 of 19974 ebook). This investigation elicited narratives in response to questions. It was hoped that coherent stories ensconced in a specific context would emerge. An effective use of narrative inquiry as a methodology requires the researcher to expand the meaning of narrative from simply a “story” to “one of narrative as simultaneously storied presentation, representation and meaning-making process” (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, loc 145 of 3800 ebook).

Riessman (2008) used “story” and “narrative” interchangeably. She described seven functions of narratives that overlap regarding the use of stories between individuals and groups. These functions are to remember the past, to argue for a cause, to justify actions or a position, to engage the listener, to entertain, to mislead an audience, and to “mobilize others into action for progressive social change” (p. 9). It was in this final function that this narrative inquiry was
grounded. Barrett and Stauffer (2009) reflected that narrative is not the final answer, but another way to “make audible the voices, experiences, and meanings of individuals . . . and to raise those questions that are often left unasked” (loc 272 of 3800 ebook). Barrett and Stauffer (2009) cautioned the inquirer to reflect upon his/her personal subjectivities and beliefs regarding both the topic and the approach to research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) expressed this thought when they suggested that an important “starting point for narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own narrative of experience, the researcher’s autobiography” (p. 70).

Weiler (2000) emphasized the importance of the “primacy of students’ personal knowledge and experiences, thus legitimating what students know and bring with them to the classroom” (p. 153). This study used the stories of affected individuals to give them voice to advocate for change. Several lenses seemed applicable to my topic. Chase (2005) suggested that narrative helps to put past experience in order and demonstrates the significance of the reflections from the perspective of the narrator. Narrative representation can highlight the depth of meaning of a given circumstance by expressing the thoughts and emotions of the storyteller. Other important aspects of narrative include action wherein the storyteller “shapes, constructs and performs the self, experience and reality” (p. 657). Stories are affected by social situations that affect the possibilities for “self and reality construction” (p. 657). These situations may be in the home, the larger world, or in the classroom. Finally, narratives are the result of the interaction between the narrator and the listener. These entities become co-constructors of the story.

**Research Design**

The nature of this investigation required a qualitative methodology as described above. Open-ended questions, focus groups, and individual interviews provided the foundation for an
in-depth narrative inquiry. This section details the components of the study such as site and participant selection, data collection methods and materials, and procedures for data collection and analysis.

**Site Selection**

This study was conducted at a major research university in the southeast. As expected, students were ethnically, socially, and economically diverse. An important element of the study was to identify those students who wished to be in music classes during high school but who were administratively advised to discontinue participation in those classes or who were prevented from participating in those classes.

**Non-Probabilistic Sampling**

**Purposeful Sampling**

In qualitative research it is common to use purposeful sampling. A site or a set of participants is selected based on their knowledge about a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In this study the site and the student population were selected for their likely ability to provide important information regarding the topic under consideration.

**Snowball Sampling**

Qualitative research projects often have a narrow focus that requires only a small number of cases or individuals for the interview phase of the study. Snowball sampling asks participants to nominate other individuals who have knowledge of the question under investigation to participate in the research. Once this study began, for instance, participants were invited to recommend friends or acquaintances who might be interested in the study and who met the established criteria for participation. One of the study participants volunteered to recruit an individual who met the requirements and was interested in the study. The recruited individual
was added to the population of this study as a result of this snowball sampling technique (Becker, 2015; Creswell, 2012; Kitchenham & Pfleeger, 2002; Noy, 2008). This participant provided information that was deemed important to the integrity of the data.

**Participant Selection**

Approximately 160 students enrolled in three university choral ensembles comprised the possible population sample. Some of the students were music majors while others had chosen to sing as a college elective. After the completion of an initial screening questionnaire, six focus groups of three to four participants each were organized. Students who elected to participate in these focus groups participated in one 30-minute interview. Originally the study was limited to members of the university choirs. Five individuals for the final interview of between 30-45 minutes in length were selected based on the information disclosed during the focus groups. However, one participant, a friend of one of the choir members who participated in the interviews, was added through snowball sampling for a total of six interviewees. This individual met the eligibility requirements and augmented the population of participants for the final interview, bringing the number of individual interviewees to six.

Since this study followed a qualitative design, six participants were sufficient for the individual interview phase of the study. Parameters for student participation in the interview portions of the study included students who met two or more of these criteria:

1. reported that they were at-risk either academically or socially during secondary school.
2. demonstrated interest, affinity or ability toward participation in music classes.
were denied access to music classes in high school to facilitate remediation of academic deficits or to meet other perceived academic priorities.

4. remained in high school music classes contrary to advice from administrators, counselors, or teachers to substitute academic remediation for music.

Data Collection Methods

The bases for the data collection methods used in this study are found in Preissle and Grant (2004) and Creswell (2012). My fieldwork was conducted as an insider in the tradition of Dubois and Mead (Preissle & Grant, 2004). I am a musician and a music teacher who struggled to find my own voice. Preissle and Grant (2004) and Riessman (2008) suggest that a researcher’s ability to empathize with study participants can be an asset in the research process.

Preliminary Questionnaire

A preliminary 15-item questionnaire (Appendix B) with closed- and open-ended prompts functioned as a screening tool to select the participants for focus group (Appendix C) and individual interviews (Appendix D). The design of this survey instrument was based on the work of contemporary researchers (Creswell, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Creswell (2012) suggested the strategy of interspersing closed-ended questions with the open-ended questions for the purposes of idea clarification and expansion as necessary.

Some of the questions were not closed in the traditional sense but could be fully answered with a single word. An example might be, “What was your favorite activity in the music classroom?” The answer might be one word or it could be longer. A follow-up question might then ask, “Why?”
Interviews

Moustakas (1994) stated that the primary vehicle for data collection in phenomenological investigations is the long interview. This interview process is usually informal and interactive using open-ended comments and questions to elicit information. Interviewing techniques were also recommended and discussed as a preferred method to generate data in qualitative research by Corbin and Strauss (2008), Riessman (2008), and Roulston (2009).

Two types of interviews were employed during this study. Appendix C contains a general guide for semi-structured focus group interviews. Appendix D contains a general outline for questions for individual interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

Based on the interviews, I composed written narratives that present events sequentially within given themes. These narratives are intended as an accurate representation of the participants’ words and ideas. As described later, validity was safeguarded as the participants were informed of the opportunity to comment on the transcriptions and suggest revisions as necessary. No one expressed an interest in reviewing the information.

The information obtained during these interviews generated two main foci. First, the responses illuminated the “what.” Were the students able to participate in musical experiences? Were these opportunities altered in some way related to school performance outside of music? Follow-up questions investigated the “how.” How did these circumstances cause the students to feel about the school experience and about themselves as related to their ability to function in the school setting? Participants’ references to pivotal moments, strongest memories, or the important influences during musical activities or classes provided structural elements within the written narratives.
The interactive nature of the interview process accommodated additional questions and comments that arose during the course of the conversation. Other questions asked of the participants included: “How do you perceive the effect on you resulting from school policies regarding participation in music?,” “Do you perceive that the actions during your school years impacted decisions you made that may have resulted in a different path regarding future activities or the development of alternate possible selves?,” and, “If so, does the impact seem negative or positive?”

Data Collection Procedures and Implementation

Phases of the Study

This study had three distinct phases. These phases moved from a large to a small sample and from general to specific data. The three phases of the study are described below.

Phase One.

Phase One of the study was implemented between the dates of March 5-26, 2014. One ensemble was able to allow approximately 30 minutes of class time on March 5 for the introduction of the study, presentation and signing of the informed consent document (Appendix A), and completion of the survey (Appendix B). The remaining ensembles completed Phase One on March 26. One hundred sixty students were invited to participate, with 135 (84%) returning completed surveys. Only those who agreed in writing to participate, by signing the consent document, completed the survey or were interviewed.

The survey was a 15-item questionnaire primarily consisting of open-ended questions. This questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding students’ interest and past experiences in music as a means to ascertain their eligibility for the interview parts of the study. All participants maintained anonymity by providing a pseudonym for identification during the
focus groups, interviews, and for identification in the written dissertation. The information from this questionnaire informed the selection of participants for Phase Two.

**Phase Two.**

In Phase Two participants who answered in the affirmative to questions nine or ten, or who checked the second and/or third choices under question 12 were invited to participate in one 30-minute focus group discussion if they had indicated that they would be willing to participate in the interview portion(s) of the study. Several responses indicated that students had been advised out of music classes but did not indicate why. Additionally, there was information contained in the responses to the open-ended questions and comment sections that warranted inclusion in the focus groups. Students who met these parameters were considered as candidates for focus groups.

The goal was to form six focus groups of three to four participants \( n = 18-24 \) based upon the responses to the questionnaire (Appendix B). Fifty-six of the original 135 participants indicated on the consent form that they would be willing only to complete the survey. The remaining 79 students were further screened by their answers to questions 9, 10, and/or 12 (Appendix B) as described above. Fifty-seven of the original 135 participants met the parameters for inclusion in the focus groups, however, not all of the 57 had agreed to the interview portion of the study. Invitations to participate in focus groups were issued to the twenty-five students who met the parameters for the focus groups and also agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study. Of these, 17 students scheduled a time to participate in a focus group. Focus groups were conducted between the dates of March 31, 2014 and April 14, 2014. Two of the seventeen students did not come to the focus groups. The total focus-group participants who
were selected from the university ensembles numbered 15. One participant was added through snowball sampling for a total of 16 participants.

Appendix C served as a guide for the focus-group interview. Additional prompts were included based on the analysis of the survey questions and comments. These interviews took the form of semi-structured group discussions with students participating freely and openly. As ideas were exchanged new questions arose that were captured on the audio recordings. Participants in the focus groups spoke candidly within the group and revealed information that aided in the selection of the candidates for the final, individual interview in Phase Three.

**Phase Three.**

Phase Three interviews were conducted between April 16 and 28, 2014. This phase of the study consisted of one in-depth individual interview of 30-45 minutes in length, with each of five students, drawn from the focus groups, and one additional participant who agreed to participate in this phase of data collection. These interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy of reporting and transcription. Appendix D contains a general outline for questions for the individual interviews based on suggestions by Moustakas (1994). However, interviews were interactive and additional questions and comments arose during the course of the conversation.

**Snowball Sampling Procedures.**

The minimum requirement of scheduling 18 participants for the focus groups was not achieved after the administration of the initial questionnaire, therefore snowball sampling was employed to augment the number. There was one participant who was recruited for the study by this method. She was not currently involved in the choral ensembles. We met at a mutually satisfactory time where she completed the survey and was interviewed.
Data Analysis Procedures

Sources (Riessman, 2008; Roulston, 2010; Saldaña, 2009) recommend that qualitative researchers begin analysis by immersing themselves in the data before selecting a method of analysis or coding. Saldaña (2009) outlined preliminary or first-cycle strategies for beginning qualitative researchers such as attribute coding followed by or combined with structural coding. Several writers (Creswell, 2012; Riessman, 2008; Roulston, 2010; S. Saldaña, 2009) suggest using a combination of approaches once all data has been collected and the initial analysis is complete.

Initial Analysis

As is common in qualitative research, analysis began with the data generated by the questionnaires and was ongoing during the entire process of data collection through the creation of narratives included in the final product (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Riessman, 2008; Roulston, 2010). Information gleaned from all study instruments was included in the analysis. Descriptive statistics are reported from the information gathered in the questionnaires.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accurate reporting. The initial analysis of questionnaire responses helped refine the focus-group interview instrument and the selection of potential focus-group participants. Analysis of the focus-group responses informed the selection of individual interviewees.

Secondary Analysis

Once the secondary analysis procedures began they continued simultaneously and in tandem to preserve the rich, descriptive information contained in the interviews.
Narrative analysis considerations.

Riessman (2008) and Roulston (2010) remind the researcher that narrative analysis differs from analysis in other qualitative methodologies. In narrative analysis, longer accounts of events are preserved to honor “individual agency and intention” of the participants (p. 12). Standard categorical analysis for themes can remove the context and alter the meaning of the text. Therefore, every effort was made to preserve the contextual integrity of the interview data.

The narrative analysis of transcriptions from the individual interviews utilized an approach where the story is preserved. These narrative processes of analysis and construction were interpretive and interactive as the narratives were created. It was vital to maintain the integrity of the speaker(s). This representation highlights not only the circumstances surrounding the events recounted in the interviews, but it allows the reader to grasp the meaning of these events to the participant. These individual interview transcriptions were coded using the coding software to identify important themes.

Coding.

Transcriptions from the interviews were coded for themes following the guidelines in Creswell (2012) and Saldaña (2009). Coding for themes is inductive in nature. The detailed accounts from the transcriptions led to general themes.

The computer software *HyperRESEARCH* was used to facilitate coding of themes and organization of files in combination with ongoing narrative analysis. As with the other qualitative analysis methods the computer software available for coding can be used effectively in several qualitative methodologies. This program was selected for two reasons. First, the visual appearance facilitated ease of organization. Large portions of coded material could be viewed in
context as well as in categories simultaneously. Secondly, HyperRESEARCH was compatible with the computer hardware utilized in the research.

**Hallam Motivational Model.**

In addition to narrative analysis and coding, the in-depth information generated by the individual interviews was examined in the light of the malleable aspects of personality included in Hallam’s (2002) model of musical motivation (see Figure 1, p. 42). My analysis adapted this model of motivation to analyze how the events during the school day and in the music classroom affected the participants and contributed to the construction of the self. Experiences that were of particular significance to the participant were categorized according to their influence on the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the participants in addition to the consideration of possible selves and the envisioning of the ideal self (see pp. 41-44).

**Quality Assurance**

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy by the researcher. Validity is established when participants’ stories are accurately reported. I faithfully reported the particulars of actions set in the context of place, time, and experience (Riessman, 2008). Throughout the data-collection process participants had the opportunity to review the transcriptions of the interviews. If the participants had asked to check the narrative in progress or the final story for accuracy the materials would have been made available to them (Creswell, 2012). My contact information was available if participants had questions or concerns. No participants expressed an interest in reviewing the materials.

The combination of data collection methods such as preliminary questionnaires, focus-group interviews, and individual interviews provided a depth of perspective and thick description. Preissle and Grant (2004) addressed the question of quality borrowing the standard
for truth from realism and objectivism. They noted that an accumulation of detail from more than one perspective could confirm the truth of a situation. Details and vivid descriptions contained in the reflections of participants regarding individual experiences in a single circumstance lend validity to the findings (Riessman, 2008). The quality of the narrative was enhanced as I endeavored to look beyond the content of participant interviews by asking why and how the stories contributed to the development of meaning in the lives of the participants (Riessman, 2008).

**Limitations and Bias**

Some of the findings of this study may be considered to be limited in generalizability due to the small sample size of six interviewees for the in-depth interview. Although a small sample size is not unusual for narrative inquiry, some critics might question the applicability of the study due to the small numbers. The study employed purposeful sampling. The 135 survey participants and focus groups of 16 participants were specifically chosen for their firsthand knowledge and experience with the topic under consideration. Further research in other states or regions of the country might corroborate these results.

The narratives resulting from methods such as student interviews as interpreted by a researcher could be viewed as biased. Clandinin (2007) discussed a movement in the social sciences to apply the positivist, objective methodologies of the physical sciences to social research. Viewing research subjects objectively and the knowledge acquired during the research process as “things” allow researchers to distance themselves from personal involvement. Adoption of this stance serves to ameliorate bias.
Ethical Considerations

The highest level of ethical standards as delineated in the Human Subjects Protection documents that are founded on the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report were maintained throughout the study. Respect for persons was adhered to in all circumstances. All participants were provided an informed consent document. Although I perceived little risk, all information regarding such a possibility was communicated to the participants. Strict confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms or other techniques for disguising identities. All consent information was kept in a locked file in Haas-Howell 620 at Georgia State University. This is the office of Dr. Patrick Freer, my dissertation advisor. Recordings were uploaded to a MacBook Air purchased specifically for this study. This password protected computer remained in my possession for the duration of the study.

Participants were informed of the opportunity to review the transcriptions of their interviews to check for accuracy and to determine if the representation of their story was acceptable to them. At that time any participants’ concerns regarding how they were portrayed would have been discussed. I planned to work with the participant(s) to find a presentation that was acceptable to both parties while maintaining the integrity of the information. No participants availed themselves of this opportunity.

Representation

This dissertation is the representation of the study in fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy in Teaching and Learning, with a concentration in Music Education. The qualitative data is in narrative form. Charts or tables displaying descriptive statistics and themes are also used to consolidate information.
CHAPTER 4: QUESTIONNAIRE AND FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

The beginning of this chapter reports the demography of the population that completed the questionnaire in Phase One and details how students were selected for Phases Two and Three. The second section of the chapter introduces the Phase Two focus-group participants and the final section highlights themes that emerged during the focus-group discussions.

Phase One

The Questionnaire.

The questionnaire in this study served to gather basic information regarding the musical involvement of the choral students during secondary school. It also functioned as a screening tool to select students for the remaining phases of the study. During Phase One of the study questionnaires were distributed to approximately 160 students in three choral ensembles at a major university located in the southeastern United States. Of these choral students 135 opted to complete the 15-question survey for an 84% return rate. The researcher received nine questionnaires that were not included in the study for reasons including insufficient identifying information or lack of a corresponding consent form. The survey contained questions to ascertain demographic information such as age, biological sex, college major, and past experience in music. Two final questions addressed interest in participating in a focus group or individual interview. An opportunity to recommend friends (snowball sampling) for participation in the project was contained in the survey.

The questionnaires that were included in the study were in various levels of completion as some questions were not answered and others had partial answers. This eventuality was designed into the form. The answers to some of the questions were contingent upon the answers to previous questions. An example is contained in Appendix B question 9 that asks, “If you were
in music class in high school did a counselor or administrator ever recommend that you drop out of music class?” If the answer to this question was no, then some follow-up question(s) may not have applied.

**Description of the Sampled Population.**

The age of the participants was skewed toward younger students who were of “traditional” college age. The largest percentage of 78.5% (N = 106) of respondents fell between the ages of 18 and 23, the traditional age for undergraduate college students. Twenty-six of the participants were 19 years of age with very few (N = 5) who were between the ages of 31 and 34. One student was 43 years old. For purposes of this study the term “non-traditional” will be used to denote students who ages are outside the range of the traditional college ages of 18-23.

Although mixed choruses strive for balance between males and females for performance considerations, often the population is slightly skewed toward females. The numbers of participants and biological sex of those who chose to complete the surveys affected the balance of male-to-female participants in this study. Thirty-six percent (N = 49) of the participants were male while 63.7% (N = 86) were female.

Another area of interest was the distribution of the college majors of the participants. For many of the participants singing in chorus was an elective course, an avocation, practiced for enjoyment rather than as a requirement for the completion of a course of study. The survey participants were grouped by music major and non-music major. The categories of music majors included vocal performance, music composition, music education, choral conducting, music technology, and music management. A significant number of participants were music majors (N = 82) for whom participation in a large ensemble was a requirement. The balance of participants (N = 53) consisted of non-music majors whose interests ranged
throughout the course offerings of the university and for whom music was an elective (see Figure 2).

![College Majors of Survey Population](image)

*Figure 2. College Majors of Survey Population.*

Survey results indicated that a majority of the participants were involved in some form of music during secondary (middle and high) school. Of the respondents 123 participated in music during middle school. By high school the numbers of those involved in music dropped to 108. Of these students 18 indicated they had been advised to drop out of music in favor of other academic pursuits. Of those who were counseled to change their classes, only five worked successfully with administration to remain in their music classes

**Phase Two**

**Focus Groups.**

Six focus groups met to discuss their experiences in school music and their feelings regarding lack of access to music classes throughout their secondary school experience. Their responses were revealing. Students portrayed their emotions with phrases such as emptiness, feeling overwhelmed, no break from stress during the school day, a distancing of friends, and the sense of losing a family.
During the focus groups it became apparent that one student had answered question nine incorrectly on the survey regarding advisement out of music. Further probing established that this student had been advised to substitute academics for music. It is possible that she misunderstood the question on the survey or perhaps she was initially reluctant to disclose that aspect of her life.

**Focus-Group Participants.**

As noted in the methodology, 25 invitations for participation in focus groups were emailed to students who met at least two of the four criteria (see pp. 50-51). Seventeen students agreed via email correspondence to participate in these focus groups and scheduled a time to meet for a 68% participation rate. Since the target number of participants for focus groups was 18, one more participant was added through snowball sampling procedures. Fifteen of the 17 original respondents came to six focus groups, for a participation rate of 88%. The final participant who was recruited via snowball sampling came to an individual session. Therefore the final focus group participants numbered 16. Although the original goal of 18 participants for Phase Two was not achieved, qualitative studies often have smaller numbers. The addition of the snowball participant sustained the participation rate of 88% in Phase Two. The limited number of participants was not deemed to have materially affected the outcome of the study.

As described in the methodology, the focus group participants were selected based on information contained in the questionnaire (Appendix B). Answers to questions nine, 10, and 12 were particularly significant for screening. This information addressed administrative advice to drop music classes, whether or not students complied with that advice, and their feelings concerning the outcome of their actions.
The focus group participants were diverse in their origins of birth, cultures, and worldviews. This diversity enhanced the semi-structured discussions and created an atmosphere conducive to interesting interactions among the participants. There were five males and 11 females. Six freshmen, seven sophomores, and one junior joined two seniors in the focus groups. Thirteen of the participants’ college majors were divided among the sciences (N = 7), the humanities (N = 5), and one elementary education major. It is interesting to note that although 61% of the survey population consisted of music majors the focus group population had only three music majors, or 18% (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3. College Majors of Focus-Group Population.](image)

Of the focus group participants, nine were advised out of music classes. Of those, five worked to remain in their music classes.

Since the participants for the study were drawn from college students, the number of definitively at-risk students (N = 3) was lower than might have occurred in another population. Many at-risk students may have overcome obstacles to attend college. However, many others who may have been at-risk in high school may have found their circumstances insurmountable and consequently did not attend college. Information gleaned from the focus-group population drew attention to additional student concerns regarding access to music classes and administrative advisement.
Phase Three - Individual Interviews

The focus-group discussions drew attention to the individuals whose information warranted more in-depth investigation according the parameters of the study. Invitations to participate in these interviews were emailed to seven students. Six of the seven agreed to a single individual interview. Three of the interviewees met the descriptors for at-risk. Two of these at-risk students reported severe socio-economic and familial disadvantages while the third had documented learning difficulties. The two low-SES participants had to overcome great personal adversity to become college students. The other three interviewees were selected to discuss the effects of administrative advisement out of music on their high school experience.

Focus Group Results

One goal of the study was to garner reflections of college students about their experiences in school music. Originally I was purposely seeking at-risk students who would share what music meant to them in their lives. Although only three focus-group participants were at-risk as defined, all of the students were eager to share their experiences and presented unique perspectives on the place of music in their lives and in their school day. Students echoed the thoughts of others throughout these conversations.

The focus groups were organized as semi-structured interviews. I asked questions based on the guide (see Appendix C). Conversation was lively during the sessions. Students spoke freely about their secondary school experiences. They related the feelings engendered by their involvement in music, academic conflicts, administrative scheduling, and counseling. Students often introduced topics without prompting. The interactive sessions allowed students to offer comments and interjections, often concerning each other’s stories. In addition to much laughter there were often sympathetic nods and assent when a common occurrence was addressed.
Although several themes emerged during the conversations, one aspect of classroom music unified the conversation: the sense of belonging and community experienced in school music. Each theme contained several embedded categories. The words of the participants illustrated the categories within the themes.

**Analysis.**

Qualitative researchers (Bruner, 1986; Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1995) distinguish two types of narrative analysis. These are “analysis of narratives” and “narrative analysis” (Polkinghorne, 1995). Analysis of narratives uses paradigmatic thinking to identify themes that are consistently raised by multiple participants. Chase (2005) suggests that the paradigmatic form of analysis may be particularly suitable to illustrate how participants are affected by societal constructions (in this case, schools). Bruner (1986) describes this process of analysis as the logico-scientific mode of thinking that establishes categorization and then seeks to discover how these categories are related to one another. Bruner also notes that the paradigmatic imagination differs from that of poets or writers in that it enables the researcher to envision possible connections across experiences or in interview data before there is a definite link (1986). The goal of analysis of narratives is to better understand the commonalities found among various participant experiences. As I reviewed the transcripts from the focus groups, I identified the themes according to the paradigm described above.

In Polkinghorne’s (1995) second type of analysis, “narrative analysis,” researchers collect descriptions of events and weave them into a story constructing a plot as the framework for the story. Bruner states that the “imaginative application of the narrative mode leads to good stories…. It strives to put…timeless miracles into the particulars of experience, and to locate the
experience in time and place” (1986, pp. 12-13). In this study, the narrative analysis portions take the form of oral histories of two at-risk participants and these are detailed in Chapter 5.

I observed that students’ comments fell into general categories and coded them in HyperRESEARCH. As I coded it became clear that several codes were related and these became topics. Forty-one codes addressed the topics listed in Table 1 (see p. 69). My thought processes regarding coding are illustrated in the two examples of coding that follow.

**Example One.**

This first example could have been coded in multiple ways. A study participant named Teresa took off-campus classes her senior year and that situation prevented her from participating in chorus during her final year of high school.

And even just that one year, I just felt like I missed out on sooooooo much in chorus. It was my senior year and I know it was going to be super fun but I didn’t get to take chorus. And so, just… having that outside experience like away from all the stress of your classes. I didn’t take the AP classes like that but it’s just being in chorus… was just a step away from like all the academics and stuff. It was like a little break for me. So I really missed out on that my senior year.

The first sentence of this passage illustrates how much Teresa liked chorus. One can sense her excitement. This sentence could be coded as “community” or “enjoyment.” In her second sentence she refers to stress relief and I coded the next few sentences in that way.

**Example Two.**

In the following passage Marie discusses the academic pressure that emanates from administration for students to take AP classes in support of the schools’ reputation.
Table 1. Alphabetized List of Topics and Related Codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Number of Times Referenced</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Advisement          | 116                         | Academic pressure.  
                      | Access to music classes.  
                      | AP class load.  
                      | Change of schedule.  
                      | Consequences of advisement.  
                      | Counseling out of music.  
                      | Dropping out of music class.  
                      | Opinions of academic pressure.  
                      | Personal perseverance in spite of counsel.  
                      | Reaction to counseling.  
                      | Relevance of AP classes.  
                      | Teacher guidance.  |
| Beginnings          | 110                         | Adverse family circumstances.  
                      | Church music.  
                      | Elementary school.  
                      | Family Influences.  
                      | Friend Influences.  
                      | Music lessons.  |
| Extra-Musical Benefits | 137                        | Community (Belonging).  
                      | Confidence.  
                      | Effect of music on schoolwork.  
                      | Enjoyment.  
                      | Stress relief.  
                      | Triumph over adversity.  |
| Meaning             | 119                         | Best experiences in school music.  
                      | Encompassing musical experiences.  
                      | Meaning of in-school participation.  
                      | Meaning of music to life.  
                      | Most important connection to school music.  
                      | Reflections of feelings about participating in school music.  
                      | Worst experiences in school music.  |
| Other               | 92                          | Adult decisions.  
                      | Change, change to chorus, voice change.  
                      | College experiences.  
                      | Disability.  
                      | Goals, preferences.  
                      | Music experiences outside of school.  
                      | Performing alone.  
                      | School experiences and choices.  
                      | School music and religion.  
                      | Using chorus class as an easy “A.”  |

Notes: Participants responded with multiple answers
And, I think, at that point . . . most of the counselors and the administration was letting us know that the AP exams kind of basically go towards the school’s reputation and . . . [be]cause it helps with college credit – blah blah blah and it makes the school look good. And its makes the teachers look good with their scores. And so that was a lot of pressure, and I was already like struggling in that class at first.

This is a clear example of a student’s “opinion of academic pressure” and her perceptions of the reasons behind it.

I identified relationships between the topics introduced during the focus groups to arrive at three over-arching, emergent themes. These themes were: (a) family and friend influences and support for music involvement, (b) the global school experience as impacted by music participation, and (c) administrative advisement to discontinue music classes in favor of advanced classes or remediation.

**Theme I: Family and Friend Influences**

**Familial Support**

As indicated by the interview guide in Appendix C, each conversation began with students sharing thoughts about how they became interested in music. Many of the participants told stories of family and friend influences that encouraged their musical aspirations. Family encouragement was extremely important in the development of skill and continued interest in musical activities.

Nineteen-year-old Jane expressed it this way, “I came out of the womb singing. Our whole family can sing so it’s like a hereditary type thing.” Lola, age 20, was committed to religious observances that sometimes conflicted with chorus activities. Even so, her family
members, who were very musical, encouraged her to participate in chorus activities and concerts. Her feelings about chorus were evident in her remark regarding an elementary school chorus audition, “Ok, like I was chosen! This is for me!”

A musical family and tradition nurtured 18-year-old Teresa’s musical interest: “Every single member of my family had been in the church choir, all growing up. And so my grandma was the piano player and so it was basically tradition for us to do that.” Anna, age 19, did not consider her family to be musical but her mother insisted that each of her children study music: “So she signed each one of us up … when I was four she signed me up … I started with the violin.” Anna later switched to cello and played it throughout middle and high school. One of the non-traditional participants, T-Bear, a 29-year-old male, stated that he was reared in a musical family. His mother and grandmother both liked to sing and encouraged piano lessons. He also recalls singing in harmony with his brothers from a very young age. Nineteen-year-old Alice’s family encouraged her participation in music throughout elementary school and part of secondary school.

Christian recalled his mother’s edict: “You have to do choir. And you have to do praise band and praise Jesus with your voice.” He was a 20-year-old sophomore film and video major who was reared in a musical family. Music was always a part of his life. He said he was “forced to sing in church” (choir). This statement was made with a smile. However, by the time he reached middle school he felt, “Well, you know, I don’t really like to sing ... I don’t really do good with this.” He decided to join the band and remained in band through his sophomore year in high school.

An 18-year-old freshman who planned to become an elementary school teacher, Andrew joined the church choir at age 12. He stated that he succumbed to the “peer pressure” from his
church youth group and pressure from his mother to participate. It was expected, so he complied. He enjoyed his participation and was soon recognized as a “good singer.”

“I was always interested in music,” said Aretha. Twenty-two-year-old Aretha’s enthusiasm for music was palpable as she reminisced about her beginnings. Her family told her that she sang for others in her church when she was only two years old. From that moment on she sang at church, joining school chorus when she had her first opportunity in the eighth grade.

Raul, age 19, was a freshman music technology major. He attributed his musical interest to his singing grandmother. He was never very interested in singing in elementary school, and he participated in football and band in middle school. When he was forced to choose between music and sports in high school he chose music, both band and chorus. Although he joined chorus he felt uncertain about singing and described his experience: “I would be straining to hit the notes that I used to hit. And then I wouldn’t get what was going on.” His mother explained that his voice was changing but he felt, “I don’t know if I can sing in choir no more.” He credits the high school chorus teacher with guiding him to find his voice.

Her mother’s example fostered Marie’s love of music. This 18 year-old sophomore recalled that her mother calmed the children in the family with music: “I know sometimes if we were upset about something she would play our favorite song or she would play a song that was, like, comforting.” She shared that her mother “told us music helped set the atmosphere of our home. She would read to me at night and there would always be music playing. So it kind of became a source of comfort for me.” Marie loved her elementary general music classes and was motivated to continue music in the form of chorus in secondary school.
Lack of Familial Support

Not all of the students had family support. An elementary school musical seeded 22-year-old Mariel’s love for performing, especially singing. However, a move, religious commitments, and lack of family encouragement conspired to prevent her involvement in school music after sixth grade. Eighteen-year-old Mary Jane expressed an interest in music but “my mom didn’t pick up on it,” however, she did have the family support to join band in middle school.

The culture in Serina’s country of origin negated the possibility of music for girls until they reached adulthood. Even though her family was musical and she heard music in her home she was not allowed to have lessons or participate in music except peripherally. During her childhood, Serina’s intrinsic love of music triggered her efforts to teach herself to play the piano by ear. When she reached adulthood she pursued her long-held dreams of studying music. She is now a 32-year-old freshman vocal performance major.

Despite the fact that her family was not musical, Sasha, age 19, demonstrated an innate love of music. She played flute in elementary school but opted for chorus when she reached middle school. Her high school did not offer chorus until her senior year. Red, a 22-year-old senior journalism major, described little support for his musical interests but he persevered, achieving high levels of performance in band and chorus.

Theme II: Global School Experience

Researchers have documented that music classes often provide extra-musical benefits for participants and can affect their global school experience (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Allsup, 2012; Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). A table illustrating students’ views of the relative importance of extra-musical benefits is found on page 75. The lessening of these benefits could be construed as a negative effect or a loss.
Impact of discontinuing music classes.

When asked how discontinuing music classes affected their global school experience, students’ responses addressed several areas but one underlying perception was a sense of loss of community or belonging (Adderley, Kennedy & Berz, 2003; Allsup, 2012; Freer, 2014). Representative quotations follow.

Anna, who was a member of a community youth orchestra, compared the sense of belonging she felt in the school orchestra to her experience in a community music group saying:

I mean the bond that you have in a classroom is really different than the bond that you have when you go to an orchestra rehearsal for an hour and a half. In other groups . . . it’s more like . . . this is JOB. In a classroom setting it’s like . . . you know, you have a chance to build relationships with the people you’re around. It’s like a sense of community. I really do feel that I missed out on that.

Teresa regretted the missed opportunity to serve as a mentor to younger, less experienced singers. She wanted to tell them “Oh! It’s like this. You read these notes. It’s not hard. I have these tricks!” Mary Jane felt that, “this almost family-oriented environment . . . was taken out of my day.”

When, as a sophomore, Christian expressed a desire to be in chorus rather than band, the chorus teacher asked him to wait one year after he dropped band before joining chorus. He expressed his feelings about what he missed during that year when he was not in music classes:

Because music is such a universal thing, when I was involved in music it felt like I was contributing something. I was only out for a year but it was like . . . it was a huge thing that I was missing . . . (Christian, 20)
Extra-musical benefits.

The participants in this study were often eloquent when describing the extra-musical benefits they received from music participation and the meaning of music in their lives. Representative quotations follow. See Table 2 for a summary of responses.

Table 2. Extra-Musical Benefits of Music Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Perceived Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>Enhanced Performance in Other Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>Stress Reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility/Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Increased Self-confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: $n = 14$. Participants responded with multiple answers.

Enhanced sense of belonging.

Jane shared that “I got into choir at school and, I mean, I started going into Honors Chorus and All State and, just really, choir like built a family like away from school. Like it was just that extra little side family.” Aretha was a senior who listed on her questionnaire that she was majoring in music education. She described her chorus teacher as her “mom, she was our mom at school.”

Having been reared in the rural southeastern United States, 22-year-old Red grew up in a small town and participation in music ensembles was a large part of his life. His leadership roles allowed him to create friendships throughout the band and chorus. He expressed that he “cherishes to this day” fond memories of his relationships to others in his music classes.
Enhanced Performance in Other Classes

Students said that the stress relief they felt during music class helped them to return refreshed to classes such as Math and Science, with an enhanced ability to focus. Benefits to learning can include this stress reduction and a time for relaxing the mind, however the following descriptions suggest other ways music can enhance learning.

Marie felt that her music study helped her improve in math classes. She described the relationship between mathematics and her study of music theory: “sometimes I would think of math in terms of music and it kind of helped.” She continued, describing music during the school day as “really encouraging” and “it was almost a recreational way to learn.”

In T-Bear’s situation the desire to be in music motivated him in a practical way, providing the impetus to improve in his other courses. He describes his choir experience: “I enjoy . . . the bond of people of like minds and like talents when they . . . make beautiful music. So when I had that taken away from me . . . You know I really wanted to get back into and it motivated me to give my all [in his non-music courses].”

Stress Reduction.

Lola volunteered, “It’s kind of a break, take the stress off my day, have a little bit of fun. . . . then come back to classes more refreshed.” Lola added, “It was always something to look forward to.” Anna shared that, “When you’re expressing yourself, when you have that outlet, it's kind of like a stress reliever. You’re able to focus more and concentrate better and perform better in everything that you do.”

“Music was always just a release,” said Jane. Marie shared that participation in music classes “encouraged me and it kinda put me in a better perspective so that was definitely
helpful.” Raul, commenting on how music class affected him, stated, “I was a lot more energetic and a lot more enthusiastic toward my workload, you know, in other classes.”

**Increased personal responsibility/leadership.**

Andrew felt that when he wrestled for the school other factors could affect his performance such as the skill of his opponent, “If I’m bad in wrestling it could be because the other guy’s better than me. But in chorus, if I mess up a solo, it was nobody’s fault but mine.” He expressed that he developed a strong sense of personal responsibility for his own performance and also for the performance of the singers around him. He felt that he was in a leadership role, leading by example.

Aretha’s sense of personal responsibility was heightened when she was given a Music Teacher’s Assistant award. This allowed her to “co-teach the class” with her teacher. As drum major in the band and a section leader in chorus, Red demonstrated that he could handle great responsibility. One of his proudest moments was leading the band during a high-profile parade that was televised.

**Increased self-confidence.**

Christian offered that music involvement helped him socially, “Because the more you are involved with music there is an increasing quality to your confidence, your overall confidence. . . . You prosper around the people in your other courses because you feel so good in your music courses.” With an animated expression, Raul declared, “While I was playing sports, I never felt totally confident . . . Once I got into music, whenever I was in band class . . . whenever I was in choir, completely comfortable . . .”
Theme III: Administrative Curricular Advisement

Two of the sixteen students who participated in the interview portions of the study were unable to participate in music during secondary school for reasons unrelated to the study, however, several participants introduced the topic of curricular advisement during the focus groups. These discussions led to an unanticipated finding: frequently, those who were advised out of music were not at-risk academically. The following information focuses on this finding.

Music classes played some role in fourteen of this study’s participants throughout their middle and/or high school years. Nine of these (64%) indicated that they had been advised to discontinue music classes in secondary school. This occurred for two primary reasons: remediation and placement in advanced placement (AP) or honors level classes. Of these nine students, five (55%) advocated successfully to remain in their music classes. Students described their experiences citing counselors and other administrative figures who insisted that advanced placement classes were particularly important. The theme of curricular advisement is examined from three perspectives: (a) counsel to discontinue music, (b) students’ views of curricular counseling, and (c) students’ perceived value of the classes that replaced music classes.

Counsel to discontinue music classes.

Each of the nine students whose information is contained under this heading was advised to discontinue music classes. Two of the students were definitively at-risk. Their personal struggles resulted in counseling to discontinue music in favor of academic remediation. Their compelling stories are vital to the discussion and will be explored in detail in the following chapter. The remaining seven of the nine students (78%) were counseled to substitute advanced placement (AP) classes for music classes. Representative interactions between these seven students and school administrators follow.
Although she remained in chorus throughout high school, Lola stated that the school’s counselors removed chorus from her official class schedule every semester. She routinely sought out the counselors to have chorus re-instated as one of her classes. She insisted that she wanted to be in chorus and she remained in chorus throughout high school. She became very emotional as she described her efforts to continue in music. Explaining why she chose to continue her music classes Lola stated, “Because I was too passionate about it and I knew that music was never going to be something that I was going to be, not as a career so I was like ‘I might as well as enjoy it [music] while I can.’”

At Raul’s school the options for AP classes and honors classes were relatively few. According to Raul, these few AP classes usually seemed to be offered during at the same time as advanced music classes. Counselors told him, “it’s in your best interests to take Honors or AP classes because it looks much better on a transcript . . .” He acquiesced to the counselor’s advice, however, the scheduling of these classes prevented him from advancing beyond the basic levels in band or chorus.

Counselors recommended that Andrew take AP classes that would have interfered with his participation in music. He opted to decline because he was aware of his limits due to his diagnosed learning difficulties. He put it this way, “I couldn’t load up that much. I had to say ‘no.’” Andrew added, “There was definite pressure [to take AP classes]. He was told to take AP “English, History, whatever.” Andrew continued, “I made my own choices, heavily objected to by my advisor.”

**Student views of curricular counseling.**

Five of these seven (not at-risk) students stated that they were pressured to take AP and Honors classes in lieu of music. They reported frustration with the stark choice between
academic success and music participation and were especially vocal about the unrelenting pressure to enroll in these classes. Representative statements regarding these students’ perspectives of advisement follow.

Teresa, who had ambitions for participation in All-State and Honors choirs, was advised that alternative course offerings would further her college aspirations. She shared that, “When I was talking to my counselor . . . it was kind of like an ultimatum.” She felt that there was no time to discuss her schedule then it became impossible for her to reinstate her music classes. The location of the additional classes at some distance from the school negated the possibility of singing in chorus even as an extra-curricular activity.

Access to music classes during the school day was important to Lola, “Had I not taken it [chorus in school], I would’ve just not taken it. I would not have had another option to join like a church group or to join like a youth group or something like that.” When asked, “Did you feel that you missed out by not taking those other [AP] classes?” Lola responded, “Yes and no. Because music got me through a lot of other things . . .”

Commenting on Lola’s experience, Anna interjected, “. . . she kind of sacrificed, you know, AP classes for chorus. And with me, it was kind of the opposite. I sacrificed orchestra for AP classes, but I wish I did have the time to take orchestra classes.”

**Students’ perceived value of the classes that replaced music classes.**

Of the sixteen students who participated in the full study, there were seven students, who were not at-risk, who discontinued music classes for advanced classes. Not all of these students were pressured to do so. However, these seven students expressed that the return of value of the AP classes was not worth the loss of the opportunity to experience a more inclusive high school experience. Students agreed that they felt that the pressure to participate
in the high level classes was to benefit the school’s reputation and funding rather than what was in the best interests of the students.

An additional student who was *not* advised out of music but who was very involved in student government spoke directly to this topic. Marie commented, “The administration was letting us know that the AP exams go toward the school’s reputation and . . . makes the school look good [if one can pass the end-of-course exam]. And it makes the teachers look good with their scores.”

Teresa was one *not* academically at-risk participant who followed administrative advice to discontinue music classes. She echoed the thoughts of four other students who expressed that the return in value of the AP classes was not worth the loss of her school music involvement. She elaborated on her experience:

“She [the counselor] didn’t tell me that they didn’t have the program that would cooperate with my [college] major . . . So I had to take a nursing program which didn’t help because by the time I got to college those credits didn’t even count so that was a waste of my time. So I could have done this and still be able to be where I’m at now without all the stress.” (Teresa, 18)

**Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the demography of the sampled populations for each phase of the study and reported the results of the questionnaire. The final portion of this chapter presented the results of the focus-group discussions and highlights the common threads that were identified.

The study was conceived to examine the meaning of music participation to at-risk students. The sampling of college students yielded a high percentage of students who were not at-risk. This unexpected finding may be partially explained by the fact that at-risk students are
often deterred from college enrollment since at-risk students are less likely to overcome the challenges that mitigate against college attendance (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Gilson, 2006). However, narratives of two at-risk participants and the influence of music in their lives will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

The first theme that emerged was familial influence in the development of musical interest and skill. The second theme focused on how music participation impacted the school day and lives of the participants. The third theme addressed student concerns regarding administrative pressures to discontinue music experiences. These three distinct themes that emerged during the focus group discussions were examined through the words of the students.

Each focus group began with the researcher asking what stimulated participants’ interest in music. Many of the students pointed to the heritage of music in their families. They reminisced about their beginnings as they attributed their interest in music to musical activities in their homes and churches. This influence encouraged them to choose to participate in music activities when they had opportunity. For those whose homes were not musical there seems to have been an innate longing to participate in music; those students took advantage of the opportunities provided by their schools.

The second theme concerned the effect of the circumstances on the global school experience of the affected students. Participants’ comments highlighted not only the relaxation that was afforded by music classes but also the extra-musical benefits that they accrued. These extra-musical benefits included a heightened sense of responsibility and leadership skills, a lessening of stress, and a positive effect on the learning environment. Students reported that music classes helped them make new connections between learning tasks, relieved stress, and enabled them to refocus in non-music classes.
A third theme arose as many students began to report that they had been advised to discontinue music classes. Student comments were grouped into three categories under the general heading of Administrative Curricular Advisement. The areas of interest were (a) the counsel to discontinue music classes, (b) students’ reactions to such advisement, and (c) the students’ perceived ongoing value of the classes that were offered in lieu of music classes. Students indicated that there was pressure to take advanced placement and honors classes to the exclusion of all non-academic courses. Some of the students succumbed to the pressure while others refused. Both types of students were vocal in their assessment that administrative pressure seemed unrelenting. Most students did not feel that the AP classes provided the promised benefit.

Finally, students referred to a sense of belonging and community that they experienced as part of a musical ensemble. For those students who discontinued their music classes, the overwhelming comment was that they experienced a sense of loss of a “family.” The sense of belonging motivated several students to fight for their music classes in spite of administrative counsel. This sense of belonging and family is particularly demonstrated in the narratives of two students, Aretha and T-Bear. An in-depth exploration and analysis of the profound effect of school music in their lives is contained in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVE RESULTS

During the six individual interviews, students elaborated on and reiterated the themes identified during the focus groups. This chapter contains extended portions of two of the individual interviews. Both of these individuals presented rich accounts that highlight the themes of this research study. Their stories illustrate the positive impact that access to music education can have on the lives of at-risk students. Both of these individuals faced serious personal adversity and now consider the influence of music an ameliorating factor in overcoming their challenges.

In the previous chapter I analyzed the narrative focus-group interviews by identifying themes and recognizing associations between the identified themes (Bruner, 1986). An alternative way to analyze narrative is by maintaining the “story,” the narrative construction (Polkinghorne, 1995). The lived history of the participants is described as these rich stories unfold. I have included the context to preserve the meaning ascribed to life events as recounted by the speaker during the interview. This chapter consists of detailed, faithful narrative construction of the life circumstances for each of two participants utilizing their words and phrases as contained in the transcripts.

These stories consist of logical sequences of events constructed from participant data gathered during the three phases of data collection. Pauses and hesitations were removed when they did not affect the sense or the spirit of the text. Ellipses are used to denote omissions and any remaining pauses. I have used brackets for clarifications within the quotations. Punctuation or italics indicate vocal emphasis of the participants. Where necessary, researcher-provided context is clearly indicated and interwoven with the narrative data.
Analysis of Narrative Constructions

I analyzed these narratives according to the motivational model developed by Hallam (2002, p. 233) that illustrates the interactions between individual and environmental factors in determining musical motivation. The components of the model that are pertinent to this study are those Hallam identified as “malleable” aspects of the individual personality. These aspects are the ideal self, the concept of possible selves, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

As discussed earlier, the ideal self may occur when one or more possible selves are realized (Hallam, 2002). However, these study participants were young, and the ideal self, while formalized in their minds, may not yet have come to fruition. Further, the hardships these participants endured may have delayed the external realization of the ideal self they sought.

Feelings of self-efficacy resulted when the speakers achieved high levels of performance or skill in musical endeavors. These feelings of self-efficacy often reinforced feelings of self-esteem. Heightened self-esteem may also arise from the sense of belonging that is frequently experienced when one is a member of a musical community. These malleable aspects of the personality came to the foreground or receded throughout the conversations related in this chapter.

Aretha’s Story

This 23-year-old female arrived early to the focus group. The other focus-group participants never came, so Aretha and I were able to have a revealing conversation. The second time we met was for her to participate in an individual interview. There was some redundancy in the conversations but there was also detail and embellishment to information from the “focus group.” During the focus-group conversation I believe that Aretha was more forthcoming
about personal details of her life than she might have been had the other participants arrived.

What follows is a composite of the two interviews.

Beginnings.

Aretha and I met in an unoccupied classroom of the music department of the university. I asked Aretha how she became interested in music. She replied enthusiastically that she sang her first song before a group when she was two years old and had been singing ever since, adding, “then my mom just kind of raised me in the church choir.”

Although she sang in elementary school, when she reached middle school age she attended a smaller school where choir was not available for her during sixth grade. Chorus was available to her in seventh grade, but “I went to this new school,” she said. “I was in a new area. I was like, ‘I don’t know anybody.’” These words were spoken in a childish whimpering voice for effect. Her manner communicated that she recalled feeling shy and afraid that she might be rejected. She did not join the choir that year. In eighth grade she had another opportunity to sing in her school choir. This time she reacted differently, “Maybe I should do chorus,” she recalled thinking. ‘I like to sing.’ And then I saw . . . I was like, ‘Oh! They’re getting trophies at the end of the year!’” Laughing, she said, “oh, that’s incentive!” Still, the extrinsic motivation of a possible trophy was enough to entice her to join chorus. Her experience was less exciting or meaningful than she anticipated. As a result she hesitated before deciding to try chorus in high school. It was to be a momentous choice for her.

High school.

Aretha participated in chorus and remained in choir all four years of high school. She developed a strong attachment to her teacher and classmates and music became paramount in her
life. By the 10th grade music had become a “need” in her life but Aretha’s failing schoolwork threatened her participation in chorus.

On her questionnaire Aretha had indicated that she had not been counseled to discontinue chorus. In our conversation she shared that she had stayed in chorus even though she had to make up classes. I asked her to elaborate on this seeming discrepancy. “Um . . . I was in Algebra II Honors my 10th-grade year. And I failed one semester. I passed my first semester but I failed the second semester. I was devastated ‘cause I had never failed a class in my life!” She continued:

And so I was like, “Oh my God!” And so my counselor came to me and she’s like, “Well, we’re gonna take you out of chorus and we’re gonna just let you make it [math] up.” And I was like, “No. You’re not taking me out of chorus. Like, this is what makes me happy in my life. You can’t do that!”

Aretha envisioned a future, possible self as a performer. She met with the counselor and:

I let her [the counselor] know that this is what I feel like my future is going to be. I wanna actually pursue music. I [Aretha] was like, “So if you take me out of this class, I’m losing a part of . . . if you’re preparing [me] for my future, this is preparing me, by being in choir.”

The counselor relented and she was able to remain in chorus. Aretha related:

So they said, “Well, you have a free period so we’ll just stick your Algebra class right there your senior year and you’ll work it like that.” I [Aretha] was like, “ok, just as long as I don’t have to get out of chorus.”

When she took Algebra II the second time it was not at the Honors level.
I responded, “that’s exactly the kind of thing that is most interesting to me; is when a student had an issue with school and the counselor says, you know…” Aretha interjected, “Let’s remove your elective. Something you *enjoy* to make up this.”

In view of the information regarding advanced classes that had come to light in prior focus groups, I wondered why the *honors* designation was so important. Why would the counselors not say, “Ok, why don’t you just do regular Algebra or regular Physical Science.” Aretha responded that, “When I take it [Algebra or Physical Science] over again, I’m in the general class. I’m not in honors anymore.” She had struggled in Physical Science as well as Algebra. She was proud of the ‘A’ she earned in each of these classes when she repeated them. The second time around she was in on-level classes.

**Her family life.**

The above revelation raised questions in my mind so I inquired, “When you were having trouble in these classes was there any particular reason that you were struggling…?” Aretha responded, “My 10th-grade was a really hard year. I had a lot of stress going on at the time.”

Aretha began to share details of her life. She lived with her mother and stepfather in a two-bedroom condominium. In October of her 10th-grade year a cousin with three children moved in to their home. Aretha’s bed was an air mattress and she began to share it with her second cousin causing the bed to break. Aretha shared a broken bed and a very small living space with a cousin who was emotionally distraught. The young cousin became unable to control her bodily functions at night, probably due to her emotional distress at the situation,

Aretha also described the “chaos” that made it difficult to study. The younger cousins were noisy and:
... when they would turn the knob on the shower, they would just completely break it off or the shower head or just ... and then I guess all their bags of clothes must have had roaches in it or something because all of sudden our house was just infested with water bugs and roaches and ants! I’m like, “What in the world? What is going on at my house?”

It was very unstable ... 

She confessed that she was upset and she thought that might be why she struggled her second semester. Her tone alternated between distaste for the circumstances she faced, frustration, and guilt for her resentment because she knew that her mother was trying to help a family in need.

When I suggested that it must have been difficult to concentrate on her schoolwork she sighed deeply, “Extremely hard. You have no idea how hard.” She tried escaping to her father’s house but he was rarely there so she was often alone. She also began to “hang” with a friend after school. She commented that, “no homework got done. Let’s just say that.”

Her schoolwork suffered and she was unconsciously changing her behavior at school. Her music teacher and her literature teacher called her mother to ask if Aretha was all right. Aretha imitated the caller’s “teacher’s voice” as she recounted, “We’re a little concerned because she’s not been . . .” [Aretha did not complete the thought.] The teachers told Aretha’s mother that “[she’s] unengaged and she’s not enthusiastic about her work and she has a [an] attitude problem. She’s angry all the time. She’s defensive.” Aretha’s mother defended her by describing the domestic situation. Once her teachers understood what was going on they “tried to work with me a little better.
The music teacher’s care became a motivating factor for Aretha. I asked, “So did you feel, then, that music took on a special place for you because of that?” In a softer tone, Aretha shared this reflection:

I think so because I didn’t notice [before] that she [the teacher] cared so much. And so, once she made that call and my mom explained, it was almost as if she took me under her wing like, “Ok, I understand what’s going on in your house.” She would even take special time for me. I would go and I would eat my lunch at her class ‘cause that was her planning period. And I would go and we would talk or she would just get on the piano and play music while I ate or just whatever. She really went out of her way for me.

At the time of the study, Aretha was trying to pass an audition and fulfill other requirements to be accepted into the School of Music at her university. At that point she had not been successful. One of Aretha’s future possible selves is that of music teacher. She indicated that fulfillment of this goal would constitute her ideal.

And so that’s why . . . and I almost feel like that’s another reason why I have this determination to be in the music program. Because I want to be that for somebody. You know, the way she connected to me, I want to be able to connect with my students like that. And, I mean, I feel like when she retires . . . “I could pick up where she left off.” You know? And she knows that it’s [the music program] in good hands. That somebody is gonna be a great music teacher that’d be just like her. And so I guess it’s just like a dedication to her if I was able to do this.

I then asked her if her teacher’s kindness to her was more important that the music itself. She answered thoughtfully:
Mmhmmm . . . Just . . . that’s why music is so important, I mean. It almost ties in
together. It’s not just because she was a ‘teacher’ but it’s because she was my music
teacher and she helped me cope with things through the music. Like I said, sometimes I
would just come in her class crying, just like, “I’m tired. I can’t do this [said in a crying
voice].” She’s just like, “Breathe.” And then she would just play. She would just play and
it would just really relax me and I’m just like, “Everything will be okay. This music is
just giving me hope to just know that one day it’s gonna pass over, you know.” And it
would get me through my day.

Musical Experience and Meaning

Choral music is sung and, therefore, uses words. The use of text is one element that
distinguishes choral music from other forms of music. I wondered whether the text or the music
was more important to Aretha. She answered:

“Well, it was mostly, I think, the actual, just the music. Because sometimes she [the
teacher] wouldn’t say anything. Sometimes she would just play . . . and I just let that
just marinate in my soul. And I’m just like, ‘[deep breath] Ok.’ And then I can go to my
next class like a brand new person.”

It is clear from these exchanges that chorus was extremely important to Aretha. I asked
her to share, “What stood out to you about your experiences in school music? What was the very
best thing?” She answered, “Um . . . my teacher’s spirit. Her coming in ready to like, share what
she had and show us everything about music made me enjoy it.”

She discovered a sense of belonging and family as evidenced by her description of her
chorus teacher and class:
She always came in, “All right, little babies, let’s stand up and stretch,” you know. And I loved that she called us her little babies. Even though I have a mom, she was our mom at school. And we were her little babies. She had a way of connecting with us and teaching us how to read music without like saying, “This, this, this [said in a mean voice]!” You know, she didn’t drill us. She just showed us a way that it would connect and that we would never forget it. And so, I think that’s what made me love it so much, and that’s what changed my life.”

And further:

Umm, that class actually felt like a family, you know. So I guess it wasn’t just that I had that relationship with Mrs. Jones, but when I went into that class I’m like, “Oh, I can’t wait ‘cause I’m going to see this person, this person, you know.” We all hugged each other. We all - you know, it was just like . . . there was a moment in time (spoken slowly, thoughtfully) where it wasn’t school . . . you didn’t think of choir class as school . . . that just felt like you was going to relax and just have a good time. And nobody in there looking and judging you or, you know, any of the things that go on in high school outside. You know, like, none of that happened in that class. It was a very comfortable environment, so I guess that’s what I can say aside from my relationship with the teacher. I just had a really great relationship with everybody in that class.

**Negative aspects of chorus**

I then asked her to consider if there was anything that she did not like about her music classes. Her first negative is really a positive. Her immediate answer was revealing, “They weren’t long enough.” Her school had block scheduling where many classes are 90 minutes in
length. Her comment was, “And I think ours was only like 45 minutes. And I was like, ‘Why is this . . .’ and the time, you know when you’re enjoying it, the time flies and I’m like, ‘The bell already? What!??”

Another negative concerned the lack of field trips. They only went to “festival [required annual competition].” “We didn’t get to do anything else as far as like exploring music outside of the classroom.” Aretha complained that they did not get to go:

To music museums or you know anything that could pertain to us learning about music or the culture or the history. . . . I’m like, ‘This is a class just like any other class. If I can go to the Martin Luther King museum for history, why can’t I go to a music museum?’

**Positive aspects of chorus**

I asked her, “What is the most important thing that you think your participation in music contributed to your life?” Aretha’s response spoke volumes:

My determination. Because music . . . [Aretha paused to collect her thoughts] Many people try to act like music is not a big deal or it’s just something that you can play around with. *But music teaches you so much more than just the average, “Oh, I can sing.”* I mean, sitting down and learning how to sight-read; that’s not an easy task, especially if you’ve never done it, you know? Sitting down and figuring out the notes and try to sing it with fluidity, I mean that takes determination. That takes, you know, you being focused and staying on task, you know really delving into that and that’s what it helped me have more determination in my life. Because as a kid, you know sometimes you’ll get that lackadaisical attitude about, “I’ll do it later. I don’t have to focus that much on this.” And that [music] just gave me the drive and determination.
That’s what it taught me the most. That’s what’s important that I got from music classes.

**Access**

Suddenly Aretha introduced a new aspect of the topic of access. “I’ve been hearing a lot of schools talking about taking music out. And I’m just like ‘What?’” When I responded that in some places that was true, she rejoined:

I can’t believe it! My entire life was like choir, band [she helped with the band]. And so, I’m just like, “That means so much to me.” And I know it means a lot to a lot of other students. How could you take that away? I mean just to have more time for test-taking skills or whatever, like . . . That’s not going to help them take the test better. *This* is what’s helping them take the test better, I feel you know . . . It’s my outlet. That’s my relaxation period to just have fun, and then I can come back and focus on this.

She continued:

. . . yeah it didn’t actually, like, academically help me get the answers better, but I had a better attitude going into class to be more receptive to learning, you know, what the teacher was trying to get across. I had a better spirit about going into my other classes. She went on to say, “I don’t see the logic in taking out music classes. I don’t.”

I asked her to consider, “Just imagine what you think it would have been like if you hadn’t had music class? In a whisper she shared:

Oh gosh. If I didn’t have my music class, I don’t think I ever would have stopped being angry. I think at that 10th-grade point, if I didn’t have her [her teacher] . . . I’m not going to cry . . . oh well . . . If I didn’t have her [spoken through tears] Whooooo . . . I probably
would have got in trouble, you know. My life . . . I probably wouldn’t even be in college you know. Whooo . . . I would have just been angry at the world. I would have been in defense mode at everybody. Blaming everybody, you know, and I would have never got past that. And I just . . . I wouldn’t have had no outlet, no outlet. ‘Cause at home . . . it’s so loud I can’t hear music even if I played it.

The topic of access to music classes raised another question as well. My intent was to discover how not being in music classes affected Aretha’s total school experience. This exchanged followed instead. “I wanted to ask you ‘How did not being in music classes during school affect your total school experience? But you were always in music.’” I continued, “And so for you, it was important that you had it [music class] at school. But you had to go the counselors and say…” Aretha interjected emphatically, “DO NOT take me out of this class.” In contrast to others in the study, Aretha had a positive experience with a counselor who rearranged some classes so Aretha could remain in chorus. Then discussing how important it was to have music in school, she elaborated enthusiastically:

“YEAH! Because that was the only place I could get it! If I didn’t have that music class I would . . . I probably would have been fighting, dropped out, or you know or barely gotten by. I probably would have, you know, not even got a real degree. I probably would have ended up getting a GED or somethi. . . you know, anything . . . I wouldn’t have achieved what I have achieved, and I wouldn’t have got all the awards that I have gotten over the years for music or whatever if I didn’t have that class.

Achievements.

The preceding remarks are a testimony to the sense of belonging and community that often exist in music classes. These qualities, as they existed in the classes, sustained Aretha during challenging moments. She began to develop musically. The reference to her awards
revealed yet another facet of her choral experience. I asked her to tell me about her awards. She shared proudly, “When I was at high school I got ‘Most Improved Sight Reader’ award. Um, I got awarded, um, a ‘Music Teacher’s Assistant’ award.” These awards reflected her hard work, musical development, and the maturing of her character. She continued:

Me and Mrs. Jones, we were close. That was my girl! Like I love her so much! When she would be busy, she would let me get up and conduct the sight-reading. I would start learning how to play it a little bit so that I can help the students learn their notes for the music. And so I would co-teach the class with her. I was the best sight-reader. She gave me an award for section leader, because when we went to Festival I was able to help lead them during the sight-reading and stuff.

Her achievements contributed to a blossoming sense of self-efficacy and a healthy self-esteem.

Yeah! It was really nice. I even went on and I did the Kellogg’s Competition with my church choir. I mean, it was amazing so . . . but if I didn’t have it, gosh . . . I really don’t know who I would be! You know? ‘Cause it plays such a major role in my life.

She queried, “‘Who is Aretha without musical influence?’ I don’t know. I hum on the way here.”

**Aretha’s Epilogue**

Aretha’s story is one of pain and loss, but also of triumph and joy. Her mother, concerned about Aretha’s academic success, did not support her musical aspirations when the two conflicted. However, the determination she learned in music class gave her the courage to advocate for those classes on her own behalf. Additionally, her determination to work hard transferred to her other classes and helped her to achieve a modicum of success despite her academic struggles.
Although her father lived in close proximity to her school he was not involved in her life. Many invitations resulted in only one concert attendance to hear her sing. At that show choir performance, she tripped and fell. He never came to another concert.

She continues to pursue her ideal of becoming a music educator in the tradition of her high school chorus teacher. This ideal, which earlier seemed unattainable, is closer to realization. As of this writing Aretha has been accepted into the School of Music as a music education major with voice as her principal instrument. She persevered through many delays.

Only one of Aretha’s professors is aware that she suffers from cancer that had improved but has recently returned. Aretha was devastated when she heard this diagnosis. Aretha’s response to this circumstance was telling:

You know I got really upset, but coming to choir every Monday and Wednesday at this school, it helped me not think about it for and hour and a half or an hour and 15 minutes, you know. I can actually just sing! I refuse to not take it [choir], you know? Like, I have to take it because that’s what makes me happy. When I’m up there singing, I’m smiling the entire time. I’m really into it because, for a moment, I don’t have to think about the doctor saying my cancer just came back, you know?”

T-Bear’s Story

During the focus group interviews T-Bear had sheepishly referred to “almost being a high-school drop out.” He did not elaborate in the focus-group setting. When I invited him to return for an individual interview he was eager to participate. We met in an empty classroom in the music education building of his university. He was ready to share his story with me.

Grinning, 29-year-old T-Bear reiterated, “Yes, I was. I was almost a high-school drop out.” In the focus group he had shared that he grew up in a musical home, singing harmony with
his brothers from the age of three. Wondering how he reached the point of almost dropping out of high school, I asked him to share his background with me.

Beginnings

T-Bear again stated that he was, “in choir ever since before middle school.” Additionally, his grandmother had invested in the music education of her grandchildren. “My grandmother put me and my brothers through piano early when I was in elementary school. So we learned how to play the piano. So we knew all about chord building. I knew how to read music and write – I knew how to read and write music as a child.” When music was involved, T-Bear had a strong sense of self-efficacy. He felt very self-sufficient in all of his musical pursuits.

Referring to his secondary education I remarked, “You had to be able to sight-read to go to All-State.” T-Bear related his childhood experiences to his musical development:

Exactly. And sight-reading was always an easy thing for me because I knew how to play the piano, and I had to know how to sight-read. And we would have piano judges that we had to go to – piano recitals that we would have to go to – not only recitals, but also we would have to go and sit by the judge and he would grade us on our performance and our reading. So he would give us a piece to read and then he would grade us on our music and stuff like that. So we would have to do that.

I responded, “And that was your grandmother that made sure that you all did that?” He answered:

Our grandmother put us through that. Yes. But I, I thank my grandmother for and I love her to my heart for putting us through music. Because she put that music in our lives and for me, music was everything. It was my whole reason to go to school.

Period.
**Middle School**

“In middle school I started in the choir there my sixth-grade year, in the beginning.” He added, “I did very well in middle school and in the choir, and I had a great experience. I started with competition going to the honors chorus and going to different – umm, different real big performances in front of the school.” In certain areas of T-Bear’s narrative it is difficult to distinguish between self-esteem and self-efficacy. He had great faith in his musical abilities, and this confidence created a healthy self-esteem that sustained him during middle school.

All-State Chorus was not offered at his middle school, but he said he would surely have auditioned if it had been. He was very enthusiastic about his performances in “honors chorus - sixth, seventh and eighth grade.” He described going to a performing- arts magnet high school to participate in a large honor choir. Middle-school chorus influenced his aspirations. He began to entertain thoughts of a future possible self: “So we had a, we had a great time. Well, I had a great time in middle school and umm, I did a lot of different performances and everything. And, and . . . that’s, that catapulted me in my music, and it inspired me to become a songwriter.”

He described the experience of being mentored by another young man who seemed to be up-and-coming in the gospel music scene. This friend had placed third in a competition that T-Bear described as *American Idol* for gospel music. He explained his adulation for this young singer telling me, “I was his, and I was his protégé or his understudy. He was my section leader.” A sixth-grade T-Bear admired the successful eighth grader for his leadership as well as his singing ability. For T-Bear, there was a sense of community in the choir, “and it kind of set aside from the other students in the school because we all had a mutual, a mutual love for music. And a mutual love for creating and re-creating music and getting an optimum sound that was great.” This statement revealed a sense of belonging and shared purpose that provided
a family at school for him. I asked him to share an important memory of his musical middle-
school experience.

I say the thing that trumped everything had to be the eighth-grade play. [A] young lady,
she came to the to the school and she had a play written out and she had these umm
songs. [These] songs . . . were able to tell, like, our life, and it was a play that really
directly related to what we were going on as middle school students.

We had a time where we could monologue, and it was acting as well. And, umm, it was
this one song that I led, and it was a solo song and, umm, I sang it. It was, was . . . it was
powerful because it [the song] basically said that, umm, “Look at me. I’m just another – a
person in the world, uh, with my dreams they disappear . . . they, umm, my dreams they
appear, they fade away.” And it – it was kind of saying . . . like it seems like everything
is going wrong, where do I find my place?

So a lot of times at that time we was going through puberty and it was like a lot of
us was just trying to find our place in the world. Where did we matter? Where did we
come to matter? And so, that was kind of like what I was going through, so it really
resonated with me and it was a pleasure that I was able to expel- that I had a song that
was able to illustrate my feelings at that particular time.

His words clearly demonstrated that he was searching for meaning, for “his place.” Later
in the interview it became evident that he was thinking not only about puberty, but also about his
home life. He concealed the difficulties at home from teachers and administration during his
middle-school years.

T-Bear loved to perform in front of others, and the eighth-grade play gave him the
opportunity to shine. I asked if he participated in any special ensembles during middle school.
He responded that he did. Many times the activities were self-motivated and self-directed. T-Bear demonstrated leadership in these ensembles:

Oh yes. Now there were many, many different talent shows that me and the guys . . . we would get a whole Motown thing going on . . . And we would have a whole performance lined up. And we would have different melody [medley] of songs that we would do. So we would have some Temptations here, do some [laughing as he spoke] that’s what I’m saying, that’s what I’M saying. We had a great time.

The teacher sometimes supervised the self-directed activities:

A lot of things that we did self-motivated, our teacher would come with us, and our music director. She would kind of coach us . . . she would either accompany us with the piano or she would she would hear it and give us criticism – “ok, you know you want to work on this particular harmony or that particular harmony.”

Once again, his confidence in his musical abilities nurtured his sense of self-efficacy and a budding sense of authority:

but for the most part, umm, well I [T-Bear] kind of arranged all the harmonies so we kind of had those under control, fortunately. Sometimes we would have to come out ‘cause somebody wouldn’t want to listen to me, so I’m like, “Ok, well we can go over to the teacher and have her tell you what you need to sing.”

I asked him about his academics in middle school. He replied:

I was not doing bad in academics. You know, I wasn’t failing any classes at all, but at the same time I wasn’t serious about my academics. And it, it wasn’t, umm . . . it wasn’t an issue to be serious about academics at that time for us. It was just like, you just don’t fail, you know?
He described himself as “just a regular student.”

At the end of T-Bear’s eighth-grade year the choir teacher from the magnet high school for the performing arts visited the middle school and auditioned interested students for the magnet choral program. T-Bear was accepted into the program. He recounted it this way, “He [the high-school choir teacher] came and he auditioned all the best singers and, umm, from every middle school and brought them together to make this amazing choir.” T-Bear’s self-efficacy and personal confidence were evident in this statement, “I was THE best singer in my middle school.”

T-Bear chose to go the performing-arts high school even though it was not in his district. He recalled a joint venture with the magnet school students that made him want to attend that school, “And they were all big brothers and sisters to us. And it, you know, it really gave us ownership of the school before we even got there.”

This bit of information evidences two concepts. The first concept is the sense of family and belonging contained in his description of the magnet school students as big brothers and sisters. The second concept is that of ownership. A sense of ownership could enhance the sense of self-efficacy. The interactions with the older students may have presented ideas for possibilities that he had not previously considered.

**High School**

When I asked him about high school he began to describe his home life as the background for his struggles in high school. “Well, unfortunately because my mother – and my mother and my father were not together so . . . They were together at one time.” T-Bear’s father was a Vietnam veteran who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. That condition exacerbated other problems and led to his parents’ divorce. Although he did not remember his
dad “being there” since he was three years old, he made this statement concerning his home life and his parents. “I mean I love my dad. Don’t get me wrong. If it wasn’t for him, I wouldn’t be here, so I love him. I don’t fault him. I don’t fault my mother.”

He continued, “And so my mother had to raise three, three, umm, young men on her own. All by herself and it was a big struggle with her ‘cause you know no one ever really knows what they are doing, so, it was hard.” His grandmother played an important role in his life:

so it’s like my grandmother. I have to take my hat off to my grandmamma because she was really the rock and she had to be grandmamma and daddy and, and momma’s mother at the same time. So she had to wear many hats . . .

He described, “and my mom, she, a lot of times, she would work two and three jobs at a time.”

As he entered high school T-Bear was very self-conscious about his physical growth and appearance. Relating this circumstance to the hardship at home he shared:

I grew out of all my clothes. I couldn’t wear their [his brothers’] hand me downs. So I had an outfit for Monday and an outfit for Tuesday. Wednesday I had to wear the shirt from Monday and the pants from Tuesday. Thursday I would switch it up – the shirt from Tuesday and the pants from Monday, and Friday I just had to gamble. [And] people notice me, not that I was trying to draw attention to myself, but people notice me.

T-Bear continued:

The kids noticed, and they were mean. I was so embarrassed I didn’t want to go to school, so I would, I would leave. I would go to school every Monday, and I would leave at lunch because I did not – I didn’t want to have to face that kids ‘cause, aww man, they setting me up, and they gonna talk about me, so bad And I was like, aww man, I’m ugly – ohh, I’m so ugly!
Since he was in the magnet program I especially wondered, “So now, when you left on Monday, did you go back the rest of the week?” He replied:

Not really. I would go to school, and I would stay for homeroom, and then I would go to choir. Then I’d eat. Then I’d leave and I’d come back at the end of the day because we had – I was on the magnet program and we would have, umm, a second choir where all the choirs would meet together at the end of the day at the school so I . . .

This exchange followed:

R: So, you . . . in ninth grade, you . . . you went to your choirs. Because you were in the magnet program so you had to . . .

T-Bear: I was in the magnet program.

R: Your music classes.

T-Bear: Those are the ones that I loved to do.

R: So you, you didn’t go to things like History and English and Math and Science.

T-Bear: I have to be honest wid [with] you, I mean, I’m being transparent. So out of those eight classes, we had seven classes and the eighth class was the after-school class, which was the magnet class. I had eight classes, I passed three, and two of them (those that he passed) were choir. So, I failed everything else.

Didn’t care for anything else. I wasn’t going to school. It wasn’t that I didn’t understand the material; that I couldn’t keep up. The thing was, I was so embarrassed to go because I din’t [didn’t] have anything my whole ninth-grade year. I had one pair of shoes and I, I had one shirt – had two shirts and two pants, and the kids were so mean.
T-Bear went on to say that he “was not an exception to the game. I just couldn’t face them [the mean students] at the time.” During this period he resented his mother’s lack of attention, expressing it this way:

“Wow! You see I’m going through this, that and the other. You could give me a – you could you give me a help with this, that and the other.” But she didn’t really – she was going through her thing. And she, she didn’t help me with, umm, anything as far as my grades. She didn’t care about it. So I was like, if you not going to look them over, then, if you are not gonna care about it – ‘cause the first thing I brought home an F was in ninth grade, and she didn’t look over it, and I was like, “Wow, you didn’t look over it. You didn’t care?”

His mother was “going through her thing, which involves her working two and three jobs, going through marriages and whatnot.” He became very discouraged. “At that time I was like, I was like I’m doing terrible with this, that and the other, and I just said, you know what? I don’t, I don’t see where this can change.” He continued, “I failed so many classes that for the rest of my school year of my high-school years, I could not fail a class [be]cause I would not have graduated on time.”

This poignantly statement followed: “The only thing that kept me in school at that time was music.” Music classes were the only classes he did not fail. This statement echoed the sentiments he expressed when describing his piano lessons, “You know it was my whole reason for education. It was the only thing that I sought at that time. Man, it was the only thing I had going for me because I could, I could sing.” His belief in his ability to sing (self-efficacy) seems to have been the anchor for the little self-esteem that he had at the time. In fact:

I made it to the Solo and Ensemble [I believe he meant All-State. All-State requirements
meet the description of the audition he posits.] the first semester of my ninth-grade year, but I didn’t study my music and everything because I was going through all that with the whole self-esteem thing with no clothes and stuff. I didn’t want- I didn’t want to go. I made the audition, but I ended up not going because I didn’t want to be embarrassed. His attitude completely reversed when he met with his counselor about 10th-grade classes:

My counselor, she looked at my grades and she said, “T-Bear you have completely let me down.” She said, “I don’t know what you have done. The only thing that you care about is choir. You have completely messed over every other class you did. So until you get your act together I’m gonna to take you out of choir. I’m not going to take you out of the magnet program but you gonna have to prove to me that you are worthy of getting into the magnet program.” So my first year of the ninth grade again [He had to repeat ninth grade].

His response to this development was not entirely unexpected:

When I say it was like the biggest slap in the face. I mean my whole world crashed. I was like, “I don’t have a reason to go to school! NO! Why would you take me out of Choir?” And I felt, like, so bad. It’s like I didn’t have a purpose anymore in school. I didn’t care about nothing else. I didn’t care about Language Arts. I didn’t care about Math, Science, forget all that. I just want to go and sing. [Be]cause I could go and sing there. Now I can’t sing! What! So I was like, “Man, I really want to go sing!”

Rather than causing him to give up on school, however, the counselor’s decision motivated him:
“So it gave me a little a little fire up under me and then I said, ‘Hey! Let me take this lead out my back side and let me push forward and let me do try to do something with these classes.’”

For T-Bear this was a turning point. He wanted to be in choir so he accepted the decision of the school. Rather than become embittered, he became determined to succeed in his academic classes. He cited a sense of belonging as his primary motivation:

[be]cause if I didn’t do good I would not be able to get back in Choir. And like I said, I had developed these, umm, partnerships in the, umm, this Choir organization. I was in the magnet program and all my friends were in the magnet program. All my friends were in the choir, or in the band and/or in musical theatre, and me I’m not a part of the crew anymore.

His description continues:

It was a privilege to be in choir. We auditioned to get into choir. You have to prove yourself worthy. And I had proven myself unworthy with my grades. So I had to come back and prove myself worthy. So not only did I have to get my grades together for the choir so I could be worthy to sing . . .

Nothing in T-Bear’s life had changed as far as his finances. He was still teased about his appearance and he realized, “Wow! I’m living in provety. [This is phonetically how he pronounced it.] And I would always read about provety at school and read about poor people, and I had to face the fact that I was one of those people…,” but he “grew thick skin real fast” and felt that “everything they say can just roll off my shoulders.” Then, victory, “And my next progress report was right before my report card; I had all C’s. I was like yes!” Then:
I show them (to my) counselor, and she said, “you got all C’s. I will let you get back in choir this time, but I need to see some progress. I need to see some A’s and some B’s on here. But you made all C’s, and you didn’t fail anything. You can get back in the choir.”

During the time that he was not in choir, T-Bear took up boxing. The boxing coaches and the school counselor gave him the tough love he wanted from his mother; “they had chastised me the way I felt my mother was gonna chastise me because I brought back bad grades.” He felt that she was “not paying attention,” but other influences in his life helped him to take responsibility for his own choices. Another influence was his grandmother. Sometime during his tenth grade year he went to live with his grandmother. “So I [T-Bear] said, ‘I won’t let myself down.’” I asked if he felt that boxing had helped with his determination to succeed and he replied, “Definitely. And the choir people.”

It was the threat of being ‘kicked out’ of the magnet program and choir that kept T-Bear working to improve his grades. He put it this way:

And that . . . that was my consequence, and it pushed me to really dedicate myself to my grades. And I was so behind in high school that I really didn’t give any thought to college, period. And at home it wasn’t being reinforced at all, period.

Again, the discouragement and sense of hopelessness is clear. At this point in time he had no conception of future possibilities. He indicated that he only wanted to be able to provide housing and food for himself. “So I had no dreams. No, I had no idea of college. I had no idea of what college was. Why go to college, anything like that. College was like nowhere in my plan.”

The first year that he was back in choir full time he began to excel in choral activities participating in various festivals and competitions. That year he had more clothes but “I just
really didn’t care anymore. I had to get my, my, my, my education. So I was doing better in school, and I was understanding . . . “ He was able to make up his credits and graduated with his original class. He remained in music throughout high school even participating in All-State Chorus, which he remembers as an important achievement.

T-Bear’s Epilogue

T-Bear has had a remarkable journey. His participation in this study is a testament to the fact that he is in college. He tried to go to college right after he graduated from high school and even took some music classes. As a young man, however, he was working to put himself through school. Working and completing his schoolwork proved to be too much for him. He dropped out of college and worked at various jobs for a few years.

When he returned to college in his late twenties, he hoped to study music but was unable to pass the audition. He majored in physical therapy but he still seeks music involvement, participating in choir and guitar class. His vision of a future, possible self has been revived. He still hopes to write music someday but his reason is not fame. It is to make a difference for someone else through his music, much in the same way that the song in the eighth-grade musical “spoke” to him:

I still write songs, and I would love to see if I could get my songs shopped out to someone so that someone could hear it and maybe . . . maybe you know, maybe inspire somebody. I believe that I can probably get someone to sing one of my songs and . . . and probably change the world.

He plans to practice physical therapy to support his musical aspirations.

He did not blame others for his losses. He said, “It was all my fault. It was my decision to not go to school. It was my decision to not do my grades. It was my decision; you know
that’s my burden.” Referring to lack of familial undergirding, “So with me not having a strong support system I have to do . . . I have to figure out how can I support myself.” He takes responsibility for his past and his future. He said he learned “not to make excuses but to make results.”

When expressing his hope for a family of his own some day, T-Bear describes his ideal self:

I want to do the right things. I think kids are a privilege. I believe that it’s a privilege to raise a family. I want a big family one day. So until I’m able to support a family, I won’t have a family. So right now I just try to do everything I can to be in a situation where I can support a family. I don’t . . . my family, my kids, my children won’t have to go through what I went through. You know they’ll have a father that’s there for ‘em.”

Reflecting on T-Bear’s memories of his childhood, I commented, “So even if your children - something happens and they only have one pair of shoes, and two shirts, and two pairs of pants – they’ll still have you. And that is way more important than the money.” He nodded, smiling.

T-Bear’s final words describe the man he wants to be, his ‘ideal self.’ “I could be every great thing that they [his parents] wasn’t and be everything that I loved about them and make sure that I do it with my kids, with my children. And everything that I didn’t like, I’m gonna make sure that I don’t do it with my children.”

**Conclusion**

The narratives provided by these two students exemplify the purpose of the study: to investigate students’ perceptions of the effect of school music on their global secondary school experience. Further, the participants’ reflections provided deeper insight into how at-risk
students valued music participation during the school day and the overall impact such activities had on their lives in and out of school.

The lives of these at-risk participants were recounted in narrative form using the participants’ own words and may be considered representative of the targeted population. Transcriptions of recorded interviews maintained the chronology of events and direct quotations were used to illuminate the effect of these events on the lives and decisions of the students. These at-risk participants provided clear examples of the impact of music on their lives.

Each of these students faced difficult personal circumstances. Both of these students were deeply emotionally invested in school music, and each was counseled to discontinue school music to facilitate academic remediation. They spoke passionately of their reactions to such counsel, expressing simply, yet eloquently, the meaning of music and how music participation in school had presented new possibilities for their lives, even affecting their determination to attend college. Their college attendance provides a platform for them as they explore future, possible selves.

As each narrative unfolded, it was examined through the lens of Hallam’s (2002) motivational model. This study focused on the malleable aspects of the personality. Aretha and T-Bear each envisioned an ideal self for which they were striving. Their experiences in school music presented possible selves for consideration. They each achieved self-efficacy in music that enhanced their self-esteem. The qualities of self-efficacy and self-esteem in music resulted in a determination to succeed in academic courses as well as music classes. They are proud of what they have achieved.
Viewing these lived histories in context and examining the meaning surrounding the circumstances in which these participants experienced music illuminates the powerful and life-altering influence often found in music classrooms.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study contains reports of student reflections regarding experiences in music education during secondary school. I asked students to articulate their feelings regarding the importance of opportunities to participate in music classes in a school setting. Students who were denied access to music classes for remediation were of particular interest. The final research population necessitated the removal of the descriptor “at-risk” from the original primary research question (see below). The subsidiary research questions remained the same.

The primary research question was, “How did the removal of students from in-school music education opportunities affect their overall school experience?”

The subsidiary questions were:

1) How do those students who valued school music participation but who were denied access to music classes perceive the impact of the resulting situation on their overall school experience and subsequently on their lives?

2) How do those students who were able to remain in their chosen musical activity in spite of administrative or academic difficulties perceive the impact this participation had on their overall school experience and subsequently on their lives?

3) Do students perceive that participation in these music classes led to success in other areas of school life such as academic performance, improved citizenship, and increased possibilities for the future beyond high school?

4) Do students perceive that lack of participation in music classes led to negative effects on their lives as described above?
Summary of the Methods

I selected a qualitative methodology to generate personal narratives with thick description to illustrate the meaning of music in the lives of the participants. The research design had three phases. In Phase One, 135 students in three choral ensembles completed a questionnaire (Creswell, 2012; Markus & Nurius, 1986) with open and closed-ended questions about their experiences in secondary school music classes. These surveys served as a screening tool to select students for the interview portions of the study in Phases Two and Three. A total of 16 students attended focus group interviews in Phase Two. From these focus groups, six students were invited to elaborate on their information in individual interviews during Phase Three.

Conclusions

This study was grounded in a constructivist epistemology as discussed in chapter 5. Constructivism (Bruner, 1986; Crotty, 1998) holds that social interactions contribute to each individual’s development of meaning. This study presupposes interactions that occur in the school setting as catalysts for the making of meaning. The interviews generated student reflections in the phenomenological tradition (Moustakas, 1994). Focus-group discussions yielded general themes. The in-depth individual interviews expanded on these themes and allowed for a deeper analysis. Combined, the varied forms of data contributed toward an understanding of at-risk student perceptions regarding the importance of music in their lives.

Focus-Group Findings Discussion

Participants spoke about their backgrounds, and this information led to the identification of the first theme of (a) Family and Friend Influences. The remaining two themes are (b) Effect of Music Classes on Global School Experience, and (c) Administrative Curricular Advisement.
These final two themes, although distinct, are interrelated, with events in one theme generating feelings or comments related to the other. In the sections below, circumstances described under each heading are accordingly interrelated and overlapping.

**Theme I: Family and Friend Influences**

Family activities and the culture that surround a child often shape interests and contribute toward skill development (Gardner, 1999). These influences were evident in the reflections as many students recalled exposure to music in the home or at church even as young children. Unfortunately, not all families were supportive of expressed musical interest. The study participants from those families have persevered in music in spite of discouragement as evidenced by their membership in a university choral ensemble.

**Theme II: Effect of Music Classes on Global School Experience**

Analysis of the conversation surrounding this topic delineated two primary subtopics. The first subtopic concerned the impact of discontinuing music classes. Students reported a sense of loss when they discontinued in-school music classes.

The second subtopic focuses on the perceived extra-musical benefits of participation in music classes as identified by study participants. These benefits are (a) a sense of belonging; (b) enhanced learning/ability to focus; (c) stress reduction; and (d) personal responsibility/leadership and increased self-confidence.

**Impact of discontinuing music classes.**

Students who discontinued their music classes shared what they missed most about being in music classes. Their reflections depicted a sense of loss. Since participants viewed discontinuing music classes as a loss, these comments could be construed as reporting a negative effect on the global school experience. A recurring theme was that students missed the bond that
developed in the classes during their participation in music. Many students used the term “family” to describe their perception of what it meant to be in music class.

**Extra-Musical Benefits**

**Enhanced sense of belonging.**

The sense of community or belonging (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Allsup, 2012) was mentioned by 78.6% of the participants. While a large percentage of the respondents seemed to value this aspect of music education, to some of the students it was essential to their school experience. For them, music was the sole reason for coming to school (Kinder & Harland, 2004). Other students expressed that their music classes allowed them to escape from family dysfunction, learning disabilities, or the myriad other difficulties of adolescence. For them, participation in music classes allowed focus on enjoyable activities and opportunities for success in contrast to stressful personal challenges. These students also looked to their teachers and classmates to provide needed support (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Allsup, 2012; Freer, 2015; Hendricks et al., 2014; Hourigan, 2009).

**Enhanced performance in other classes.**

Several students stated that participation in music during the school day helped to “relax their minds” and increased their ability to focus when they returned to academic pursuits. One student shared that her music theory studies enabled her to view mathematics in a different way (Gardner, 1983, 1999; Hanson, Silver & Strong, 1991) and enhanced her ability to make mathematical connections (Duke, 2014; Scripp & Meynard, 1991). Some students attributed their improved academic performance to participation in school music (Hanson, Silver & Strong, 1991). The threat of being denied music may have served as a stimulus to work harder in school.
for some students. However, other participants’ self-efficacy and self-esteem improved because of their participation in music classes enhancing performance in academic pursuits (Sava, 1987).

**Stress reduction.**

Another benefit of music participation is the lessening of stress. As discussed in Chapter 4, study participants in AP and Honors classes communicated that they experienced academic pressure that exacerbated stress. The prevalence of this pressure caused researchers to develop a new instrument, StRESS, to investigate the stressors encountered by those who are in advanced curricula (Suldo, Dedrick, Shaunessy-Dedrick, Roth, & Ferron, 2014b). They found that, “Across two large independent samples, the StRESS factor with the highest mean was Academic Requirements,” (p. 14).

Related research explored AP students’ coping mechanisms and discovered that students with lower levels of life satisfaction reacted to stress in inappropriate ways (Suldo, Dedrick, Shaunessy-Dedrick, Fefer, & Ferron, 2014a). Those same students often developed negative feelings about the academics that were causing the stress. Students with greater satisfaction in life, however, found healthy ways to handle the stressors in their lives. According to the Suldo et al. study, one positive way to relieve stress involves diversions such as athletics or creative activities (2014a). Other researchers have recommended music activities to alleviate stress and promote resilience (Coholic, Fraser, Robinson, & Lougheed, 2012; Hendon & Bohon, 2007). Fifty-seven percent of participants in my study indicated that participation in music had an ameliorating affect on their stress.

**Personal responsibility/leadership.**

Being entrusted with leadership often enhances a sense of personal responsibility and leads to increased self-confidence (Hourigan, 2009; Kinder & Harland, 2004). Examples given
by the students in this study included: Aretha, who experienced a sense of validation from accepting opportunities for leadership in the classroom such as leading in sight-reading exercises; Andrew and Anna, who functioned as section leaders within their ensembles; Teresa who enjoyed mentoring younger students; and T-Bear, who assisted with performance preparation (Shuler, 1991).

**Increased self-confidence.**

Teresa and Andrew, among others, shared that their self-esteem was enhanced as a result of being selected for solo performances supporting previous research findings that participating in music activities enhances self-esteem (Sava, 1987). Participants stated that their self-confidence was heightened when the teacher and their peers recognized them as ‘good’ singers or performers. Half of the participants expressed that the self-confidence they gained transferred to other school activities, academic and/or social, improving the outcomes in those undertakings as well.

**Theme III: Administrative Curricular Advisement.**

This third theme concerned administrative advisement regarding students’ class schedules. Purposeful sampling created a pool of participants who had been advised to discontinue music classes for academic reasons. I anticipated finding that the primary reason students discontinued music was for academic remediation. However, the study population consisted of college students, perhaps lowering the number of at-risk students than when compared with the general population. The majority of study participants were advised to discontinue music classes in favor of Advanced Placement or Honors courses. The reasons for such counsel and students’ reactions to counselors comprised two subtopics for discussion: (a) counsel to discontinue music classes and (b) students’ perceptions of advisement. A third
subtopic (c) concerned students’ perceived value of the classes that were substituted for music classes.

**Counsel to discontinue music classes.**

During the focus-group interviews seven students shared their perceptions of the counsel they received. Participants shared that, often, they “received” their schedules only to find that their classes had been decided by administration. Lola chose not to accept that decision and insisted that music be included in her schedule. Seven students were advised that they would be harming their college careers if they did not take AP and Honors classes. Five of the seven students accepted that advice and did not continue music classes. Each of these five students felt that counselors made these decisions based on formulaic considerations without thought to individual student needs or concerns.

**Students’ perceptions of advisement.**

“Pressure.” That single word summarizes thoughts expressed throughout all of the focus groups to describe students’ perceptions of administrative advisement to substitute AP classes for music. Suldo et al. (2014a) and Suldo et al. (2014b) investigated the level of stress found in students who are enrolled in Advanced Placement courses or in International Baccalaureate programs. Their research supported previous findings that students in advanced curricula suffered increased stress that correlated only with academic pressures (Suldo, Shaunessy, Thalji, Michalowski & Shaffer (2009). Suldo et al. reiterated that “high school students in accelerated curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs and Advanced Placement (AP) courses face additional stressors related to their academic context (e.g., increased workload, more high-stakes tests, pressure to achieve)” (2014b, p. 2).
In addition to pressure to enroll in accelerated classes, students indicated their levels of perceived stress were unrelenting once academics became the sole reason for school. Music classes, often credited by students with relieving stress, were now absent from their schedules. Suldo et al. (2014b) noted the “inverse relationship between stress and positive academic and psychological functioning in adolescents” (p. 3). Other researchers (Schmeelk, Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003) found that students who reported lower stress levels maintained a higher GPA and “were more likely to have gone further with their education than those in groups that had experienced more stress…” (p. 427).

Many of the participants in the present study expressed that it seemed the pressure to take AP classes was based on what would best serve the interests of the school rather than what was best for students. Support for this observation is found in Abril and Gault’s (2008) survey of secondary school principals who stated that music classes are often deemphasized or discontinued entirely due to “state-mandated curricular requirements” (p. 76). Music teachers who participated in West’s (2012) research mentioned the increasing difficulty of scheduling music classes due to emphasis on “high-stakes testing” requirements. This present study corroborates that finding from the perspective of the students. While Elpus’s (2014) definitive study of national databases found that enrollment in music classes is not declining, he noted that the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) particularly disadvantage Hispanic students, English language learners and students with Individualized Educational Plans. Hoffman (2013) included students with low SES in this designation.

**Students’ perceived value of classes substituted for music participation.**

Participants in the present study volunteered their opinions of the AP and Honors classes that were recommended as substitutions for music classes. The following statements reflect
participant perceptions as expressed in the focus groups. The overwhelming consensus was that the AP and Honors classes did not add value to their high school experience. Often, although students may have earned an ‘A’ as the final grade in the class, they were unable to pass the AP exam. Participants expressed that if the class did not count for college it was a poor use of their time and they missed out on other high school experiences, thereby gaining nothing. Students also noted the common statement of counselors that the result of the AP exams did not matter. They were instead told that, “it would look good on a transcript” and were encouraged to take AP “no matter what it was.”

Often students were not able to select the advanced courses that interested them or that would benefit them for college. Teresa, who was encouraged to take college classes while still enrolled in high school (dual enrollment), discontinued chorus to take an entire year of college classes that were purported to support her college aims. The location and schedule of the classes made it impossible to continue in chorus classes. At the end of the year Teresa discovered that, contrary to what she had been told, the college courses did not apply to her anticipated nursing college major. Teresa missed her chorus participation and felt that she had sacrificed chorus participation for courses that did not augment her high school experience. Many students commented that the courses “were a waste.”

Students expressed that they missed the enjoyment and sense of accomplishment derived from corporate music making. Additionally, these music classes had served as a break, a place to relax and connect with friends (Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Allsup, 2012; Freer, 2012, 2015; Hendricks et al., 2014), a place where students participated in a different kind of learning (Gardner, 1983, 1999; Hanson et al., 1991; McFerran, 2010; Scripps & Meynard, 1991), and a
place where they could experience success (Hourigan, 2009; Kinder & Harland, 2004; Sava, 1987; Shuler, 1991).

**Narrative Findings Discussion**

As students shared their opinions about the themes identified above it became apparent that their feelings and emotions were congruent with Hallam’s (2002) motivational model (see pp. 41-44). Elements of the malleable aspects of personality were evident in student reflections as they envisioned ideal selves, experimented with possible selves, approached self-efficacy and attained some modicum of healthy self-esteem.

Music was important in the lives of all of the students who participated in the study, yet many of the participants did not fit the definition of at-risk elucidated on page 17. A stated purpose of this investigation was to examine the meaning of music in the lives of at-risk students (Shuler, 1991). The individual interviews in this study focused on “at-risk” as a significant element for exploration to discover whether participation in music made a difference in lives that were bereft of traditional values and support.

The individual interviews extended and elaborated upon the understanding of the Hallam (2002) malleable personality factors at work in the lives of two at-risk students. Aretha and T-Bear’s lifelong exposure to music created a love for singing and for performance. They remained involved in music throughout their schooling and music class became a refuge from hardship.

Through their music classes Aretha and T-Bear were exposed to possible selves that enabled them to reconfigure the ideal self they may have imagined. Their ideas of possible selves were initially very limited. Both of these students said that there was never any idea that higher education was a possibility for them. Their experiences in music class led both of them to envision an ideal self as a professional musician. Both Aretha and T-Bear had challenging home
lives and received little encouragement from their parents. The self-efficacy they experienced in music class encouraged the growth of self-confidence and self-esteem. They began to feel that they had value as individuals. The self-confidence and feelings of success engendered by participation in music classes permeated Aretha and T-Bear’s total school experience (Catterall et al., 2012; Hallam, 2010; Lonie, 2010; Sava, 1987) enabling them to improve their school performance and creating the impetus to attend college.

Both of these participants felt that they were born to be musicians. In an effort to provide a solid educational foundation, as was the case for this duo, administrators often advise students to focus only on traditional academics (Elpus, 2015; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995). Music education can benefit all students who participate, but for those to whom it is of paramount importance, lack of access to music in school may have a detrimental effect (Coholic, Fraser, Robinson, & Lougheed, 2012; Hendon & Bohon, 2007; Rhodes & Schechter, 2012). To deny individuals the opportunity to participate in an activity that is vital to them may result in discouragement, disinterest, and disaffection (Rusinek, 2008) leading to poor school performance and failure.

Thorough examination and chronicling of their stories enabled me to understand the intense impact music had in their lives. These students’ narratives demonstrated resilience and perseverance (Rhodes & Schechter, 2012) but it was the presence of music and music teachers in their lives that encouraged them, that infused them with the determination to overcome the obstacles they faced (Sava, 1987). In their words “music saved them.” Aretha and T-Bear came from dysfunctional families where the difficulties they experienced exacerbated the traditional pressures of adolescence. They struggled socioeconomically, academically, and socially (Shuler, 1991). Their narratives exemplify the powerful effect of participation in music classes.
Summary of Findings

The participant reflections reported during this study illuminated student concerns regarding access to music during the school day. All of the students in the study felt that music was an important part of their total school experience. Students reported an enhanced sense of community in music class as an important reason for valuing their participation. Other benefits to their global school experience included lessening of stress, enhanced learning, and development of leadership skills and personal responsibility. Often students felt so strongly about music classes that they acted as advocates for themselves and rejected administrative advice to discontinue music classes.

The majority of the study population was comprised of students who had been administratively advised to discontinue music classes. The expectation was that most advisement to discontinue music classes would be for the purpose of remediation for struggling learners or at-risk students. An unanticipated finding was that the majority of students who were advised to discontinue music were encouraged, instead, to substitute advanced classes. Although at-risk students were initially the target population, the study population of college students may have been weighted in favor of students who were not at-risk as only two participants shared that they were counseled out of music classes due to academic deficits.

An ancillary finding was that students often felt that the classes substituted for music were not beneficial and that they had experienced a loss when they were no longer in music classes. Additionally, students felt that counselors did not consider individual needs and that schools were focused on what served the school rather than students.

The at-risk students’ personal narratives epitomized how meaningful music education can be in the life of a student. These stories illustrate the transformative influence of music.
Music, in the hands of an empathetic and skilled teacher, can make a difference between success and failure. No student should be denied access to these opportunities.

**Implications**

It is clear that music classes are meaningful to the students who participated in this study. Students valued the option to take music as part of their schedule of classes. Perhaps these study participants were able to clearly articulate their thoughts because they had had to contemplate or experience lack of access to music classes. Students stated that participation in music classes contributed positively to their overall secondary school experience, even improving their academic performance by creating a sense of community, lessening the stress of academic pressure, and helping the mind to make connections in new ways. Their reflections also revealed two considerations regarding access to music classes that were unanticipated: the pressure to discontinue music in favor of accelerated classes and students’ feelings about ongoing pressure to participation in traditional academics to the exclusion of music classes.

If the goal of education is to create successful learners, educators should endeavor to provide a classroom climate that accommodates the needs of students with alternative learning styles and/or intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 1999). Study participants related that a sense of community and family, augmented by opportunities for individual success in the music classroom fostered self-efficacy and self-esteem, often leading to success in the global school setting. As an experienced teacher, I found that dedicated teachers in all subjects worked to meet the needs of diverse learners. This can be difficult in many school subjects, however, the nature of music lends itself to individualized instruction. Each student is required to contribute independently to the final product. When students realize their participation affects the outcome of the larger ensemble, often they discover a sense of ownership and pride in a job well done.
Those feelings of success (self-efficacy) then create the self-confidence that they can be successful in other school endeavors.

**Belonging.**

Seventy-nine percent of the study participants who participated in school music cited the sense of belonging, friendships, and the feeling of family they experienced in their music classes as primary benefits from music participation. Those who discontinued music classes expressed regret at the loss of that atmosphere. Aretha and T-Bear particularly valued this aspect of their music classes. The sense of community and self-efficacy they experienced from classmates and teachers significantly impacted their lives, even enabling them to improve in their academic classes. For these students, the sense of belonging and safety was nurtured in the music classroom.

Educators, administrators, and counselors need to familiarize themselves with students’ backgrounds and their need for community or a sense of belonging, emotional support, and encouragement from teachers and peers. This is especially true for those students who may be marginalized through learning difficulties, low SES, or family dysfunction. Such knowledge can lead to teacher involvement and counselor advisement on a personal level such as that afforded to Aretha and T-Bear. Although they were struggling, their counselors and teachers recognized that participation in music classes would impact Aretha and T-Bear in a positive way and supported their efforts to remain in music.

During the course of this research I spoke informally with school counselors who have indicated that, usually, the concerns described above are not considered when making decisions regarding class schedules. Administrators and counselors can aid in the creation of successful students by using the knowledge of individual student backgrounds, needs, and interests when
scheduling classes. Within the music classroom ethical behavior demands that teachers foreground the welfare of each student, adjusting teaching emphases and strategies as necessary to create lasting benefits for participants (Regelski, 2014).

**Advisement**

Federal and state entities continue the call for quantitative standards as proof that students are learning (“Page Special Report,” 2015). This focus on test results (Baker, 2012; Heilig et al., 2010; Salazar, 2012; West, 2012) creates pressures on schools to increase the numbers of higher-level courses offered and the numbers of students enrolled in these classes. A recent posting on a local county website trumpeted that 16 high schools were named 2015 Advanced Placement Honors schools highlighting schools’ emphasis on academic rigor. The findings of this present study suggest that students perceive that administrators, rather than encouraging student input as to the course of action that meets students’ needs, may make decisions based on state mandates (Abril & Gault, 2008; West, 2012) or what “makes the school look good.”

Often students’ interests are overlooked or they are pressured to substitute AP classes that do not serve them well for music classes. It is important to offer students an education, which, by objective standards such as college admission requirements, will best serve them in the future. Yet, students in this study indicated that perhaps it is time to refocus on the students and their individual interests. Several studies cited in this dissertation demonstrate the high levels of stress among students who are in AP classes to the exclusion of music ensembles or other arts participation (eg. Suldo et al. 2014a; Suldo et al., 2014b). What of the students who, although academically capable, prefer to have the time in their schedules for a more comprehensive, balanced secondary experience that extends to consistent arts participation and extra-curricular
activities (Wolf, Thompson, I., Thompson, E., & Smith-Adcock, 2014)? Can arts education actually enhance learning in ways that may not be documented by test scores?

Dewey (1938, 1998) cautioned against siding with either extreme in education. Early in the 20th century, traditional education consisted of the transmission of adult information and skills to young, malleable minds while progressive education focused on allowing young minds to develop in a more natural manner. Dewey suggested that these two philosophies are related and must work together so that education can be connected to the actual experiences of the students. The practical result of the recent focus on state and federal mandates seems to be a return to education without consideration of student experience.

Eisner (1992, 2002) and Gallutt (2007) lamented administrators’ and educators’ relegation of the arts to a last resort for learning when there were no scientific or quantitative facts at hand. Eisner posited six “distinctive modes of thinking, these artistically rooted qualitative forms of intelligence” (2002, p. 8). Among these modes of thinking that can be honed by participation in the arts, Eisner described the ability to use sound judgment, to be flexible while working toward a stated purpose, to distinguish form from content while recognizing their shared qualities, to achieve success in spite of limitations, and to recognize that aesthetic satisfaction is an important motivation in work and life (2002).

These education philosophers called for balance. Others still do (Boyce-Tillman, 2013; Elliott, 2012; Jorgenson, 2008; Melnick, Witmer, & Strickland, 2011; Yob, 2011). They suggest that much can be learned within arts education that may be missed in its absence. The reflections contained in this study suggest that contemporary students agree with that view. I have listened to their frustration. I have experienced my own frustration with similar administrative decisions during my tenure as a teacher in secondary schools.
Easing of mandates allows states to receive waivers from some of the requirements of NCLB. The *Blueprint for Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2010* sought to provide some relief, however, recent evidence suggests widespread implementation of new policies has not happened or has been ineffective in restoring balance in scheduling of classes (Suldo et al., 2014a, Suldo et al., 2014b). Kivunja (2015) urges schools to educate students for the skills that are needed in the 21st century. Of these, the learning and innovation skills include “critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, communication as well as creativity and innovation” (p. 31). Arts education seems particularly well suited to develop these skills. Music classes often continue to be disenfranchised. How can this situation be rectified?

Students should have input regarding decisions about their schedules and should be able to request changes in a non-confrontational manner. When teachers advocate for students they should be sure to foreground how serving this population can enhance the community’s view of the school. At the individual school level, meaningful communication between music teachers, counselors, and administrators could contribute to an expanded view of the importance of music as an integral part of the school day. This is particularly important for those students who have indicated their desire to participate in music classes. At the county and district levels, fine arts coordinators must educate themselves on the positive effects of music and other arts in the lives of at-risk students, the importance of music as an ameliorating factor in students’ stress, and the research supporting enhanced learning as a result of music participation.

**Music Teacher Preparation**

Music teacher preparation at the collegiate level should include readings, discussions about, and practice working with all types of diversity in the music classroom including but not limited to students whose socio-economic status may be low, learning disabled students, students with physical limitations, students with Individualized Education Plans, and English language
learners. New standards in teacher education in the state in which this study was conducted require that teachers in training include these considerations in their planning.

Students majoring in education are required to take a variety of classes addressing psychology and sociology. Often these classes are taken early in the college career. The methods courses, taken during the final semester before student teaching, are often focused on techniques and best practices specific to ensemble teaching. My experience as a choral methods instructor made me aware that I can and should equip my students to approach their students as individuals with specific needs. Care must be taken to assure that prospective teachers know that they influence lives. They may have the opportunity to effect actual life changes and choices for students such as those in this study population. This may be particularly true for those students who are struggling in some way. It is our responsibility as college instructors to provide experiences that enhance our students’ sensitivity to the myriad student “realities” they will encounter in their classrooms. Music is uniquely positioned to “educate feelings” (Reimer, 2003). Educated feelings stemming from a heightened aesthetic sense can engender greater engagement in learning. During teacher preparation we must communicate the importance of this aspect of music teaching to our students who can then utilize these concepts in their classrooms.

**Differentiation**

There appears to be a dichotomy in the current educational climate. Although teachers in training are required to consider and plan for differentiated learning, in the classroom and in the counselors’ offices, measures necessary to ensure this differentiated learning may be overlooked (Rock, Gregg, Ellis, & Gable, 2008; Tomlinson, ed., 2005). In practice, differentiated teaching may translate into addressing the needs of only those students who have been documented as having special needs. Even so, students with special needs frequently receive inadequate support
and/or may have been misdiagnosed (Barringer, Pohlman, & Robinson, 2010; Rock et al., 2008; Tomlinson, 2005). Students who may not present with special needs may have alternative learning styles. Their deficits, though real, may not be observable. At-risk students and students with alternative learning styles may particularly benefit from participation in music classes. While it may be difficult to address the many learning styles that may exist in a classroom, researchers and practitioners now believe that arts education encourages the development of flexible and malleable modes of thinking and problem solving (Barringer et al., 2010; Curtis, 2014; Duke, 2014; Eisner, 1992, 2002; Kivunja, 2015). Therefore music education may reach students who struggle to learn in other classes and music may stimulate their thinking in ways that may transfer (Duke, 2014) to academic classes resulting in enhanced learning.

**Re-direct and Re-focus**

Other students may choose to lessen their traditional academic load so that they can participate in music classes or other extra-curricular activities that temporarily redirect their thoughts and energies so that they return to other classes better able to focus and succeed. Researchers in the field of business management have investigated this principle (Schilling, Vidal, Ployhart, & Marangoni, 2003). These researchers found that the learning rate of individuals was significantly enhanced when participating in activities that are related to their specialty but differing from its main focus. Their research supports the idea that students who take a break from traditional academics, while still participating in learning in the form of music may enhance their overall scholarship. Narayanan, Balasubramanian, and Swaminathan (2009) also found that optimal learning and productivity occurs when there is a balance between specialization and diversification. When considering how people learn in schools, the
single-mode specialization can be thought of as traditional academics, and the multi-modal diversification can be thought of as arts (music) classes.

**Advocacy**

It is possible that this study, in concert with studies cited throughout this document, might provide a basis for advocacy efforts at the state, district, county, and local levels. Fine arts leaders at county, district, and state levels must insist on a voice in policy decisions that address curriculum and graduation requirements. These leaders should call for and then offer to lead professional development for the purpose of educating administrators, counselors, curricula specialists, and teachers regarding the place of music in a well-rounded education.

The current study illustrates the importance of foregrounding student concerns when scheduling music classes. Advocacy efforts should be grounded in concern for students rather than what best serves the music program, although these two concerns may ultimately achieve the same ends. To safeguard music for the students who would choose it, professional development for music teachers might include suggestions of effective ways to approach administrators regarding the place of music in the curriculum. An ancillary approach for music teachers to consider when conversing with administrators may be to focus on how music successes can enhance the reputation of the school as a whole. Administrators might be more willing to work with music teachers regarding individual student concerns when they feel that the teachers understand the job responsibilities and professional pressures facing school counselors.

The resources on the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) website, while helpful for advocacy, are focused on preserving music education programs. This study suggests that perhaps the focus should change to one of assuring that individual students receive the music
education that is their right. Music teachers must educate their administrators and counselors as they advocate for students and as they seek to effect change in school policies for future students.

**Future Research Recommendations**

While I had anticipated encountering at-risk students for whom music was an integral part of academic success, an additional theme that emerged during this study concerned those students who were advised out of music classes in favor of advanced placement and honors level classes. Studies have investigated whether participation in music influences higher academic scores (Baker, 2012; Bidelman, Hutka, & Moreno, 2013; Catterall et al., 2012; Moreno, et al., 2011; Salazar, 2012; West, 2012). These quantitative investigations found that even among “good” students, grades improved with music participation. Elpus (2013) suggested the selection process bias as a possible reason for previous findings that music study is related to improved test scores. However, additional recent research demonstrates that there are measurable academic gains found among populations that participate in music classes, particularly those who are at-risk (Kraus et al., 2014; Slater et al., 2014). If, as these studies indicate, music study is quantitatively correlated with enhanced learning, it may be argued that music must be available to all and cannot be eliminated from the academic schedule.

This present study points to the extra-musical benefits of participation in music. Music study alone may or may not produce academic improvement but participation may be a significant cause for such improvement in those students who choose to study music. Participants reported an inverse relationship between the pressure for academic achievement and the overall quality of their secondary school experience. The passage of NCLB in 2002 exacerbated a focus on high-stakes testing. Elpus (2014) notes the extreme measures practiced by some administrators to maximize the percentage of high test scores. Although NCLB
recognized the arts as a core subject in 2002\(^1\), teachers and administrators reported a narrowing of the curriculum that often discouraged consistent arts participation (Elpus, 2014). Studies have documented the academic pressure in this era of high-stakes testing (Suldo et al., 2014a; Suldo et al., 2014b). The present study provides an oral record of how these study participants felt about the lack of access to music classes and the academic pressure they experienced.

**Replication.**

**Secondary School Population.**

**At-risk.**

Future research could replicate this study with a secondary school population. Although my original intent was to conduct this study with high school students, there were three primary factors that mitigated against using a secondary school population: (1) the difficulty of gaining access to the schools and students, (2) the difficulty of obtaining honest and accurate information from counselors, and (3) the concerns surrounding privacy issues of likely participants. If these possible barriers can be surmounted, the study I suggest might provide valuable information. It would be informative to find whether this younger population would corroborate the reflections of the college student participants. With a younger population of students who are currently in secondary school the researcher may discover a higher percentage of at-risk students since they would not yet have matriculated to college.

\[^1\] On April 9, 2015, on the eve of the 108th birthday of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), music was recognized as a core subject in draft federal education policy. In the 2002 NCLB legislation music was included under the umbrella designation “the arts.”
Given the successes of Aretha and T-Bear, one might question whether the threat of removal from music classes might be an effective motivator for at-risk students. Such a view fails to consider the larger aspects of Aretha’s and T-Bear’s narratives. Aretha stated that had it not been for music she probably would not have finished high school. We would not know about her because she would not have been in this study population. She advocated for herself, but it was not the threat of removal that saved her. It was her relationship with a caring music teacher. This teacher kept her coming to school and inspired her to become a music teacher in her own right.

T-Bear found a family in music classes and the threat of expulsion did motivate him. However, had he not been in the magnet music program he might not have finished high school. He shared that had he not been restored to music he would have “dropped out.” With a fractured family unit of his own, it was the longing for the sense of community found in the music classroom that motivated him to persevere. He thrived when surrounded by students who were striving for excellence. This sense of accomplishment transferred to other areas of his life and schooling.

Both of these students, rather than being motivated by fear, were motivated by the sense of belonging, acceptance, and family they found in the music classroom. Future research with a secondary school population may be able to discover the true impact of music classes on the at-risk student who may be struggling to remain in school.

Comparing band, orchestra, and chorus students’ responses.

An interesting investigation with a secondary school age population might be a comparison of the responses between band, orchestra, and chorus students. Would the responses differ regarding the impact of music study among students in these diverse areas
of music? Although the current study population was drawn from college age choral students, several of these had participated in band and orchestra while in high school. Their responses were not markedly different from the responses of those who sang in chorus in high school, however, a study with a population currently in high school might produce another result.

**Expanded College Population.**

This study used purposeful sampling. The participants’ participation in chorus at the college level spoke to an interest in music. A future study could cast a wider net at the post-secondary level, recruiting students from the general population. Such a study might produce information regarding students’ interest in music during secondary school. The initial questions might mirror those for this study although the results might differ markedly from the population purposely sampled for this present study. Participants in a the general population may or may not have an interest in music, have participated in music in secondary school, have had a positive experience with music, and have been advised out of music for remediation or advanced level classes. However, music permeates society as evidenced by the use of music in advertising, for motivation, and for pleasure.

Elpus (2014) found that Hispanic students, English language learners, and students with Individualized Education Plans were underrepresented in music classes. This present study found that high achievers are also pressured out of music classes. It might be informative to discover if a sampling of the general population would validate the findings of the purposeful sample recruited for the current study regarding the importance of music experiences during secondary school. The study I suggest might begin a conversation about
the availability of music to general school populations and how young people value music in their lives.

**Effect of Rest Periods and Task Variety on Learning.**

Previous researchers (Simmons & Duke, 2006) examined the consolidation of memory of a keyboard task. They found that a rest period that included sleep improved recall of the task when participants were retested. Walker and Stickgold (2006) discussed the stabilization phase of memory consolidation that “appears to occur largely during wake cycles” (p. 142). Although Allen’s (2007) research focused on memory consolidation of procedural skills during sleep, her findings suggested that additional learning can occur after active practice has ended, “[affording] the brain an opportunity to connect and integrate new skill memories with existing networks of similar and related memories” (p. 66). Mednick, Makovski, Cai, and Jiang (2009) studied the effect of sleep and rest on visual memory and Cash (2009) examined the effect of rest intervals on the overnight consolidation of procedural memory of a keyboard task. More recent research findings have examined the consolidation of memory during waking rest periods (Dewar, Cowan, & Della, 2014). Researchers found that it was not necessary for participants to intentionally rehearse new information for a boost in memory to occur. Their high sensory distraction from the verbal recall exercise was a visual task as opposed to a related learning task.

This final aspect of memory stabilization and consolidation studies led me to consider whether or not participation in music provides a period of rest from traditional academics for the brain. Future research might investigate whether the of participating in a related relaxing or enjoyable activity promotes continued learning as described above. In music classes the focus of the mind is directed to a different kind of learning than might predominate in traditional academic classes. Learning continues, though differently, through an activity that engages
additional senses and modes of learning (Barringer et al, 2010; Gardner, 1999 & 2004). Several of the study participants said that being in music class refreshed their minds and helped them to return to academic classes with better focus. This aspect is closely connected to task variety as an aid to learning.

As discussed above on page 125, an active waking period with task variety has been shown to improve learning in business settings (Narayanan, Balasubramanian, & Swaminathan, 2009; Schilling et al., 2003). Research in an academic setting, specifically targeting music as the task providing variety, may illuminate how students redirect and refocus during a rigorous academic school day.

**Reflections**

The conclusions of my study may seem familiar to some readers. Perhaps this is because the findings of this study corroborate similar findings of previous research noted throughout this paper. This study, however, presents the words of students who are impacted by the administrative decisions over which they have no control. Often, they feel powerless to resist on their own behalf. I have encountered this same situation in the circumstances described below.

Since beginning this study I have had occasion to speak informally with high school counselors, parents and teenagers. The counselors, located in the geographic area where these study participants attended high school, shared with me that when a student transitions from eighth to ninth grade the prime considerations for scheduling are grades, test scores, and state mandates. I inquired, “What about students who have indicated that they want to be in music? What if they were in chorus or music in middle school and it is important to them?” One counselor from a preeminent suburban high school assured me that these students would be steered away from music classes. The standards constitute the only criteria. My conversations
with counselors support the reflections of all but two of the study participants. Fortunately, Aretha and T-Bear encountered a different sort of counselor. What of other students to whom music is integral to their development or whose primary intelligence may be musical (Eisner, 2004; Gardner, 1983, 1999, 2004; Tafti, 2014)?

I have encountered many parents while conducting this study. Some are located in the geographic area of my study and I have spoken with others during the course of my travels through the southeastern United States. When describing my research to these parents of high school age children, I found they were eager to share their experiences with me. The majority of these parents, like countless others I have encountered in my career, are extremely concerned about their children’s performance in school and its effect on their holistic well-being. They report students who study several hours a night, whose stress levels are unprecedented, and who have very little time to participate in sports or music activities that might give balance to their lives.

When these students do try to incorporate other activities into their lives, the stress mounts because they cannot complete their schoolwork in a reasonable amount of time. Parents have shared with me that they find they must go to the school and advocate for appropriate course selection. They must insist on counseling based on their children’s individual needs rather than counseling based solely on test scores and perceived ability. Although these parents may be successful in facilitating changes for their children, they sense administrative disapproval of their choices. Unfortunately, too often students may not have a parent who actively advocates for them in this manner.

During the time period in which I conducted this study, I engaged in conversations with students who are currently in high school, both in my present location and during my travels in
the southeast. Upon hearing that I was a musician, they shared that they missed their music classes. These students volunteered that they were encouraged at younger and younger ages to discontinue music classes to take AP classes. Some of these young people were very gifted musicians. Other students shared with me that they found a safe place in the music classroom; that place, that activity described as the place where students may find holistic life success through music participation (Freer, 2012; Hendricks, 2014).

This document began with Grace (Sigler, 2011). Grace was told that she should never even attempt college. She reported that her IQ was not in the triple digits. Grace shared eloquently about what music means to her. Her participation in band engendered feelings of self-efficacy on her instrument. Grace’s feelings of self-efficacy empowered her in other classes. She graduated from a prestigious college and received a full scholarship for graduate work. She completed an advanced degree and became a speech and hearing clinic director. She is the embodiment of the principles elucidated in this paper.

Grace . . . who was told to forget about higher education. What if she had not been able to find success in band? Should these opportunities be denied to new generations of “Grace?”
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Georgia State University School of Music
Informed Consent

Title: Can You Hear My Voice? At-Risk Students’ Reflections Regarding Access to Music Participation During Secondary School

Principal Investigator: Patrick K. Freer, Ed. D. Secondary
Investigator: Paulette Sigler, Doctoral Student

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study because you are a student in a Georgia State University choral class. The purpose of the study is to investigate possible relationships of musical experiences to the global school experience in secondary school. I want to collect stories of diverse musical experiences and of what music means to you. The study has three phases that will take place over approximately 8 weeks. Phase one is a survey and will have approximately 160 participants. Phase two will consist of focus groups interviews and will have between 18-24 participants. Phase three, the individual interviews, will require between 5-7 participants.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey questionnaire that may take up to 30 minutes of your time. This will occur during a regularly scheduled chorus class. Following the questionnaire you may be invited to participate in a focus group. This focus group numbering 3-4 individuals will participate in a 30-minute interview. The focus group interview will be with Paulette Sigler and will take place in a classroom in Haas-Howell.

If you are selected to participate in the final interview process, you will be asked to participate in one individual interview with Paulette Sigler lasting 30-45 minutes. This interview will occur in Paulette Sigler’s office, Rm 604 Haas-Howell. If you participate in all three parts of the study the total time will not exceed 1 hour and 45 minutes.

III. Risks: You will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits: Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to gain information about the effect of decisions by teachers and administrators in removing students from music classes when such classes are meaningful to them. We want to investigate the impact of these decisions upon individuals’ future choices.

GNU APPROVED  IRB NUMBER: H14301
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 02/26/2014
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 02/25/2015
V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

You must be at least eighteen years old to participate in this study. Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only Paulette Sigler and Dr. Patrick K. Freer will have access to the information you provide. We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly: GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).

The information provided will be stored in a locked cabinet and a password- and firewall-protected computer. The key to identify the research participant will be stored separately from the interview data to protect privacy. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in a group form.

Information gleaned in the study is confidential. Focus group participants will be advised that all conversation is confidential. However, we acknowledge that there is a minimal risk that a student might repeat information discussed in the focus groups.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Paulette Sigler at psigler1@student.gsu.edu if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject: We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. If you agree to participate in this study and be audio-recorded if invited to be interviewed and participate in a focus group if selected, please sign below.

________ I am eighteen years old or older.
________ I agree to participate in a focus group and individual interview if selected.
________ I understand that the focus group and individual interview will be audio-recorded for research purposes.
Appendix B

Meaning of Music Class in Middle and High School

Your “made-up” name: First __________________ Last __________________

Your age______ Year in School __________________ Your Major __________________

Your biological sex________

Feel free to write on the back of the form if you need more room for an answer.

1. Please put a check next to the musical activities that you were involved in during your middle school and high school experience. Check all that apply.

   _____ General music classes  _____ Band  _____ Orchestra
   _____ Chorus  _____ Guitar  _____ Other (Please explain).

2. Were you in music classes during middle and high school?______ If no, please tell me why you were not in a music class in during secondary school.

3. Did you participate in music activities outside of school?______ If yes, please tell me about those activities.

4. If you were in a large ensemble was it band, orchestra or chorus? __________________

5. What level was your ensemble?_________________________ (beginning, advanced, etc.)

6. If chorus, what was the make-up of the group?

   _____ Boys and girls
   _____ All boys
   _____ All girls
Your “made up” name______________________________

7. How long were you in a musical ensemble during high school?

_____ Less than 1 year  _____ 1 yr.  _____ 2 yrs.  _____ 3 yrs.
_____ 4 yrs.  _____ 5 yrs.  _____ 6 yrs.  _____ Other

8. What do/did you enjoy most about music classes? Check all that apply.

_____ Activities (field trips, etc.)
_____ Friendships
_____ Opportunities (solos, All State, Honor ensembles)
_____ Performances (local concerts, competitions and festivals)
_____ Special Groups
_____ Other - Please explain if you would like.

9. If you were in music class in high school did a counselor or administrator ever recommend that you drop out of music class?

_____ Yes  _____ No

10. Did you follow the administrative advice to drop out of music class?

_____ Yes  _____ No

11. If you dropped out of music class, how long did you remain out of music class?

_______ One semester  _______ One year  If longer than one year, please explain.
12. If you did not remain in your music classes throughout secondary school, why did you discontinue these classes? Check all that apply.

______Did not enjoy it. (Please explain.)

______Had to make up other classes. (Please explain.)

______Teacher or counselor recommendation to focus on academics. (Please explain.)

______Wanted to try other activities. (Please explain.)

______Other. (Please explain.)

13. If you were not able to remain in your music classes, what did you miss about it?

14. How did not being in music class make you feel?
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Your “made up” name

15. I would be willing to participate in a focus group or individual interview.

______Yes ______ No

If yes, please include your email address.

Other contact information (if applicable)

Recommendation: If you have a friend, age 18 or over and a student at GSU, who might be interested in participating in this study, please list the name and contact information here:

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Thank you so much for participating in this survey!
Appendix C

Focus Group Interview Guide

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today and to participate in this phase of the study. Please understand that our conversation will be recorded. This is strictly to help me remember what was said. When I transcribe these recordings I will identify you only by your “made up” name.

Would each one of you be willing to share a little bit about how you became interested in music?

Think back over your time in middle and high school. What stood out to you about your experiences in school music? What did you like best?

Were there aspects of the school music experience you did not like? Did you participate in music throughout high school?

Did you discontinue participation in chorus or band while you were still in school? Why?

How did not being in music classes during school affect your total school experience?
Appendix D

Guide for Individual Student Interview

What are your first memories of music activity in your life? How did you feel about it that activity?

What about that experience made you feel that way?

What other experiences have you had in music? Tell me about them.

Did being in music classes make your day better? Your year? How?


What about these classes made you feel this way? Activities? Opportunities (for solos or being singled out in other ways) Friendships? Performances? Your teacher?

What was your favorite song or activity?

Tell me your favorite memory about music class in school.

Did being in music class affect your work in other classes? How?

Did being in music class affect your overall school experience? How? Was it better? Worse?

If you were able to stay in music, in spite of advice to enroll in other classes, what factors contributed to your continued participation in music class?

If you were unable to continue in music during middle or high school, how did this circumstance affect you?

Please describe your feelings regarding music's importance in your life.