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To Tour or Not to Tour: A Case Study in Music Education Ensemble Travel

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Abstract

In this multiple case study, purposeful sampling was used to identify three participants in music education who regularly engage in travel with their secondary ensembles. The research was guided by the following questions: What is the worth and value of travel opportunities from the perspectives of the music teacher with regards to the program, the school community, and to the music education profession? What ways do the teachers feel that school ensemble travel can be improved? Data was collected by holding an individual interview with each participant, a focus group interview, and through writing prompts that each participant completed. Each traveling institution is considered a case through which to explore similarities and differences in the complexities that exist in school travel. Though peer reviewed literature is limited in this field, it is hoped that this study will expand the literature for music educators. Thus, this study is framed around research on study abroad travel and educational travel in general. Within music, a look at many of the shorter, non-academic articles from magazines for band, choral and orchestra directors draws connections between them and the data from study participants. Questioning the relevance of the tradition of ensemble travel is important given that travel occurs regularly but seems researched infrequently. Data analysis using NVivo included 29 nodes, 4 themes and word frequency statistics. A close look at the data reveals that the benefits do indeed outweigh the disadvantages of ensemble music travel because of enhanced awareness during rehearsals and many non-musical factors that prove to be a holistic factor in our music students' education.

Introduction

It is customary for high school choirs, orchestras and bands to travel as part of the ensemble's yearly activities in addition to concerts and classroom activities. This might involve a parade in Disney World or a performance at a unique venue in New York City. The ensemble might decide to tour for recruiting or performance purposes, or they might hold the philosophy that this is their students' only opportunity to ever travel beyond the confines of their area due to socioeconomic status or other circumstances. To prepare for such travel, the ensemble director must spend countless hours engaging in fundraising activities, parent meetings, working with accounting software, and doing a myriad of activities that take him or her away from lesson planning and carrying out curricular interests. This case study will explore the various motives for travel along with the value and merit of the experience as it is weighed against the time, effort and financial resource drain leading up to the event.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the study is to examine the advantages and disadvantages of engaging the ensemble in the travel experience and to determine ways to improve procedures along the way. Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, and if not, does travel continue as a result of tradition, or is it simply a recruitment tool for the ensemble? By undergoing this case study, this paper explores the multifaceted aspects of travel by examining three ensembles and their directors from three separate school districts. The scope of this study is limited to those three

school districts that form three separate cases from Western Pennsylvania schools that are traveling in the spring of 2015.

Need for the Study

There is strikingly limited peer-reviewed literature on the topic of student travel, particularly for music ensembles, yet this phenomenon is a very regular part of ensemble participation in the United States. An entire industry of companies has formed around this phenomenon, yet there is very little research on the need of school travel, its benefits, its risks and its rewards. This study will initiate research that begins to fill a knowledge gap for music educators.

Research Questions

Beyond the extant literature on this topic, the focus of this study was derived from the following guiding questions:

1. To what degree is travel worth undertaking to the students, the educator and the music program, with regard to the loss of class time and administrative tasks involved in planning the travel experience?
2. What suggestions do the participants in this study have for ways to improve the experience of school ensemble travel for teachers, parents and for students?

Methodology

Plan of Research

This study is a qualitative case study, looking at the three Western Pennsylvania schools and their ensemble directors at their respective schools. The research plan involved contacting participants, holding interviews, a focus group interview and writing prompts completed by the participants. Member checks were used and data was coded and analyzed using *NVivo*, a software program designed to organize qualitative data.

Method

This research was conducted as a multiple case study. First IRB approval was obtained from the Kent State University IRB. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants and establish consent through a consent form adapted from a template provided by Kent State. Interview questions were derived by connecting them with the literature, and separate individual interviews were held with each participant. Interviews were recorded using two devices simultaneously to prevent any potential data loss. One was a Samsung Galaxy S5 mobile phone, and the other device was a Zoom H4 handheld recorder. Recordings were deleted once the study was completed. Having purposefully sampled music educators that I knew engaged in ensemble travel, I chose a representative from choral, band and orchestral music education who taught within two hours driving distance from my residence. As busy individuals, the only time to meet for the focus group happened to be at the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) state conference for music education, which was a great venue for a focus group since everyone

was gathered to think and learn about music education. To triangulate data, aside from a focus group and an individual interview, each participant also emailed responses to writing prompts. Participants chose their pseudonyms, and their real names were never used in any of the data.

Once the data was collected, the interviews were transcribed as Microsoft Word files and sent to the participants as a member check. All the qualitative data was coded and entered into the NVivo software and analyzed for themes. Categorizing data using NVivo, 29 different nodes and four main themes emerged, which will be reported and analyzed further into this paper.

Limitations

Since the methodology chosen here is a case study, its limitations are the scope of the study, three high school ensembles in Western Pennsylvania that are traveling in the spring of 2015. As a result of having only three participants, the limitations of this qualitative study are that the results are not going to be generalizable to the entire population. However, this study will give a valuable window into this particular aspect of the job of the ensemble conductor, a part of the job that has no “beginner’s guide,” that is not heavily discussed in teacher training, and that is pervasive as a popular engagement for American high school performing ensembles.

Literature Review

While music student travel is widely reported in music periodicals, it has not been a largely studied topic of peer reviewed empirical studies. While the music periodicals will give us some insight into the phenomenon and some fodder for analysis, this literature review will look outside of the realm of music education for relevant data surrounding student travel. Even within education in general, the learning effects of travel and tourism have been under-researched (Falk, et al, 2013). Internationally, research is quite limited in terms of student travel (Chadee & Cutler, 1996). Researchers have identified education and learning as a motivation for travel (Stone & Petrick, 2013). This literature review begins with a look at two studies regarding music education travel, followed by some general student travel statistics and a theory on travel preferences. This is followed by studies on travel, experiential learning and leadership styles. The literature review concludes with information from music education periodicals.

Music Travel

Curious about the value of travel for band, Holcomb (2003) studied five band programs in Michigan that regularly travel. At each of the five schools, she interviewed the band director, an administrator and a band parent. She also surveyed 105 of the students in those band programs. For those students, the top two reasons they reported enjoying band trips are for the travel experience itself, and for social reasons. Only 13.3% of their motivations were for music education related reasons and 85% of the reasons were non musical and non educational. 83% of the students felt that band trips were a strong recruitment tool. 4 out of 5 directors interviewed said that they thought the trip was a strong recruitment/retention tool, but only one school noticed an increase in numbers during a trip year (Holcomb, 2003).

As there is not a great deal of literature on this topic, Holcomb's literature review was populated by news articles, some that highlight various band trips, but others that have had terrible consequences such as a hospitalization due to hazing and a fatal bus crash. One band director she interviewed said that he traveled with his band as a form of keeping up with the Jones's, because most other band directors traveled as well. Of band directors she interviewed, the length of the trips ranged from five days to two weeks, and the price ranged from \$500 to \$2300. Four out of five directors sought sponsorship and fundraising as a means of helping students to go who could not otherwise afford the trip. Amount of fundraisers ranged from two per year to constant, ongoing fundraisers. Criteria these directors used for choosing the destination included venue and cultural value, but this varied widely among directors. Four out of five of these directors excused students from school for the trip. One said that he thought that three days was optimum because more days discouraged the academically oriented, and less days discouraged those who just wanted to miss school (Holcomb, 2003).

Parents in the study felt that the trips were educational, and they were supportive of the various locations. They expressed concerns regarding the price, but they were pleased that this was an opportunity for students to travel outside of the state who wouldn't otherwise get the opportunity, and they could do so in a safe and supervised manner. From their perspective, not much class time was lost to trip planning. Neither parents nor administrators mentioned anything regarding the extra time that travel opportunities usurped from the life of the music educator. Administrators cited opportunities for students to learn and grow from cultural experiences as benefits of travel. They expressed disadvantages ranging from students missing school to cost. Holcomb concluded that the benefits do indeed outweigh the liabilities. Benefits included recruitment, retention, performance opportunities, education, travel opportunities, student bonding, and cultural benefits. Disadvantages included teacher time, student affordability and liability (Holcomb, 2003).

Also looking at disadvantages and advantages, but with respect to choral competitions, Millard (2014) wrote her dissertation on the role of ensemble competitions in choral music education. Competition is often a part of music ensemble travel, and travel is usually a part of music ensemble competition. Millard surveyed 183 choral directors in 10 states to determine reasons they and their students participate in competitions. The first documented choral competition was a glee-singing competition held in Belle Vue Gardens, Manchester, England in 1855. Within the United States, the band tournament of 1923 began school music competition. Choral groups were added to Pennsylvania's state music contest in 1930, and to Ohio's in 1933 (Millard, 2014). By the 1960s states began adding sight singing to make sure that educators were working on more than just this particular performance. Music educators in this study (Millard, 2014) had concerns regarding fairness of scoring and of the adjudicators. They were concerned that doing poorly at competition will yield negative feelings toward music among the singers, and that competitive activities may undermine intrinsic motivations.

Only 28% of Millard's respondents reported that competition had no bearing on their repertoire selection. They indicated that the most important reasons to take choirs to competition were to increase work ethic, motivation, and to hear the judges' feedback. Educators responding felt that their students desired competition for the recognition, ratings, morale, and for the opportunity to travel.

Student Travel Statistics

Having travel opportunities is important to students. The World Tourism Organization estimates that youth travel generated \$182 billion in receipts in 2012 (Miller, 2015). “Young travelers today want, more than ever, to enrich themselves with cultural experiences, to meet local people, and to improve their employability when they return home” (Miller, 2015). Student spending has increased by 40% since 2007 despite the global economic climate. A survey of 34,000 young people in 137 countries found that 38% of respondents travel for education verses 45% for vacation (Miller, 2013).

Travel Theory

A common theme in the literature is that students are finding travel opportunities through education, and particularly music education, while their families might not have otherwise been able to provide such travel experiences. In 1972, S. C. Plog sought to determine why people hold certain preferences related to travel. Through his research, he developed what is known as Plog’s Psychographic travel model (Plog, 1972). Plog (1972) defines psychographics as the “study and classification of people according to their attitudes, aspirations and other psychological criteria, especially in market research.” He defined destinations as lying on a continuum between allocentric and psychocentric, with destinations that are new and distinctive in the marketplace designated as allocentric, and well-established destinations considered psychocentric. He plotted personality characteristics to find out where each person fit in the allocentric-psychocentric continuum, and that shed light on each person’s travel preference.

As a means of testing Plog’s theory, Griffith and Albanese (1996) studied 145 undergraduate students who were in the young single stage of their family life cycle. They were able to validate much of Plog’s theory, and they found that travel preferences were heavily influenced by types of travel destinations and types of family experiences from when participants were growing up (Griffith & Albanese, 1996). If trips during childhood have a large bearing on travel preferences during adulthood, then the high school band, orchestra and choir trip can indeed have a role in building those preferences. If we believe that travel creates its own form of intelligence and that it is helpful in garnering cultural understanding, then the music ensemble trip can do far more than what it sets out to do if it plays into Plog’s model and instills a desire to travel educationally in life.

Travel Studies

"All travel is educational because it broadens the mind as people learn from and interpret experiences" (Stone & Petrick, 2013). For centuries Americans have ventured to Europe to learn languages and to seek knowledge through travel. Ancient philosophers wrote about benefits from travel. During the 17th to 19th centuries, young upper class British men would go on the Grand Tour, a venture across Europe as a form of education (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Laubscher (1994) found that both travel with a learning objective and travel without specific objectives generated educational benefits including personal development, new perspectives, and many generic skills, such as autonomy, independence, and self-confidence (Laubscher, 1994). Eighty percent of

respondents in a Student Youth and Travel Association study from 2008 reported a belief that travel is an essential part of a child's education. Sixty percent reported that travel had a positive impact on their academics, and more than half of their parents perceived academic improvements as a result of student travel (Stone & Petrick, 2013). Most studies in an educational travel literature review showed that travel has rewards in life skills such as problem solving, navigating and communicating (Stone & Petrick, 2013). In discussing limitations of their study, Stone and Petrick stated that "the extant literature on travel learning benefits has a focus, almost exclusively, on international travel, in particular, study abroad, which makes it difficult to generalize the results to all travel."

One study asked college students which experiences had the strongest impact, and study abroad ranked the highest, above courses and friends (Paige et al, 2009). Study abroad benefits include a change of perspective or worldview, independence, self confidence, intellectual and cognitive growth and dispelling of stereotypes (Stone & Petrick, 2013). These benefits increased with longer study, but Dwyer (2004) reports that worldview changes and increases in self-confidence have a lasting effect. Other research on study abroad found that 53% of students later said that it was one of the most important events of their life (Abrams, 1979).

Lamet and Lamet (1984) studied 184 students who studied abroad over a ten year period of time. Only one of them reported their in-class time as being the most valuable. The out-of-class portions of their learning were the most impactful for 62% of the respondents, and the remainder found both aspects of their study abroad to be equally rewarding (Lamet & Lamet, 1984). Results of a study by Gmelch (1997) concurs that students learned more through travel than in academic settings. She came to this conclusion by analyzing journals of students who were studying overseas (Gmelch, 1997). If these results are true, then the band, orchestra and choir trips are engagements in experiential education, and the education is not necessarily limited to music.

Experiential Education

Experiential education is defined by Luckman (1996) as a "process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience" (p. 7). Southcott (2004) studied an undergraduate music course whose study content was Orff, Dalcroze and Kodály. Students traveled to Europe, visited their respective museums and wrote reflective journals, which proved to be integral to the experiential learning process. Southcott found the following to be advantages of experiential education: authenticity, experiencing original sources, unpredictability of outcome, spontaneous opportunities of learning, and holistic engagement (activating all the senses). Students agreed that it was expensive, but worth it. Educational benefits occurred because they were able to critique based on experience. Southcott states that all thinking involves risk, and experiential learning remains more permanent (Southcott, 2004).

Leadership

If a music educator is planning an experiential educational trip, (s)he might be thinking about which style of leadership is most effective. While not a music study, a relevant study by Lopez (1980) sampled 24 high school teacher leaders and 287 student followers. She was interested in which kind of leaders satisfied the followers the most. She used tests of dogmatism, authoritarianism and rigidity to determine whether leaders are more authoritarian or more

democratic in their style. Results are that at the beginning stages of the trip, the more authoritarian style of leadership was preferred partially due to students being overwhelmed and desiring clear cut guidelines. As the trips went on, students preferred more democratic approaches to leadership because of their flexibility to allow for some unscheduled groups activities.

From the Periodicals

The articles in music education periodicals were related to ways to improve the trip, what kind of trip to take or how to plan a trip. They operated under the assumption that there would be a trip, but none of them mentioned why that assumption was made. One music director expressed in an interview their opinion that students and parents would buy in more if they had some choice in the trip destination (Olson, 2008). Also advocating for travel, Jonathan Adams (2013) noted that travel helps build a cooperative spirit and is a great way to share new experiences that can't be duplicated at home. Stories of travel are told in some articles. One band director feels as though a particular class is far more involved in band than other classes. He attributes it to a trip they took in elementary school that was a 2 hour bus ride to see the percussion show, "Blast!" That developed their perception of what a marching band could be (Hagman, 2010).

The literature from these periodicals contains stories and interviews that will be valuable to compare with participant data from this study and thus strengthen the level of insight. I find from the literature review that the music ensemble trip is indeed experiential learning, a strong and valuable tool. It is a tool that can help teach students about music, but that can also help them to learn life lessons, diminish stereotypes and understand the world better.

Participants

Participants in this study are three music educators representative of choir, orchestra and band from schools in Western Pennsylvania. They are all members of PMEA and the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME), and they all regularly travel with their ensembles. I purposefully selected them because I have worked professionally with each of them before in various settings. I knew that they were each respected representatives of their specific area within music education, and that they are all intelligent people who would bring rich detail and various perspectives to the conversation and to the topic.

Participant 1: Jimmy

Jimmy is in his 10th year as a choral educator in a rural school district in Western Pennsylvania. He teaches 6th, 7th, and 8th grade choir along with high school (9-12) Concert Choir, Women's Ensemble, Beautyshop Quartet, Barbershop Quarter and Chamber Ensemble. His choirs regularly adjudicate at the superior and excellent level. The makeup of the student body is not very culturally diverse, but it is socioeconomically diverse. The high school choir currently has 107 students in three curricular ensembles and three extracurricular ensembles. Jimmy travels annually with his choirs and does a large trip every four years.

Participant 2: Maude

Maude is the orchestra director in a small town school district that graduates about 150 students each year. The district is in the county seat, and has supported an orchestra program for over 20 years. Due to scheduling and financial pressure, the orchestra program has gone through changes in recent years that include eliminating and re-instating string instruction for 4th graders, and reducing contact hours for all string players in grades 6 - 12. Students who participate in 4th and 5th grade receive a once a week, small group, 30-minute pullout lesson. Students in 6th grade have a 25-minute group lesson once per week, and a 25-minute large ensemble lesson 2 times per week, that is not a pullout. Students in grades 7-12 may choose orchestra as a daily elective class. About 20 percent of middle and high school students take private lessons. In addition to teaching the string program, Maude has been a private lesson teacher most of her life, having graduated with a B.S. in Music education in 1988. She travels every other year with her orchestra as part of the music department trip. They take a larger trip every four years, and sometimes on the off years, she travels with her orchestra as well.

Participant 3: Jonny

Jonny holds a Ph.D. in music education, and aside from his work as high school band director, he is a nationally recognized author, clinician and composer of music for concert bands. Since 1995, he has been the director of bands at his current school, where he instructs 3 curricular concert bands, and all extra-curricular ensembles including the Marching Band, Jazz Ensemble, and Pep Band. Over 1100 students are enrolled in this high school, from families that are mostly middle class economically and not very racially diverse. He travels every two years with his extra-curricular bands and every four years with all bands combined.

Data

I collected the data in seven separate files: an individual interview with each participant, a focus group interview with all three participants together, and three individual responses to writing prompts. I transcribed the interviews in Microsoft Word, and sent them to the participants for member check. Cursory data can be found on figure 1 (below). I created this chart as a means to briefly compare facets of travel between each of the three cases (participants). Notice that all three programs travel to Disney every four years.

Figure 1: Cursory data comparison across cases

Participant	Jimmy	Maude	Jonny
Ensemble	Choir	Orchestra	Band
Current trip	Chicago	New York City	Disney / Orlando
Travel frequency	Annual/ Disney every 4 years	Every other year/ music department/ Disney every 4 years	Every other year, alternating groups, everyone travels every 4 years, large trip is Disney
Cost range	\$400-\$600 annually \$800-\$1000 Disney	\$720-\$800	\$1350 Disney; others \$500-\$600
Participation ratio	45%-80%	varies	90% - predecessor had 100%
Fundraisers	Yes 50% participation	Yes. Each ensemble is responsible for 2 fundraisers that the entire department can use. 2X3= 6 minimum per year.	Yes. 5-7 fundraisers, kids earned average 40-50%.
Booster/parent group	Yes, active, small, but crucial to trip success	Yes, trying to make department-wide, finding positive relationships building between choir, orchestra and band parents	Yes. Parents are very involved.
Student/parent input?	Not formally	Directors make decisions together	Director makes destination decision, but Google forms was used to get parent/student input regarding aspects of the trip, particularly air travel
Administrator feedback, concerns	None. Administrators have little to no contact.	Concerned with time out of school, but support the trip as a reward, and they support music policies.	Communication is good with early meetings. Administration is pleased with how it's handled.
Reasons to travel	Part of the culture, incentive to be in program, educational reasons, experience, students would not otherwise get to travel, relationships stronger among them and with the teacher	Fun reward, a perk, student bond, relationships, viewing teacher as more human.	Cultural experience, honest adjudication, social maturity
Suggestions for improvement	Publication: beginner's guide to ensemble travel; use music educator tour company; don't skimp on price; keep kids busy always; hire security; invest in an experience	Department trips need to work for everyone or rotate the priority.	Better parent communication, careful planning for a quality experience that is cultural and educational.

Notice also that Maude travels with her orchestra as part of a department-wide trip, and thus trip-related decisions are made by the three teachers involved. Figure 1 is a useful reference for a quick picture of each case and a deeper understanding of the data as we explore it further. Additionally, it was a helpful tool to remain focused on the underlying question of value of the travel experience through the eyes of each participant.

Once I was certain that the transcripts accurately represented the viewpoints of the participants, I entered them into the NVivo software. This software allows you to create nodes for qualitative coding, as a means of categorizing the text. Combing through all the data began with the following original codes found in figure 2.

Figure 2: Categorical alphabetic list of nodes

Admin feedback/issues	Destination decision	Stories
Afford/affordability	Education	Student participation
Appropriate experience	Fundraising	Students left behind
Approval	Improvement suggestions	Teacher time
Balance	Missing school	Travel company
Best experience	Only travel opportunity	Trip description
Bond, relationships	Parent feedback	Why travel?
Booster group	Policy	Worldview
Culture	Recreation	Worst experience
Current trip	Recruitment/retention	

Node Categories

Some of these nodes were useful in creating figure 1 and determining cursory information, while others turned out to be significant thematic issues in answering the research question. Next, I will categorize these nodes further and explain the rationale for each category.

The nodes *administration feedback/issues*, *afford*, *approval*, and *policy* were all related as they pertain to issues of travel as a school-related activity. Affordability was important to all involved, but administrative issues varied by school. Jimmy's administrators regularly approved the trip and never expressed concern. They gave him little to no feedback and were mostly removed from the process. Maude's administrators are supportive of the music department travel, but they are concerned with students missing school. Jonny's administrators are well-informed because he meets with them regularly. His school board was so impressed with the travel handbook published by his band that they adopted it as their board policy for overnight travel. Due to the frontloading of much material in early meetings, his administrators have little concern or feedback following the trip.

The categories of *best experience* and *worst experience* were exactly that from each participant. Maude had a particularly difficult time coming up with a best experience, having had some poor and mediocre trips. She feels as though the trips are for the students, who need the reward and the chance to bond. Her best experiences involve seeing their enjoyment at watching the slideshow of trip memories. Her worst experience involved her orchestra waiting in the cold rain for five hours during a marching band parade. Not only were the students miserable, but also the activity was not suitable for the orchestra. Jimmy's best experiences are the unplanned performances that arise. After a planned performance in a New York City cathedral, his choir was noticed at the September 11 museum and asked to perform. The brevity of that performance in that space and the excitement of a drawing crowd was touching and memorable for him and his students. His worst experience was on that same trip when a poor decision by a bus driver made them three hours late, causing them to eat dinner on the sidewalk in order to barely make their show on time. Jonny's best experience involves being adjudicated by three conductors who he admires and whose opinions are valid and meaningful to his students. His worst experience

involved leaving late, kids smoking, forgotten equipment, half the group missing the meeting point and time, a student in the emergency room all night, capped by winter weather that caused them to be 36 hours late getting home.

These and other stories are integral to discovering the value of music education travel. Since people tend to speak in stories, I created the node *stories* as a means of keeping data in story form all in one location.

The nodes *current trip*, *booster group*, *fundraising*, *parent feedback*, and *trip description* are all related to the cursory information listed in Figure 1. That information is extremely useful in painting a picture of what each case or each school looks like as it pertains to student travel. Worth pointing out is the way Maude's music department handles fundraisers. Since they travel as a department, each organization is responsible for two fundraisers that all students department-wide can use. This creates less work for each teacher, but guarantees six fundraisers per year for all students, which is in line with what Jimmy and Jonny do on their own.

Using the nodes *destination decision* and *parent feedback*, I was trying to determine whether students and parents had a role in choosing the destination or other aspects of the trip. In all three cases, the teacher(s) had complete decision-making power, but Jimmy would talk informally with his students a lot to find out their interests and Jonny used a Google form survey to get feedback from parents and students regarding air travel and other aspects of this year's Florida trip. Destination decisions for all participants were made based on educational aspects of the trip such as which adjudication and performance opportunities existed in each destination and which cultural experiences students could be exposed to that they could not duplicate at home.

The nodes *education* and *recreation* were used to determine the degree to which the trip was educational versus recreational. This became a major topic that will be discussed in detail later.

Student participation and *musical balance* directly affect one another. Interestingly, *balance* is the only one out of 29 nodes that is really about music. Refer to Figure 1 for percentages of students within the program that went on the trip. The trip was not mandatory in any of the cases, but Jonny's predecessor had it set up that way, and Jonny maintains 90% participation. Jimmy has a dwindling booster group at the moment and will only see 45% participation on this year's trip, but he has seen up to 80% in past trips. Maude deals with *balance* as best she can. This year she is taking her viola along, and playing with the orchestra as a means of helping the *balance*. She is being considerate of the single viola player in the orchestra not feeling alone and scared.

The nodes *teacher time*, *travel company* and *boosters* are all related. The category *teacher time* also illustrates the crux of the disadvantages of student travel. Also related to disadvantages is the node *missing school*, a concern shared by teachers, students and administrators. While a concern in all three cases, it was a very large concern at Maude's school. All three teachers use a tour company. Jimmy believes in using tour companies run by former music educators. Maude has had negative experiences with a tour company that did not fill out the schedule, was unprepared and asked the teachers "what do you want to do next?"

In discussing positive outcomes of student travel, the following categories came up frequently: *worldview*, *only travel opportunity*, *bond-camaraderie-relationships*, and *culture*. All three participants noted that relationships are built among the students but also between students and the teacher. Students are experiencing new cultures while cultivating the culture of the

program they will return to. All participants noted that for these students, this may be their only opportunity to travel, and it in fact might be their only opportunity to leave Pennsylvania.

The students not leaving Pennsylvania, the *students left behind*, was an interesting aspect of travel to me. I wanted to know what their teachers' perception of their experience was. All three participants reported that there were not feelings of being left out of things. Jonny mentioned that there might be a "Grumpy Gus" or two, but for the most part it was their decision not to go. Many opportunities to fundraise as well as financial assistance from boosters and alumni donors were available to them. Maude's remaining orchestra students will be working on chamber music that they will perform for the returning travelers, thus having educational goals while she is gone. While Jonny would not be leaving many students behind, those remaining will be doing intonation charts or some other educational activity.

A frequent topic of discussion was *recruitment and retention*. The literature points to travel as a huge recruitment and retention tool. All three participants agree that it is, but they tended to downplay it more as a byproduct of ensemble travel and not a reason for it.

The inclusion of *why travel* and *improvement suggestions* as nodes is intended to help answer research questions, so we will explore those later. Finally the node *appropriate experience* deserves some discussion. This node refers to Maude's struggles with travel experiences that were not appropriate for her orchestra. She describes trips that were more band and choir oriented leaving the orchestra students feeling a bit left out. She is made to feel as though she is the high maintenance one insisting that instruments do not stay under the bus overnight, but she is merely trying to protect expensive equipment from damage under the elements. While this node refers to only one participant, I think it is pertinent because it could be pointing to a larger problem within our profession and within the industry that has grown around music ensemble travel – we need to seek appropriate performance venues and opportunities for orchestra students while allowing them to take care and maintain their instruments during travel.

The visualization below (Figure 3) is a word frequency cloud that helped in determining some of the nodes and aided in thinking about themes from the data.

Themes

Through studying the nodes, looking at word frequency, re-reading and rearranging the data, I have compiled the data into four themes: transformation, education, overall program/buy-in/curriculum, and benefits and disadvantages.

said that “the cultural enrichment for the students complements their natural growth as a musician and student.”

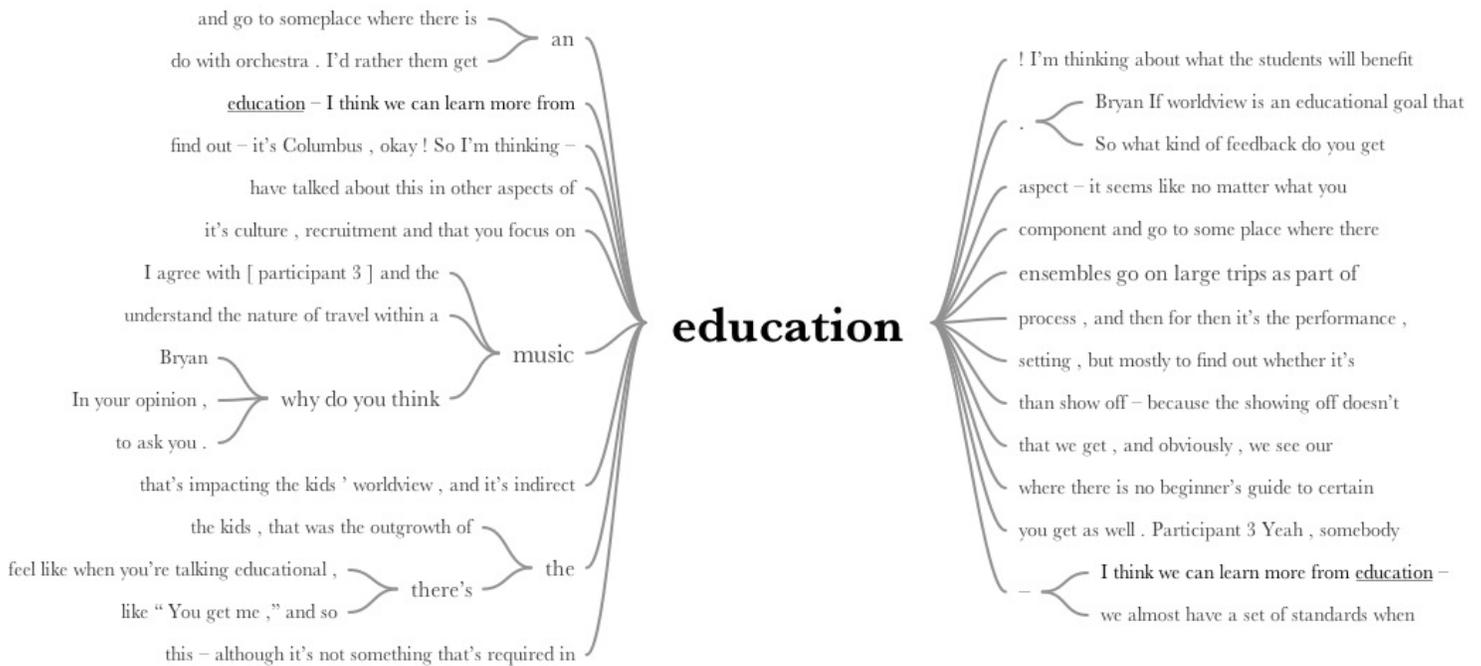
Aside from cultural learning, a greater bond is established between the students during travel. They also get to know the teacher in a different light. The student-teacher relationship grows because there is time for the teacher to learn more about each student. Jimmy said the following regarding bonded relationships and music making: “I feel like when we’re doing music curricularly, and it’s in the school day, and that’s the only time you see these kids, you’re building a bond and building relationships more so than in a math class, but at the same time, that setting lacks what you need to create some of the bond that you really need to create good music.” He also found that he learned things about students’ lives that helped him to create better musical metaphors that connect to their lives and bring them into the rehearsal.

Education

The *education* theme in this study is multifaceted, referring to the following three items: 1) educational aspects of the trip that the teacher plans and that the school expects; 2) education of the teacher through adjudication and new knowledge of the students; 3) enhanced education through trip preparation. Jonny said the following regarding enhanced trip preparation: “We’re going to a place where this might be the only time they ever see somebody from your community, from your school, and you want to leave that as favorably as you can. So your preparation should be—I’m going to give my best to this moment, which means I’m going to give my best to the preparation for that moment. So, I feel like there’s a little bit heightened—I don’t want to call it urgency, but just awareness for preparation.” Maude said that we’re trying to teach life skills. A thing like tagging your luggage is a new concept to these students.

Jimmy expressed getting to know each student better as part of his own education. Jonny expressed having the ability to learn from adjudicators that are able to give honest assessment since they are not close enough in proximity to be biased by whether students would choose or not choose their college as a result of the adjudication. Thus, he and his students are able to learn from the adjudicators.

In terms of educational aspects of the trip, Jonny places the educational items on days that would normally be school days and the recreational aspects on weekends. He feels that much of the educational aspects of travel are frontloaded, but that those experiences are heightened as a result of the trip. Maude likes to plan educational things like museums and finds ways to use class time to set up the learning process that will occur on the trip. Jimmy views the process more holistically, finding learning experiences throughout the trip, and using travel experiences to enhance daily learning in the classroom. Figure 4 illustrates the multifaceted aspects of this theme, examining words that lead into and out of the word *education*.

Figure 4 – words leading into and out of *education*

Program/Buy-in/Curriculum

“You’re adding so many elements to your curriculum!” (Jimmy, focus group).

While a previous theme looked at cultural experiences, this theme is about creating a culture within your program. Music ensembles do that in many ways, but travel experiences that connect kids help create that culture, that buy-in to what we’re doing, and connects travel back to the rehearsals in our home school.

Issues of recruitment and retention fit into this theme as well. The participants agreed that recruitment and retention were a byproduct of travel, but not necessarily valid reasons alone for engaging in travel activities. Jimmy noted that you might see kids that are on the fence about joining, but when they realize there will be a good trip the next year, they might join. For him, however, the students don’t know what the trip will be until after they have joined choir, and he does not see a dropout rate once the trip is announced. He sees 100% retention rates from students who go on trips. He attributes the retention not to the travel activities such as a day at an amusement park, but to the relationships that are built and fostered during the trip.

Maude mentions the Disney trip when talking to the elementary kids about signing up for orchestra, and while it’s a draw, they still don’t consistently sign up. She sees the music department trip as a recruitment opportunity for the band, but that it doesn’t quite translate that way for the orchestra.

Jimmy sees the trip as a carrot, or reward, for hard work in band. He doesn’t emphasize it as a recruitment strategy, but it is there as a benefit of being in band. “I definitely think it helps recruiting, and I have yet to encounter a kid where that’s the only reason they join the group

because they want to get a Disney trip. I think I'm far too demanding that people check out long before that" (Jonny, focus group).

Benefits and Disadvantages

A complex phenomenon such as this has many layers. When I asked participants why they travel, they cited reasons such as those mentioned in Figure 1: cultural experiences, reward, relationships – but they also admitted that a reason that we do it is because it's been done. It is part of the music ensemble culture. Given that the profession has a long history of engaging in travel, there are many ways to look at it. I will begin with the drawbacks of ensemble travel.

Disadvantages

Participants agreed that the trip is a distraction. As soon as you make trip information available, you become inundated with questions, some of which you are not prepared to answer yet because of the timeline of the trip. Jimmy mentioned that when his booster group is at their best, there are no questions, and everything is taken care of; but this year is not a strong year for the booster organization, so there is much that he needs to take care of. Maude and Jimmy shared a concern that when they travel, they are not there for their other classes. Jimmy's middle school ensembles are without their director, and Maude teaches grades 4-12, so her beginner orchestra students are without their teacher. The school does not get her a sub, and they cancel her lessons. Jonny also admitted that it hurts when you break the consistency by being away for travel.

Although there is help from parent booster groups and travel companies, the loss of teacher time is still a huge disadvantage of travel. These three participants have put much effort into limiting class disruptions. Jonny puts out a regular newsletter. The other two publish trip information on the web and have trip announcements on the board. Maude said that if a student came to her with fundraiser money, she would not accept it during class. While these three participants handle travel well with regards to class time, they are delaying travel-related work to be done on their own time and planning period. Ultimately, this means that there is less time for grading, curricular issues, lesson planning – or it means that there is more work to do after school. Regarding that, Maude said that it's all part of running a booster organization. It's just part of the job. Jimmy said "I feel like the musical aspects of the ensemble only suffer as much as the director allows them to. Class time should not be used to discuss trip planning, but if the director chooses to do so, rehearsal time will be lost" (Jimmy, writing prompt response).

While teacher time is a big issue, all three participants noted that students missing class time is a problem as well. They were echoing sentiments from students, parents and administrators. Jonny gives his students time out of band to make up work. All three participants take care to encourage students to keep up with their other academic work that they miss while on the trip.

Advantages

Many advantages have been brought up in other themes. Students gain a greater cultural understanding from travel. Students buy in to their program, create a culture that is unique to their ensemble, and bring aspects of that culture back to their rehearsals at school. Rehearsals are improved because the teacher knows the students better and has more efficient means of reaching

them and improving the music. Shared experiences bring people together and create a bond. In a musical ensemble whose goal is to blend, having a bond among its members is beneficial. Students get to travel that might not otherwise get those experiences. We get to hear honest feedback from respected adjudicators. Students see the director as more human and more relatable. Students gain real world skills, learn how to navigate a city, share a space with others, and they learn how to represent their school outside of the school setting.

Analysis and Discussion

The above themes were discovered with some help from Figure 3 (above), which was created using NVivo's word frequency query. In order to get a more accurate depiction of the data, I removed common words that were unrelated to the study such as *above*, *below*, *always*, *something*, and *everything*. Notice that *band* shows up directly above *orchestra*, as it is used as a word in the data actually 50.7% times more frequently than orchestra. Notice the word *choir* is very small and to the left facing upward. *Band* is used more than 79% more frequently than *choir*. In a study where equal time was given to participants representing all three ensembles, band was mentioned far more. This could play into Maude's feeling of trips not necessarily being compatible with orchestras and being far more band-oriented. However, a comparison of the words *sing* versus *play* shows that *sing(ing)* was mentioned far more.

It is valid to mention that Jimmy's is the only school that travels every year, and he sees 100% retention from students who travel. While the idea of recruitment and retention is downplayed by the participants, this part of the data points to the relevance of the trip as a tool for recruitment and retention. Music educators seem to always be under pressure for numbers, so this is not a bad thing. My participants would rather their numbers be viewed as strong and growing as a result of their good teaching and their ensemble's successes than as a result of something like a travel opportunity. Recall Jonny's comment about him being far too demanding for someone to stick around just because of a trip. Travel is a factor in recruiting and retaining students, but there is much more that goes into it, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Jonny said "The trip should be a natural outgrowth of the daily process that the director employs." This goes along with Jimmy's viewpoint that many items are being added to the curriculum as a result of the travel experience, which goes along with the real-world learning that Maude advocates.

Maude does not strike me as a negative person, but there is negativity in reading the data. She represents her orchestra students as feeling somewhat marginalized having paid for a certain experience, and then finding it to be more of a sidelines experience while the band gets to do musical things. It would be worthy to study whether other orchestra directors feel this way or if this is a problem unique to the department-wide travel experience.

Bringing It All Together

The themes *transformation*, *program/buy-in/curriculum*, and *education* can all be considered positive outcomes of ensemble travel. I had a degree of negative bias going into this study, but was overwhelmed with data pointing to the trip not being frivolous, but rather educational and pertinent to strong program-building. Educators want lifelong learners, and

music educators want lifelong music-makers. The Gmelch (1997) study confirms that students learn more from travel and experiential learning (Southcott, 2004) than in academic settings. If Plog's (1972) theory is correct that people tend to replicate travel experiences they had when they were younger, and if Maude is correct that there is a certain pride for staying put in Western Pennsylvania, then a music educator can aid in lifelong learning simply by getting students out of Pennsylvania. In doing so, we're providing vast experiences that are both musical and life lessons. Growing up, Jimmy was a student whose parents did not travel much, but he traveled with the band, and he is now a successful choral educator who travels with his ensembles regularly.

Jimmy also reported that his best and favorite travel experiences involved unplanned performances. Recall the study by Lopez (1980) that found that students desired those experiences, and that they desired democratic leadership once they were established in the tour. Matt Robinson (2011) wrote an article where he interviewed music educators about travel. His interviewee said that travel is extremely important for recruitment and retention. The participants in this study were less apt to come out and say that, but the data does show this to be true. Participants discussed many non-musical "life skills" that are acquired as a result of school ensemble travel. Recall Laubscher (1994), who found that travel without specific objectives generated educational benefits including personal development, new perspectives, and many generic skills, such as autonomy, independence, and self-confidence (Laubscher, 1994).

Implications for the Profession

Knowing that travel helps with life skills and that it does pertain to recruitment and retention is useful to the profession. Even more helpful is knowledge that it is the bonding and the learning that occurs during travel rather than the travel itself. It is the relationships that retain students, and not the travel experience. This will help music educators to put together thoughtful travel experiences. Insight from these experienced, intuitive and thoughtful music educators may help others to design travel experiences that are educational and that promote bonding and lifelong learning while maintaining a successful program. This study has certainly given me perspective that I will carry with me from initial stages of travel planning to the post travel follow up with the students, community and administrators.

Conclusion

As a high school music educator, I have traveled multiple times with my choirs, and I have had positive and negative experiences, but very equal on both sides of that coin. This is one of the reasons I wanted to engage in this research project. I really want to know whether ensemble travel is worth all the time and effort that we put into it. I began this study suspecting that I might find that it is not worth it due to negative experiences and the vast amount of work that we put into the planning, for a result that seemed like gratuitous travel. I identified more with Maude in many trips I've taken, but the analysis of the data from the three participants leads me to conclude that ensemble travel is indeed worth the effort that we put into it. Doing this study has given me insight as to how other teachers handle travel, and it has given me many ideas for ways to improve my next choir trip. I've compiled recommended ways to improve ensemble travel into the chart located below in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – Participant recommendations for improvements

Jimmy	Maude	Jonny	From the literature
Beginner's guide publication	Choose performance venues carefully and appropriately	Include meals in the price	Plan at least 12 months in advance (Olson, 2010)
Keep kids busy, no down time		View travel as a privilege	Buy travel insurance (same)
Don't skimp for the sake of saving money. Quality experiences are worth money		Plan for quality and depth of experience	Take a medical professional on the trip (same)
Use a travel company of former music educators or those familiar with music education		Transparency in dissemination of trip information	
Hire security at the hotel			
Use technology such as websites, text, email, etc. to make trip announcements			

Figure 5 gives solid insight as to answering research question 2, and I would like to conclude with participants' answers to the first research question regarding the degree to which ensemble travel is worth the hassle involved.

Maude: Traveling is difficult and expensive, however, it is also expected and truly is memorable for students. I hesitate to give that shared experience up! It has value as a recruiting tool and often helps those students who are 'on the fringes' of the group feel more connected and appreciated and known as a member of the group. This increased bond is incredibly important, especially to those students who might not be musical leaders in the ensemble (Maude writing prompt response).

Jimmy: I feel that the travel experience is most definitely worth the undertaking. These trips help our students to grow not only as musicians, but as people. They provide them with cultural experiences that many students may not be able to experience on their own. When trips are planned and executed well they provide countless benefits to our students and ensembles (Jimmy writing prompt response).

Jonny: From my perspective, trips are worth the effort provided they include the following aspects: 1) A rewarding/enriching performance opportunity the students cannot access within their own community, 2) the educational component provides a way to provide new insight for the students into the musical process they are currently entrenched, and 3) the cultural enrichment for the students complements their natural growth as a musician and student. Finally, our current educational climate has stripped much of the joy out of learning in favor of asking students to achieve a number so that a school system can be identified as a "good school". I believe student trips provide a necessary and important incentive for a student to experience joy as part of the learning process. The social maturity gained through such experiences feed into their complete cognitive development (Jonny, writing prompt response).

I did not expect to come to this strong of a conclusion on this topic. I suspected that I might find that some of the reasons for travel are economically driven by the industry that

supports it. As for tour companies, participants had positive and negative things to say about them, but none felt that they drove their reasons for travel. Holcomb (2003) also suspected that she would discover more liabilities than benefits of band trips, but she discovered the opposite. These participants talked through many issues alone, in writing and during a very rousing focus group interview, and the data spoke loudly. NVivo was extremely useful in organizing the data and honing in on important items. Therefore, I shall end with a final analysis. As I was scanning for short, meaningful and declamatory sentences regarding benefits or drawbacks of ensemble travel, the following stuck out like a sore throat/stuck trumpet valve/broken violin bridge: They bond!

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