

Research study write-up

Parent Support and Musical Growth

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The purpose of this research project was to identify differences in parent support among students in the middle school band program at Stanley County. A purposefully selected group of students ($n=6$) completed a take-home survey that asked students to tell of their perceptions of their parent's support of music. Responses were combined and it was discovered that students perceived their mothers as the most behaviorally supportive to their musical growth. Students perceived their families as key supporters in their musical growth, but stated their choice to continue with band was not related to parental or family support.

Introduction

Instrumental students achieve success at different rates whether the comparison is made from school district to school district or from one student to another in the same classroom under the same instructor. Some students take great pride in his or her own musical growth while other students come to rehearsal completely unprepared and seemingly have no intrinsic motivation. Why are some students motivated to succeed and others accept mediocrity? "Music is intrinsically motivating. Maintaining the intrinsic love, in the face of challenge, is key" (Pike, 2011, p. 23). While many variables come in to play, it is of interest to teachers as to what variables music advocates believe are influential so that our students may enjoy a most successful musical experience. It is the purpose of this study to identify differences in parent support among students in the middle school band program at Stanley County School.

Literature Review

There is a wealth of knowledge about the importance of parent support to a booster program, but parental involvement needs to move beyond fundraising and instrument purchase. Ever growing research suggests that there are many different ways that parents may foster musical growth. In a study conducted by Andrea Creech (2010), it was found that students benefit from behavior

support, cognitive/intellectual support, and personal support. In that particular study, parents responded to questions presented in surveys. In my study, the responses were collected from the view point of the student. While it may seem to parents that they are involved, it is the level of involvement perceived by the student that constitutes support.

Behavior support includes arranging and supervising lessons and participating in daily practice by listening and offering feedback when appropriate (Creech, 2010). When parents invest their own time supervising daily practice, students understand the importance of this daily practice. According to Creech, transporting students to lessons and rewarding success are other means of behavioral support. Students in my district live anywhere from one block to 50 miles from the school. It is worth mentioning that some students of the middle school age would be unable to attend lessons or musical events if they were not transported to school.

Another type of parental support, cognitive and intellectual, is shown by attending performances, arranging and funding band camps, creating a conducive practice environment in the home, exposing students to music activities outside the school day, and other music activities outside of the individual lessons (Creech, 2010). When parents attend performances, students take pride in sharing their accomplishments and knowing their parents have a sense of pride in their student—especially when parents have attended rehearsals and lessons when the music was just beginning to take shape. With regard to funding, students of middle school age have very little, if any income of their own and are unable to fund private lessons, band camps, and a well-suited instrument. These things must be parent priorities. Sichivista (2007) suggests that when parents see students expressing interest or exhibiting musical talent, parents may become more interested and therefore more involved in support their student in music.

Personal support from parents is also exhibited by supporting the student's goals and their hopes for musical success (Creech, 2010). I agree with this and believe that when parents are personally supportive of their student, students strive to please their parents and as a result grow musically. Parents can also support their student in continuing their efforts when musical growth seems to be slow (Pike, 2011). Pike also suggests that parent interactions should be positively initiated before the need for support arises. Teacher and parent interaction should take place outside of academic conferencing in efforts to generate a good rapport.

A study conducted by Jeff Rapp (2009) found that teachers do encourage parental support, but could make more efforts to engage parents in the learning aspect of music by having parents attend lessons or rehearsals and to play a greater role in the home practice environment. As teachers, we tend to call upon parents to help with fundraising and attend concerts, but do not frequently invite parents to participate in the actual musical growth of their student. By inviting parents to oversee this growth, we open the door for all types of parental support. If parents understand that the success of their student and the potential for musical growth can be influenced by their active role in the learning process, they may be more apt to invest of their time and effort.

The importance of parent support may fluctuate as students age (Sichivista, 2007). Parental support may create positive outcomes for students with regard to enjoyment of music, personal satisfaction, motivation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. It is also possible that parent support may be overbearing and could create negative outcomes in regards to enjoyment of music, personal satisfaction, motivation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. The role of parent support is unquestionably important when students are of middle school age. As students mature the parent responsibilities change. Parents can become less involved with practice sessions and

some other roles as students become more advanced musicians, but should remain personally invested in the student's growth (Creech, 2010).

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted in a small school district in South Dakota. The band program currently has approximately 57 students participating in the program grades 5-12. The middle school program consists of 27 students. In this study, differences in parent support among students in the middle school Stanley County band program were measured through student surveys. The student surveys asked students their perceptions of three different types of parent support: behavioral, cognitive and intellectual, and personal. See Table 1 for survey questions. Student surveys were sent home with the six purposefully chosen participants. The participant group of six was comprised of three males and three females. Two participants are eleven years of age, one is twelve years of age, and three participants are thirteen years of age. See Table 1 for more demographic information.

Table 1. Survey Questions

1. How did you decide to be a member of the band?
2. How much time do you practice each week?
3. Who encourages you to excel in band?
4. What are your improvement goals?
5. Who attends your performances? (concert/pep band)
6. Who transports you to school for band events?
7. How many years have you been in band?
8. Why are you staying in band?
9. Do you discuss band with anyone? If so, with whom do you discuss?
10. List other activities you are involved in.
11. Do you have friends in the band?

Table 2. Demographic Information of Participating Students

| No. | Age | Gender |
|-----|-----|--------|
| 1 | 11 | F |
| 2 | 11 | M |
| 3 | 12 | F |
| 4 | 13 | M |
| 5 | 13 | F |
| 6 | 13 | M |

Findings and Discussion

The responses were compiled and analyzed looking for common themes.

Overwhelmingly, mothers played a key role in behavioral support. In response to question 6, five participants exclusively listed “mom” as their means of transportation to band events. Participant 4 also listed “brother and dad” in addition to “mom” as his transporter. In a study conducted by Grolnick et al., students with mothers who showed a high level of behavioral and cognitive support were more capable in school (1997).

Considering the community, several parents own a ranch or farm on which one parent works and the other parent commutes daily to town for work. This could partially explain the mostly unanimous response.

Parents and other family members played a large role in cognitive and intellectual support. In response to question 3 all participants except one listed “mom” or “parents.” Question 5 also had family components listed as a common answer of those who attended the participant’s performances. Two participants also stated that teachers and friends attend their performances. When asked why the participants continue to stick with band, not one participant cited parental support as their reason for remaining a member of the band. Two students said “It’s fun” two students said, “It’s what I love/like.” Participant 3 stated her plans to drop band because of a class conflict and participant 6 stated, “It is one of my favorite classes with one of my favorite teachers.”

Participants 2 and 6 stated they do not discuss band with anyone while Participants 1, 4, and 5 both discussed band with parent/s. Participant 1 also discussed band with the teacher and Participant 3 discussed band with friends. Friends may also be a motivating factor other than parental support. In follow-up interviews, all participants

recalled discussing goals with the teacher, but did not perceive this as a form of personal support when completing the survey. When answering question 11, all 6 Participants stated they have a friend in band. Participant 3 went on to further say that, “I think band is more fun when you have you friends to do it with.”

Some aspects of parental support seemed very prominent in continuing band, but no participants listed direct parental influence as their reason to begin band. Two participants started band because they thought it would be “fun.” Three students took band because it was something they wanted to do and just one participant cited sibling’s band involvement as a reason to begin band. While parents are indeed showing their support of their students, the participants did not perceive their parent’s support as a motivating factor. Participants mostly cited goals of musical growth as their motivating factor.

Conclusion

The findings in this study suggest that parental support plays a role in a student’s musical growth though the findings of the study were limited by the small participant number and further research should be conducted to determine if these results can be generalized to the entire middle school band population at Stanley County School. Parents should understand that students perceived their mothers as the most behaviorally supportive to their musical growth and their families as key supporters, but stated their choice to continue with band was not related to parental or family support and more could be done in terms of personal support for the betterment of a student’s musical growth.

References

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