

BELONGING IN A HIGH SCHOOL MARCHING BAND COMMUNITY:
LEADERSHIP, MENTORSHIP, COMMUNICATION, AND POSITIVITY IN
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

by

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To the two little ones who have inspired me more than they will ever know,

Harrison Michael and Liliana Re

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ABSTRACT

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American high school marching bands provide an ecosystem of belonging within the high school environment. Marching bands can vary in size and purpose, but provide students with friendship, social opportunities, identity formation, and leadership and life skills opportunities. In this study, I sought to explore the social environment around a high school marching band using a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) framework. The framework allowed me to discover how marching bands operate socially, and how bands produce a family atmosphere within their program. Qualitative methodology was used with myself acting as teacher researcher (Kincheloe, 2002). Focus groups and interviews provided the data which was transcribed and analyzed for themes related to the social innerworkings of the ensemble. What I discovered was that communities of practice fostered a sense of belonging in the students who were participants in the marching band, and that belonging strengthened the community. The cyclical nature of belonging and strong communities of practice was supported by strong leadership,

meaningful mentorship, intentional communication, and an overall positive experience, which all resulted in the family atmosphere many marching band members reported to experience (Matthews, 2017). These findings indicate a need for band programs to evaluate their social structures, how they train and model for their student leaders, how they produce effective communication in the face of conflict, and how they create powerfully positive interactions among all members of the ensemble.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

“You know, marching band is more about the culture than it is about the music!”
I could not believe my ears, as I sat perched on my scaffold during a sweltering
August band camp rehearsal. One of my staff members, who taught everything
from elementary school beginning band to Big 10 conference marching bands,
was adamant that marching bands were makers of culture and that took
precedence over the music. As that statement stewed in my memory, a week later
at a rehearsal, my new student teacher, unaware of the previous conversation,
mentioned to me that she loved the culture surrounding the school's marching
band. It was positive, upbeat, caring, and the students were thriving socially,
musically, and academically. Something was there—what was it and how was it
built?

High school marching bands are ecosystems of social learning and cultural complexities. These bands are visible to the school community and provide belonging and social support to the students who join them. They are also laboratories of personal identity development that provide students with the tools to become their authentic selves in a safe space, all while welcoming a continuing stream of young marchers, or newcomers, taught by the older members and leaders of the ensemble. However, there is a lack of information on how this cultural ecosystem is maintained, how it evolves over time, and the effects of social learning on this ecosystem. In the context of this study, I

aim to explore the role social learning plays in the cultural context of a high school marching band.

Background Context

Marching bands are ensembles composed of instrumentalists and auxiliary members. The instrumentalists comprise different sections, such as the clarinet section or the drumline. The auxiliary members typically provide visuals for the ensemble with flags, batons, pom-poms, choreography, and more. These sections come together to put on a halftime show during the marching band season, which typically lasts from early August until the end of October. High school marching bands perform their halftime show at the school's football games, competitions, or festivals, while they also perform for wider community events such as parades.

Since many marching bands are large groups, there is a hierarchy of leadership that is embedded within the ensemble which is essential to ensure that performances look visually stunning, sound appropriate, and convey the meaning of the music to the audience. The band director sits at the top of this hierarchy, directing the ensemble and delegating tasks to other members of the leadership team. Marching bands will often have one or more drum majors, who serve as ambassadors of the ensemble to the greater school community, while providing leadership to the marching band on the field. These students are characteristically strong musicians, conductors, and leaders who are able to command the respect of their peers in a multitude of ways. Finally, the section leaders, whose responsibilities fall namely to their own section, are responsible for organizing, teaching, and being the commanders of their section. Depending on the size of the

section, there may be multiple section leaders, or they might combine or share section leaders with other sections based on several factors (i.e., the instruments that may play the same part, or the instruments belong to the same family of instrument such as the alto saxophones and tenor saxophones). These leaders are on the field building relationships with their peers and facilitating specific instruction geared toward that section.

Marching bands are replete with examples of social learning in a constructivist setting. As newcomers enter and older members graduate, a constant cycle of apprenticeship occurs (Rogoff, 1990). Most students enter as freshmen who typically do not understand the foundations of marching band movement; however over time, they become the more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978) or leaders who teach and mentor students to eventually take their positions as more knowledgeable others once they graduate.

Marching bands are also examples of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger Trayner, 2014; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger Trayner, 2020). Communities of practice are groups that share common goals and skills in which members continually learn from each other to increase their skills through collaboration. They do this through the mutual engagement of meaning-making, forming goals amongst the members, and developing cultural resources (Wenger, 1998).

Marching band activity facilitates constant social interaction, allowing its members to have a safe space for forming their own identity, building trust, acceptance, and self-confidence among its members (Dagaz, 2012). Through this space, students are

given the resources to discover who they are and how they want to present themselves to the world, through participation in an accepting and forgiving social group (Turino, 2008).

Finally, marching bands are suffused with leadership opportunities for students. These leadership opportunities enable students to develop agency and ownership in their ensemble, promote social interaction, and give students the freedom to shape their own lived experiences within the ensemble. Specifically, Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2021) suggest a framework for *systems conveners*, the profile of an ideal and successful leader whose main role is to facilitate social learning and encourage full participation from its membership.

Research Aims and Objectives

Building a positive culture in the high school marching band requires the director to provide opportunities for agency and ownership of the ensemble to its members, from the drum majors to the incoming members. This promotes social learning and identity formation within the community of practice and makes the ensemble a welcoming space for students. There have been many studies in regard to leadership skills and best practices as well as culture surrounding marching bands.

However, there is a lack of studies using a communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) framework to discuss social learning, cultural development, and leadership within a marching band context. While a plethora of literature also exists for identity formation in adolescence in a music classroom context, there is little to be found in a marching band context. A shift to a focus on how cultural development and social learning occur in a

marching band setting could be the cornerstone to total program transformation and can have lasting effects on both the evolution of the entire band program as well as the social and personal development of students engaged in the program.

Therefore, in this study, I will aim to explore the role social learning plays in the cultural contexts of a high school marching band, and how culture is built and maintained in the marching band context. I will be using a communities of practice framework to identify the forces that drive the cultural identity and formation of the marching band. I will also explore the formation of both group and individual adolescent identity within the marching band. Finally, I will evaluate the leadership styles and traits that are crucial in promoting agency and ownership within the high school marching band.

In this document, I will introduce the communities of practice framework and its benefits as well as the importance of identity development and leadership skills in the marching band. In addition to adding to the current literature, it is my hope that the findings within this study will contribute to the current literature on high school marching bands and the effect building a positive culture in this context may influence the rest of the high school band program.

Structure of this Study

In chapter one, the required background knowledge has been discussed. The research questions, aims, and objectives have been introduced, and the value of the research has been presented. In chapter two, the existing literature will be reviewed to provide in-depth details about social learning, communities of practice, adolescent identity formation, and student leadership. In chapter three, the methodology will be

presented. Ethnographic and phenomenological methods within qualitative research will be discussed, and the research design will be presented.

In chapter four, the first set of data and findings will be presented with a focus on social learning and communities of practice. In chapter five, we will discuss the data and findings regarding identity development. And in chapter six, we will review the data and findings about leadership in the high school marching band. Finally, in chapter seven, we will explore the implications of this research for the field of music education and discuss how practitioners can apply it in their own classrooms.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter we will explore literature relevant to the study of culture, identity, and leadership. We will start with the theoretical framework of how students learn in social settings and how apprenticeship plays a role in an adolescence's life. Following that, I will present the Communities of Practice framework originally presented by Wenger (1998). I will then discuss the recent literature surrounding identity formation in adolescence as well as how student leadership plays a role in the marching band.

Social Contexts for Learning

“All human experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication” (Dewey, 1938, p. 37). Learning occurs in a social context, as teaching and learning are social processes. Shared understanding is critical to teaching and learning process (Wiggins, 2004). “Most of our approaches to the world are mediated through negotiation with others” (Boardman, 2001, p. 51). Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) proposed his theory that everything we learn is through interaction with others—a social construction of knowledge.

In Vygotsky's view, we construct our understanding of life experiences through interaction with others. Therefore: all knowledge is socially constructed. Social interaction is an essential ingredient of the learning process. It is through social interaction that more experienced members of society act as or provide sources of information about cultural tools and practices for less experienced members of society. Everything we know, we have learned either through interaction with someone else or through applying understanding we previously developed through interacting with someone else. (Wiggins, 2015, p. 14)

Dewey (1916) concurs with Vygotsky and states that “all conversation is educative” (p. 11). Socialization is a key way in which we construct our knowledge. Much of what we learn from traditional sources of seemingly non-social learning is still rooted in interaction; for examples, books that we learn from are written by others, the anchors on the news might prompt thinking and research, or even just a curious child asking a question, is enough social interaction to start personal cognitive growth.

Vygotsky terms the “general genetic law of cultural development.” Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. (Wertsch, et al., 1984, p. 157)

Music-making is also a non-verbal way to communicate, even while being non-social as is the case in instrumental music. Students in performance-based music classrooms are reacting to what other students are playing, or the non-verbal cues of a conductor. They have to balance and blend their sound with others, determine who has melodic or harmonic parts and determine their order of importance, they have to adjust their intonation to match the rest of the ensemble, and they have to respond to those aural cues from their peers and the visual cues of the conductor. In order for students to do this successfully, they must have prior experience in these areas, usually scaffolded (Bruner, 1978) by instructors.

It is important to restate that the goal of constructivist teaching is learner independence. While independence means doing something on your own, when you put music into an authentic context, music making is a collaborative art form which requires social interaction to achieve a common goal.

Music is an inherently social art form in that when you participate in any type of music making, it involves collaboration with others; performing requires working with others in small ensembles or even as a soloist with an accompanist (Elliot & Silverman, 2015). Composing or arranging music has an end goal of performance with or in front of others. Listening to and analyzing music as a consumer requires recordings or live performances with others, and can even then spark conversations with others (Reimer, 2003, 2009). Even if no conversation takes place, there is still interaction between composers, performers, and music consumers that occurs in the mind and imagination (Green, 1995) of the listener.

The goal of participation in a social constructivist learning experience is competence and independence of the learner. Through guided participation in holistic, real-life, problem-solving experiences that involve hands-on, minds-on interaction with music and opportunities to interact with both teacher and peers, learners develop their own understanding of dimensions and metadimensions of music such that they move toward musical competence and independence. Over time, participating in social constructivist music learning experiences should enable individuals to develop understanding and skills that enable them to apply what they know to solve new problems on their own. (Wiggins, 2015, pp. 55-56)

Marching bands are driven by social interactions. The groups form ideal communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) as they involve a group of students that share many key traits: they are typically in the same age range, come from a similar geographic and socio-economic area, and have experience playing an instrument or performing in an auxiliary unit such as a colorguard or dance team. The students also share a passion for performing in a large group, growing through music, and sometimes competition. Marching bands are also inherently social, as they can involve large amounts of students who form sub-communities such as a particular section of the band, where student leaders will do part of the teaching in making sure their section is proficient in musical or movement objectives. Students learn their music and formations in a way that makes

them dependent on other members of the ensemble. In addition to that, they share a large amount of time together on the field, in the football stands, and in the band room perfecting their show. This inherently causes students to bond over their common love of music, and form friendships with other members of the school community who may have a different background.

Zone of Proximal Development

Central to Vygotsky's theory is the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (1978). The Zone of Proximal Development is where learning occurs in the space between competence and the need for assistance to function more successfully.

Growth occurs in the "zone of proximal development," that phrase in the development of a cognitive skill where a child has only partially mastered the skill but can successfully employ it and eventually internalize it with the assistance and supervision of an adult. The adult structures and models the appropriate solution to the problem, engaging the child in this solution, as the adult monitors the child's current level of skill and supports or "scaffolds" the child's extension of current skills and knowledge to a higher level of competence. (Rogoff & Gardner, 1984, p. 97)

This is the region where learners can operate independently to a point but cannot go farther without the help of another.

Vygotsky describes the zone of proximal development as the region of sensitivity to social guidance, where the learner is not quite able to manage a problem independently but can work toward a solution when guided by a more knowledgeable other who structures and models an appropriate solution to the problem. (Wiggins, 2015, p. 15)

The students will typically be able to achieve much more collaboratively in the Zone of Proximal Development, than by themselves.

Learning within the ZPD means entering an arena in which the learner is not fully competent to operate independently. Within the ZPD, with effective, appropriate scaffolding, a learner is often able to operate at a higher level than he or she would have been able to operate independently. However, for this to happen, the

learner must be willing to enter that arena. Willingness to engage in experiences that are outside a learner's comfort level requires (a) a desire and willingness to learn and (b) feelings of confidence, security, and trust. (Blair, 2009b, p. 181)

To learn in the Zone of Proximal Development, one needs the assistance of what Vygotsky called a "more knowledgeable other" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This person does not necessarily have to be a teacher, as "Vygotsky refers to this 'other person' as simply a 'more knowledgeable other,' because this person may be anyone in society" (Wiggins, 2015, p. 15). Dewey (1910) also states that socialization in learning can pull out a greater degree of curiosity due to the shared experiences of others. We can learn from our peers, parents, strangers, and authors. Any person can be a more knowledgeable other about virtually anything.

Bruner (1960, 1978) coined the term scaffolding in education and developed it into a social theory of learning. Scaffolding is the idea that we offer students the support they need to enter the Zone of Proximal Development, and then gradually take those supports away as they become more independent. "[Scaffolding] refers to the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring" (Bruner, 1978, p. 19). Much like scaffolding when painting your house, you use it to reach the places you cannot reach on your own, and when you finish the job, it is adjusted or taken down. "It is also important to recognize that, in a classroom setting, learners often provide scaffolding for one another, even when the teacher is not aware of the occurrence" (Wiggins, 2015, p. 18). Scaffolding can take many forms; teachers provide scaffolding for their students, students can provide scaffolding for other students, and the design of

the curriculum can initiate scaffolding. The pedagogical decisions made by the teacher can influence the scaffolding found in the classroom. For example, educators can use small groups during activities to help facilitate the use of peer scaffolding within the classroom.

The primary role of a teacher is to provide scaffolding for learners, enabling them to operate within their zones of proximal development, resulting in their achieving a higher level of understanding and competence in music, gaining musical independence. (Wiggins, 2015, p. 42)

Educators need to assess where each student's competence and independence lies within the Zone of Proximal Development, what they are capable of, and where they need the most support. Every student is different and needs the teacher's support in growing.

Effective teaching actually takes place within this zone of proximal development. If a teacher works with a learner on a level of proficiency and understanding that is below his zone of proximal development, the teacher is asking the learning to practice of learn something he already knows and understands. It means the teacher may be offering support where it is no longer needed. If, on the other hand, a teacher works with a learner on a level of proficiency and understanding that is beyond his capabilities within his zone of proximal development, the teacher is asking the learner to work on a level that the learner is not yet able to manage. Teaching needs to take place somewhere between the level of proficiency a learner can achieve on his own and the level at which he can be successful within teacher support. (Wiggins, 2015, p. 15)

Collaborative Learning

“Education is essentially a social process” (Dewey, 1938, p. 58). Collaborative learning differs from the competitive learning that is valued in high-stakes testing and by other educational theories. By allowing students to work together rather than against each other, they become more willing to take risks, are more willing to explore and be

engaged, and most importantly, are willing to learn without fear of repercussion or rankings.

When the classroom environment in which students spend so much of their day is organized so that student-to-student interaction is encouraged, cooperation is valued, assignments and materials are interdisciplinary, and students' freedom to chase their own ideas is abundant, students are more likely to take risks and approach assignments with a willingness to accept challenges to their current understandings. (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p. 10)

One of the most essential parts of collaborative learning is dialogue between students, as "collaborative learning also promotes children's learning with and from on another" (Zemelman et al., 2005, p. 19). This is a time where students can present their finding or talk through a problem and potential solution informally, in a risk-free setting. This also helps to promote agency when students do come up with a plausible solution to a problem and they want to report their findings.

Student-to-student dialogue is the foundation upon which cooperative learning is structured. Reports state that cooperative learning experiences have promoted interpersonal attraction among initially prejudiced peers, and such experiences have promoted interethnic interaction in both instructional and free-time activities. (Brooks & Brooks, 1999, p.109)

Additionally, collaboration helps students scaffold themselves during problem-solving. Children are able to play a more active role in their own education through collaborative learning by not only modeling problem solving strategies, but by also initiating experimentation themselves (Rogoff, 1990). According to Zemelman et al. (2005), "Children are far from passive in this scaffolding process. They learn not only by imitating grownup behavior, but also take an active part, constructing and testing hypotheses and initiating action themselves" (p. 19). Students no longer have to worry

about racing to be the first person done to prove they are smart, or worried about how others will perceive their answers, students are able to support each other, fill in any missing knowledge, and combine cognitive strengths to produce projects of the highest level.

There is collaboration among learners. They can work together in ways that scaffold and support each other's learning, and in ways that supplement each other's knowledge. Collaboration is a marriage of insufficiencies, not exclusively cooperation in a particular form of social interaction. Moreover, there are difficult intellectual challenges that are nearly impossible to accomplish alone, but are more readily addressed in the company of others. (Shulman, 2004, p. 269)

Our students also are given an opportunity to witness and try out new skills when working with other peers on new problems. Rogoff & Gardner (1984) note that "formal instruction and informal social interaction provide the child with a model of an expert applying appropriate background information to a new problem, thereby giving the child experience in the skillful generalization of knowledge to new problems" (p. 96).

In a marching band setting, students are tasked with learning formations, and they learn how their body becomes an integral part of the formation that the entire band makes. They use their peers to find their spots and learn how their body should be in relation to where other students are located. This structure makes collaboration between peers essential to the success of the ensemble. Students must collaborate and make decisions together to determine where they should go or how they should move.

Communities of Practice

"Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in

this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p.

4). Communities of practice are prevalent throughout many levels of our society, and you can find them just about anywhere: in schools, businesses, places of worship, workplaces, and more. These communities are places where social learning is fundamental in fostering the knowledge required of all participants. As I have explored emergent themes, marching bands seem to meet many of these criteria as noted by Wenger, McDermott & Snyder above.

Marching band, primarily a vehicle for music learning and performance, is also an inherently social activity. Researchers have reported that marching bands present opportunities for students to form a sense of community by working together across many ages, spending copious amounts of time together, and creating a setting that welcomes students with varied sociocultural backgrounds. Students in existent research have often described their marching band experiences analogous to a family with long lasting, personal connections. Peters found that this sense of family and community was developed through group activities such as band camp rehearsals, beginning of year traditions, small group spheres of peer interaction, and the sheer amount of time spent together. Additionally, Peters reported that community is formed by students socializing outside of band through events such as game nights. (Cumberledge, 2021, p. 68)

I suggest that marching bands are a strong example of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) as they involve a group of students that share many key traits: they are typically in the same age range, come from a similar geographic and socio-economic area, and have experience playing an instrument or performing in an auxiliary unit such as a colorguard or dance team. Marching bands are also inherently social, as they can involve large numbers of students who form sub-communities (Rothbart & Lewis, 2006; Wenger, 1998), such as a particular section of the band, where student leaders will serve

as co-teachers, and will work to make sure their section is proficient in musical or movement objectives.

Marching band also typically includes a band camp where students will also participate in bonding activities and other social activities which support the formation of social bonds.

Meaning

One of the outcomes of communities of practice is the development of knowledge and meaning. Wenger (1998) suggests that meaning is always negotiated. This means that our own personal meaning-making is constantly evolving and changing based on new information that we encounter through experience, developing one's schema about the topic (Pace, 1988). "Living is a constant process of negotiation of meaning...[and] human engagement in the world is first and foremost a process of negotiating meaning (Wenger, 1998, p. 53).

We come to make meaning through our interactions with others within our practice (Wenger, 1998). In the cultural sense, meaning-making is not just an individual act, but a social act within the community of practice. "Culture is also constitutive of mind. By virtue of this actualization in culture, meanings achieve a form that is public and communal rather than individual (Bruner, 1990, p. 33). This type of communal meaning-making is the basis of learning the meaning of an idea (Dewey, 1910) and sets the trajectory of future learning experiences. "Learning is the construction of meaning...This learning occurs within a sociocultural context that influences/molds the particular form and direction the learning process will take" (Boardman, 2001, p. 50). In

a marching band or other classroom musical setting, the music will take on shared-group meaning as well, pursuant to those participating in the culture (Reimer, 2003).

Meaning-making is formed because of the interaction between participation and reification (Wenger, 1998). These two processes help learners to find their place within the community so that they do not merely conform to the past practices of the community, but also allow their experiences within the community to shape their identity. “Participation is always based on situated negotiations and renegotiations of meaning in the world. This implies that understanding and experience are in constant interaction—indeed, are mutually constitutive” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 51-52).

Participation and Reification

Participation is a key construct in communities of practice. Wenger (1998) defines participation as such:

Participation here refers not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities...Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do. (p. 4)

Participation requires taking an active role in the community of practice, similar to that which is crucial to constructivist learning theories. Perkins (1999) states that all students are active learners and that “knowledge and understanding are actively acquired” (p. 6). Participation is an intrinsic choice that requires both “action and connection” and is both “personal and social” as it “involves our whole person, including our bodies, minds, emotions, and social relations” (Wenger, 1998, pp. 55-56). Not only does participation shape our experiences, but it also shapes the communities in which we are actively

participating through a cyclical relationship of our personal experiences and participatory membership in the community (Wenger, 1998).

Participants in a community of practice will have varying degrees of participation. As topics shift and different skills and interests are put to the forefront, different members of the community may take a step back to offer a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) the opportunity to take a leadership role (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). In a marching band setting, this can be observed when stronger student marchers reinforce movement concepts, while musical leaders reinforce musical concepts to their peers. “The key to good community participation and a healthy degree of movement between levels is to...allow participants at all levels to feel like full members” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 57). Communities of practice within marching bands need to always facilitate full members of the community, regardless of their current role in the organization.

Participation is enhanced with the concept of reification. Reification is used to treat abstract, non-tangible things as material objects. “In participation we recognize ourselves in each other, in reification we project ourselves onto the world, and not having to recognize ourselves in those projections, we attribute to our meanings an independent existence” (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). Our social interactions are frequently reified to provide context for our feelings and identity.

Reification is heavily infused in the marching arts. From the forms to the music, all of the abstract thoughts of the show designers come together through the performers on the field. Each sound, movement, formation, choreography, and so much more are all

abstract ideas that come together to tell a story or express an idea through the marching medium, all through the process of reification. The performers play a role in this process by becoming the real-life representation of the story being told by the visual and musical designers of the show. Through the marching band medium, members in the ensemble are participating directly in the reification process on a group level, and an individual level. They are also taking their own interpretations of the musical and visual design and convey the ideas in their own way. The members reification in the show influences their participation, and reciprocally, their participation influences their reification.

Participation and reification function as a duality that coexist and influence one another, that is key to social learning theory as both play a role in negotiating meaning. Both actions function in tandem, allowing participants in the community of practice to “shape the future – to maintaining the status quo or conversely to redirect the practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 91).

Community

Wenger (1998) provides three characteristics of communities: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. These characteristics respond to each other within the shared understanding, or a communal and clear comprehension of information of all members of the community. I will discuss these characteristics below.

The first characteristic of a community, the mutual engagement of participants, “exists because people are engaged in actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another” (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Not only are individual participants making meaning for themselves, but they are also making meaning for their entire community of practice.

Their shared experiences are negotiating meaning for the entire community. In a marching band, this mutual engagement may be evident when the members come together to make specific formations on the field; they are learning and understanding each part of the form and agreeing in real time what it should look like based on their specific locations on the field. Mutual engagement “is what defines the community. A community of practice is not just an aggregate of people defined by some characteristic” (Wenger, 1998, pp. 73-74). Community is not simply your physical location, or a shared trait such as race, it is a negotiation of shared meaning within a group of people.

The second characteristic of a community is the formation of a joint enterprise between participants. A joint enterprise is reflective of the mutual engagement each community shares and may not be a physically stated goal, but contains conditions, requirements, and communal reflections for membership within the community (Wenger, 1998). A joint enterprise is also a shared result of any products produced by the community. A joint enterprise that marching band students may have is a common goal to produce a successful performance; each student plays a joint role in the success of that performance, and the standards of that performance are based on the joint enterprise and mutual understandings of the group. Joint enterprises “become shared in a community of practice and allows participants to negotiate the appropriateness of what they do” (Wenger, 1998, p. 81).

The third characteristic of a community is the development of a shared repertoire of resources. “Over time, a joint pursuit of an enterprise creates resources for negotiating meaning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 82). These resources become part of the community’s

history of mutual engagement (Bruner, 1990; Wenger 1998) and allow for the continued negotiation of meaning. Ma & Hall (2018) suggest that joining a community such as a marching band includes different cultural resources for students: “Joining the high school marching band offered students a broad range of cultural resources for belonging in exchange for their intense engagement with the ensemble. These included opportunities to teach and mentor younger students” (p. 528). Cultural resources can be physical artifacts of success, such as trophies, plaques, and other awards, or they can be reified memories or stories that shape the community’s future. These reified memories could be reflections of successful (or unsuccessful) rehearsals or performances, stories of past members of the ensemble, or any other antidote that shapes the members’ future of mutual engagement or joint enterprise of the group. All three of these characteristics are at a constant interplay between one another and shape the community as old members leave and new members enter.

Newcomers

A community of practice can outlive active participants within the community. It is common for older members of the community to move on while newcomers join in to replace them (Wenger 1998). This connects to the ways that many cultures have lived on for hundreds of years; as older members die, their offspring take their places as leaders and are the ones to carry on traditions. A high school marching band works the same way—as students graduate, freshman students join the band, and the organization continues to move forward.

A key to ensuring the successful transition of newcomers to the community is to treat them with legitimacy so the new members are seen as potential members of the community.

Granting the newcomers legitimacy is important because they are likely to come short of what the community regards as competent engagement. Only with enough legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings, and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion. (Wenger, 1998, p. 101)

New members, in theory, should be treated as any other member of the community. Thus, they may be able to learn the social norms of the group and how the group functions on a social and practical basis. When newcomers are treated as less than full members, they may not connect with the community and will seek social needs elsewhere.

When students are treated as legitimate members of the community, they may start to learn using a notion referred to as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). “Legitimate peripheral participation describes the ways in which novices in a community of practice learn through participation in its practices as they move on a trajectory toward full participation” (Fenton-O’Creedy et al., 2015, p. 43). The newcomers participate alongside the older members of the group, and along the way, learn the routines, norms, and history of the community. “A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). As the newcomers become full members of the community, they eventually take on the leadership roles the older members used to occupy. “For newcomers, then the purpose is not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn to

talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 109).

Newcomers will need to learn the ways of the culture alongside a veteran member of the group, immersed in the learning conditions, similar to the apprenticeship model (Rogoff, 1990), where students are learning side-by-side with proper peer scaffolding (Bruner, 1960; Bruner, 1978) to become proficient within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). “When newcomers are entering a community, it is mostly the regime of competence that is pulling and transforming their experience—until their experience reflects the competence of the community. This is what happens in apprenticeship” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015a).

There is also an important distinction between newcomers gaining knowledge and older participants passing down knowledge (Wenger, 1998). The goal is not to have the more knowledgeable others pass down knowledge because that involves a status quo, and little to no progress being made towards change. Dweck (2017) would classify that as a fixed mindset, as opposed to a growth mindset. The optimum experience for both the newcomer and the rest of the community would be for the participant to gain knowledge through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This ensures that newcomers are prepared to take charge as they become full members; they can honor group traditions, while still adding their influence to the community of practice.

Communities of practice are the ideal social structure for “stewarding” knowledge. By assigning responsibility to the practitioners themselves to generate and share the knowledge they need, these communities provide a social forum that supports the living nature of knowledge. (Wenger, McDermott, Snyder, 2002, p. 12)

Intruders

Conversely, there are occasionally members who try to join a community that do not participate in the community of practice for a multitude of reasons, both intentional and unintentional. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) define these as intruders—"someone who occupies the space but who, knowingly or not, does not honor the principal of mutual engagement" (p. 23).

Intruders can take many forms in a marching band setting. Intruders are sometimes forced to be a part of the ensemble because their parents require them to, despite their objections, and the student may then choose not to engage with the group. Intruders can sometimes be students who are in the ensemble simply for personal gain; for example, they joined the community because it looks good on a college application but do not have the same passion, mutual engagement, or joint enterprise as other members of the group. These intruders can even be students who joined the ensemble but found that they do not feel comfortable, so they blend into the background with minimal participation until the season ends, never to be seen on the field again. "Intruders may also act as true participants some of the time, but if they take too much space, the group may cease to function as a social learning space" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). These students, at times, can cause problems for other students by either acting out behaviorally or refusing to participate in the practice as other members of the community, causing disruptions to the learning community.

Boundaries

Boundaries are considered the edges of the community of practice. A boundary can be a physical or reified object, such as artifacts or tangible items (such as a course syllabus, drill charts, or sheet music), concepts, or terms, defined as a boundary object” (Wenger 1998, p. 106). Boundaries can also be considered the social, educational, or productivity norms of the community. Green (1995) described this area as living in the margins among the text. These areas are negotiated similarly to meaning-making and can change over time. As new members start their journey into a new community of practice, they stay on the boundary of the community until they become comfortable and ease into full membership.

Boundaries play a role in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as new members are constantly crossing boundaries to become full members in the community of practice. This is both naturally occurring, as well as a planned-out process, as the leaders in the community often must present the challenges of the community to the new members so that they can eventually begin to solve the issues on their own. This is also an intersection of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), as these encounters also encourage peer scaffolding (Bruner, 1960) between new members and senior members of the community.

“Boundaries are places of potential misunderstanding and confusion arising from different regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoire, and perspectives” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015a). Boundaries are the entryway into a new community of practice. Boundaries are also the place where learning and communication

skills grow through what are known as boundary encounters (Wenger, 1998). A boundary encounter can be conversations with members of another community of practice, or visits to a community of practice. These visits help to negotiate meaning and, in tandem with participation and reification, can help to “create connections across boundaries” (Wenger, 1998, p. 110). The boundary crossings help to influence the perspectives of members, to connect schemas, and transmit new knowledge based on the participants’ prior knowledge, making boundary encounters a “crucial aspect of living in a landscape of practice” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015a, p. 18).

Wenger (1998) describes participants who enact boundary encounters as brokers. “Brokers are able to make new connections across communities of practice, enable coordination, and—if they are good brokers—open new possibilities for meaning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 109). Brokers help to facilitate boundary crossings for members of a community. Brokers in a marching band can include the students themselves or the band director. Alsop (2020) describes different roles brokers can have between a musical and researcher communities of practice: A broker can be a coordinator, who brings all participants together to facilitate boundary encounters, a broker can be a gatekeeper, who shares access to boundary encounters with other participants, brokerage can happen as a representative where they act on behalf of a community to facilitate boundary encounters, or a broker can be a liaison, who acts as the middleman between two parties of different boundaries.

In a high school marching band setting, boundaries can be set within the larger community of practice. Since many marching bands have a large number of participants,

each section can act as its own sub-community of practice. When sections communicate with other sections, I suggest that this could be considered a boundary encounter. These encounters can happen while working on cleaning formations, during breaks when groups interact, or during music rehearsals. These boundary encounters can also occur between larger groups within a school or other community of practice. For example, if two bands from different schools combine for a halftime show together, or if other school groups, such as the cheerleading or dance teams, collaborate on a halftime show, those could be considered boundary crossings.

Modes of Belonging

Wenger (1998) describes three modes of belonging that are inherent in all successful communities of practice: engagement, imagination, and alignment. These three modes interact with one another—often in “various proportions” and “combinations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 182)—to create belonging, which is integral to Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs suggests that to meet self-actualization and one’s fullest potential, one must first actively satisfy a set of different needs. Some of these needs are basic, such as the physiological of food, water, shelter, and safety. The next level of Maslow’s theory is the belonging needs—friendship and a sense of belonging in one’s community. The community of practice model supports the ways educators might assist students in achieving a sense of belonging, as noted in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.

Engagement

Engagement is a process that utilizes three intertwined processes: “the ongoing negotiation of meaning, the formation of trajectories, and the unfolding of histories of practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 174). Participants in a community are continually negotiating meanings found within their community, both individually and collectively. These negotiations help to define specific trajectories within the community. While these trajectories are set and meanings are being negotiated, in established communities, there is a history of practice or how things have been learned or done in the past; for example, social or professional norms. These three processes “take place through each other [and] engagement become a mode of belonging and a source of identity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 174). The processes allow participants to adapt to the learning environment, as well as shape it as they become full participants.

Participants can influence the direction of the community, as well as their own trajectory, due to the power structures influencing the community. Mutual engagement gives the power of change to the participants in the community, namely the older members and leaders. Individual engagement gives the power to the participants to shape their own identity through the context or lens that best suits them (Wenger, 1998).

In a marching band setting, as newcomers enter, they may negotiate their meaning of the new concepts, decide on the trajectory of their own learning, while also being influenced by the community’s engagement. This occurs all while their traditions and history of success, or lack thereof, influence their belonging in the community. The

power that leadership, both student and adult, has to influence and enact change allows them to lead the group in collective mutual engagement.

Imagination

Imagination is the basis for much creative thinking and problem-solving. Wenger (1998) explains the concept of imagination as creating the potential future.

My use of the concept of imagination refers to a process of expanding ourself by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves. Imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree. It is playing scales on a piano and envisioning a concert hall. (p. 176)

Imagination is a creative process that allows participants to produce images and ideas that can become reality or part of one's identity (Wenger, 1998). Greene (2001) states,

Imagination is not only the power to form mental images, although it is partly that. It is also the power to mold experiences into something new, to create fictive situations. It is, as well, the power—by means of sympathetic feeling—to put oneself in another's place. (p. 30)

Using one's imagination is a tool to help predict situations. For example, one can visualize a marching band formation from a bird's-eye view using acquired knowledge. More importantly, we may be able to predict social situations, as using our imagination is part of having empathy and communicating with other participants. Imagination helps us see what others are thinking and feeling, so that we can act accordingly (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020).

Alignment

Alignment is the process of connecting the participants' actions, beliefs, and practices to become synergistic in their group's norms and traditions (Wenger, 1998).

The goal of alignment is to ensure that everyone in the group has a stake in the group through their goals and actions. Dagaz (2012) states that “extensive social ties and affinity with marching band operated to increase commitment to the group” (p. 450). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner (2015a) expand on this by stating that “our engagement in practice is rarely effective without some degree of alignment with the context—making sure that activities are coordinated, that laws are followed, or that intentions are implemented” (p. 21). In a marching band setting, this means that the goal of the group could be to put on a great performance, and everyone in the group has the same goal and is actively working towards that goal. “Participation in a marching band can help create a strong sense of loyalty and encourage ethical behavior in students and can lead them to understand the importance of an aesthetic education” (Heselton, 2011, p. 24)

The most important outcome of alignment is the creation of a community of practice.

Alignment also creates a kind of community. Allegiance to a creed, a movement, the environment, a nation, a religion, a star performer, or a sports team can rally the energies of unlikely bedfellows. The commitments that unite them often have little to do with personal commonality of differences. The forms that such commitments take, and their root in specific experiences may be unimaginable from one situation to another; it is their alignment that matters. (Wenger, 1998, p. 182)

Alignment creates an allegiance to a common cause or group, and it creates common perspectives among participants in a community of practice. Alignment is often described as loyalty; it is the mutual shared values held amongst the group. When those values are not held amongst a member in the community of practice, that member may then exhibit

the signs of an intruder. Marching band directors need to give a vision and goals that the students can get behind and achieve, that work for every member of the group, and in turn, give their leaders the agency to help craft those visions and goals.

The nature of alignment requires leadership, engagement, and participation to accomplish the group's goals and become successful.

Alignment requires the ability to coordinate perspectives and actions in order to direct energies to a common purpose. The challenge of alignment is to connect local efforts to broader styles and discourses in ways that allow learners to invest their energy in the group. Whether it is about a scientific method, an artistic or a social movement, a moral commitment, or the charter of an organization, alignment requires the ability to communicate purpose, needs, methods, and criteria. (Wenger, 1998, p. 186)

Alignment will require coordination to accomplish the goal of community formation.

Even in a newly formed group, there is always at least one leader to inspire alignment in the group's cause. When a leader fosters alignment, they are "challenging everyone rather than reflecting the interest of specific stakeholders...[and] recognizing opportunities of enabling conversations, activities or projects that could achieve a valuable outcome for individuals" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b, p. 109).

Synergy Among the Modes of Belonging

The three modes of belonging work together to help participants in a community of practice to learn and grow together.

Engagement, imagination, and alignment are all important ingredients of learning—they anchor it in practice yet make it broad, creative, and effective in the wider world. Since each mode of belonging involves trade-offs, combining them enables them to compensate for each other's shortcomings. Such combinations allow a learning community to move in various ways between participation and non-participation in order to create a richer context for learning. (Wenger, 1998, p. 217)

The three modes of belonging individually have both positive and negative pieces to them. However, when we look at how they work together, we see that there are positive properties that far outweigh the negatives.

When engagement and imagination are combined, reflective practitioners grow within the community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Schon, 1991). Reflective participants are able to both engage in the practices of the community, while also distancing themselves using imagination. This allows participants to have an etic, or outsiders' view of the community (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2020). Reflection is key in a community of practice because it allows the participants to learn from their experiences and participate in meaning-making on their own terms. Being reflective is an essential part of engaging in the practices and norms of the community (Wenger-Trayner, & Wenger-Trayner, 2015a).

The combination of imagination and alignment allows us to formulate a vision and a reason behind the vision. "We align our activities, and we understand why. We have a vision and it helps us situate what we are doing and make it effective. We have a big picture and we do something about it in concert with others" (Wenger, 1998, p. 218). Vision is important to a community because it is the start of the formation or change of goals and standards. It also forces you to look at the community in holistic terms. People are best able to construct understanding when information is presented in a holistic context—one that enables them to understand how parts connect to the whole (Wiggins, 2004; Brooks & Brooks, 1999). In a marching band setting, this occurs when students see

the formations and see the big picture, not necessarily zooming in on their section's contribution to the entire process.

Finally, engagement and alignment allow for the coordination of various perspectives and their transformation into goals and strategies. Wenger (1998) suggests that “there is something unique that we can come to understand when our diverse perspectives converge in our attempts to align them for some purpose” (p. 218). When engaged participants in a community of practice also exhibit alignment, they form common goals which guide their vision for the community of practice.

Identity Formation

Reimer (2003) states that “a human mind, growing healthily within its culture, achieves selfhood—a personality, an identity, a place in the world where one is at home in the world” (p. 190). A person's individual identity is influenced by the surrounding cultures, and the result is a system of beliefs and values that influence future decision-making. Regarding a marching band setting, Dagaz (2012) notes that because the activity creates a safe space for students, it allows them the opportunity to develop a deep connection with peers, which in turn influences not only their perspectives but their personal identity as well. In this next section, I will discuss how identity is formed within Wenger's (1998) theory on Communities of Practice, how the modes of belonging influence students' identity, how multimembership plays a role in students' identity formation within the marching band setting, and how students develop an ever-changing musical identity.

Identity Formation within a Community of Practice

Central to Wenger's theory on communities of practice is the notion that individual identity is formed because of the influences of the community.

There is a profound connection between identity and practice. Developing a practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants. As a consequence, practice entails negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. This negotiation may be silent; participants may not necessarily talk directly about that issue but whether or not they address the question directly, they deal with it through the way they engage in action with one another and relate to one another. Inevitably, our practices deal with the profound issue of how to be a human being. In this sense, the formation of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities. (Wenger, 1998, p. 149)

As the students in the marching band interact, they form a community by negotiating meaning and how that meaning affects the beliefs of the students. Between the expectations set by the community of practice and our engagement in practice, this helps to support students as full participants in the community. "The development of identity is central to the careers of newcomers in communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 115). Bakhtin (1984) expands on this and relates this to the theme of carnival, which is a popular South American festival where masks are frequently worn to protect the identity of the participants. Shields (2007) explains that Bakhtin's use of masks in his writing is a metaphor for identity construction; that students can wear the masks of their community until they learn the norms and expectations of the group until it eventually becomes part of their identity.

Participants in the community of practice use their social experiences to help form their identity within the community.

An identity, then, is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other. As we encounter our effects on the world and develop our relations with others, these layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experiences and reificative projections. Bringing the two together through the negotiation of meaning, we construct who we are. (Wenger, 1998, p. 151)

All of these experiences influence participants' thoughts and actions within the community. Participants learn how to interact with others within the community and how to achieve competence in the community. Wenger (1998) argues that "membership in a community of practice translates into an identity as a form of competence" (p. 153). In the marching band, this competence can include musical and/or visual aspects that newer members can share with older members to demonstrate that they are willing participants and on their way to full membership in the community. From an etic (Mostowlansky & Rota, 2020) perspective, just participating in the community can label a student as a member to those not in the community. Depending on the school culture, this could affect the students' chosen identity traits and whether or not they decide to become members of the marching band.

"In realizing our own identities, we tend to foreground aspects that are regarded as important by the people around us" (Turino, 2008, p. 102). We may emulate the leaders in our community as we build an identity within the group. Wenger (1998) supports Turino's premise and states that you must "identify as" and "identify with" (p. 191) when defining your identity. When you "identify as," it is the process of reification; using our experiences to express our feelings and identify with the abstract. In contrast, when you "identify with," you are participating in an active community of practice and

becoming part of the community, and in turn identifying with those in the community. “It is both something we do to ourselves and something we do to each other. We identify with a community and, conversely, are recognized as a member of a community” (Wenger, 1998, p. 191). When you “identify with” the community of practice, you are embracing the common identity of the community of practice (Wenger, McDermott, R. & Snyder, 2002). In a marching band, the term “band nerd” or “band kid” is often used. Students involved in marching band typically embrace these terms and identify with the marching band in this way, often changing the connotation of these words from negative to positive.

The formation of identity is not something that is done once in a lifetime, this is a constantly evolving and dynamic process, as we continuously negotiate meaning, and meanings change.

Moving across the landscape and learning at its boundaries requires identity work – revising, maintaining, and strengthening a sense of self as coherent and distinctive whilst negotiating identity and aligning with differing regimes of competence in different parts of the landscape. (Fenton-O’Creedy et al, 2015b, pp. 151-152)

Participating in a community of practice will naturally assist with the formation of identity, due to the influences of peers and the learning that takes place within the community. “Learning involves the ability to negotiate new meanings and become a new person” (Wenger, 1998, p. 219). As students enter as newcomers and leave the marching band as they graduate high school, they may have experienced a change in their identities from relatively unknown, lost or confused students to leaders who have embraced the community of practice and take parts of the identity they have formed and negotiated

over the years with them into adulthood (Turino, 2008). Fenton-O'Creevy, Dimitriadis, & Scobie (2015) state that "learning is not just about 'learning to do' but is also, importantly, about 'learning to be'" (pp. 41-42). The environment that is created in the marching bands community of practice helps the students learn to be their authentic selves; this is just as important, or I would argue even more important, than the academic and performance aspects of the ensemble.

Identity Formation Within the Modes of Belonging

The three modes of belonging—engagement, imagination, and alignment—not only play a role in our negotiations with meaning, but they also play a crucial role in the formation of one's identity within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Engagement is the most crucial mode of belonging for identity formation because engagement "takes place in the doing" (Wenger, 1998, p. 193) in the community of practice.

Engagement in practice is a double source of identification: we invest ourselves in what we do and at the same time we invest ourselves in our relations with other people. As we build communities of practice through this process, we work out our relations with each other and with the world, and we gain a lived sense of who we are. (Wenger, 1998, p. 192)

Engagement in the community of practice requires socialization with other members of the community. Through interactions with other members, participants are able to strengthen their own practice within the community, directly affecting themselves and their identity, while also strengthening the relationships formed by those in the community.

Imagination gives the participants goals for who they would like to become.

Wenger (1998) notes that “identification depends on the kind of picture of the world and of ourselves we can build. It depends on the connections we can envision across history and across the social landscape” (p. 194). Imagination can reify our sense of participation in the community and can cause participants to either identify as participants or disassociate with the identity, causing non-participation (Wenger, 1998).

When forming one’s identity, alignment is concerned with the power dynamics of the community and how it affects the individual.

Through alignment, the identity and enterprise of large groups can become part of the identities of participants. Demanding or inspiring alignment is a form of identification because the power, individual or collective, to generate alignment extends our identity to the energy of those who align themselves. (Wenger, 1998, p. 195)

Alignment inside of a community of practice helps give the group’s common goals and social norms. It places traditions inside the community which are adjusted and carried out every year, including the power structures of the community. Becoming part of the group and being a follower of older members becomes part of one’s identity, which is due to the member aligning their views with the views of other members. “‘Going along’ —through willing allegiance or mere submission—is a form of identification because it shapes the way we experience our own power and thus contributes to defining our identity” (Wenger, 1998, p. 196). This is especially important when looking at how newcomers to the community act and feel when they first join the community.

Identity Formation within Culture

When forming our own unique identity, looking at culture is essential because we are born into cultures, and as we move through life, we become members of other cultures while sometimes leaving others. Green (1995) states that “cultural background surely plays a part in shaping identity; but it does not determine identity” (p. 163). At the same time, a group of people who share similar identities becomes a culture (Bruner, 1990).

There are two types of culture: interest-based cohorts that are voluntary, and cultures that are based on parts of your life that you cannot change. For example, race and ethnicity are cultures you cannot change, while choice of activities, social groups, and location are voluntary, interest-based cohorts. “For interest-based cohorts, conscious choice is involved in skill development and joining up with others who similarly value or take part in the activity” (Turino, 2008, p. 115). Marching band is an interest-based cohort, which attracts students due to the culture that has been built around the activity.

Schools typically foster voluntary, interest-based cultural cohorts. Kincheloe (2008) writes that a focus on cultural building “generates knowledge, shapes values, and constructs identity” (p. 58). Bruner (1996) explains that without the central building of culture in the classroom, students will lose out on meanings, rendering the education process useless. Stublely (1998) suggests that the group’s culture, or lack thereof, is evident in their musical performance. Ensembles that share a common vision and values will be reflective in their performance; those groups will have common goals for the performances that may be evident to the audience. For example, if a group has worked to

build a certain sound, and they all share in the same beliefs on what the group should sound like, they will be striving to achieve that sound during a performance. In the marching band setting, culture and identity form a cyclical relationship, with each one influencing the other, and may become apparent in their performances.

Multimembership

When looking at the nature of identity formation, it is important to remember that we are members of multiple communities of practice. In the marching band, that could include students who identify strongly with the group, such as section leaders or drum majors, or it can involve students who are intruders, newcomers, or students who identify more strongly with another community on campus, such as an athletics team or a club. Membership is more of a range and not a simple “yes or no.” Matthews (2017) states that marching bands connect to many other communities, such as the school community, the student body as a whole, and athletic groups, particularly the football and cheer teams.

We belong to many communities of practice: some past, some current; some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities. (Wenger, 1998, p. 158)

Multimembership can be thought of as a member’s social trajectory (Wenger, 1998). This trajectory is not linear, as it can take many twists and turns, it can break off and go another direction, and it can change in an instant without warning. A member of a community can be influenced by other members in a social setting (Fenton-O’Creevy et al., 2015a). For example, students who are part of the marching band may gain feelings about the marching band due to the opinions and experiences of those in another one of

their communities of practice. In other words, their alignment in other groups affects their alignment in the marching band. An individual's identity is a woven tapestry of all of their lived experiences within their different communities of practice.

Musical Identity

Humans start to form musical identities early in life, and those musical identities never stop evolving. Because music and culture are so intertwined, "people use music as a means to establish personal and social identity" (McKoy & Lind, 2016, p. 35). Music also plays a role in the culture that people are a part of, for example, at weddings, ceremonies, funerals, celebrations, and other holidays. The cultural influences a child experiences play a role in their musical identities. Children's early musical identities are heavily influenced by their parents, and as they reach adolescence, they begin to discover their own musical identities (McKoy & Lind, 2016). As adolescents, children start to discover their own musical identities around the same time as they start to discover their beliefs and opinions, which are often separate from their parents in an effort to become independent.

Not only does culture affect musical identity, but interactions with peer groups and other social factors also play a role (Butler, et al., 2007). "Vygotsky's basic idea that 'we become ourselves through others'—that our social relationships with others form the basis of our own individual development—has led indirectly to our own emphasis on the importance of individual identity in musical development" (Hargreaves, et al., 2012, p. 138). Students' peers help them to discover new music, and it gives them a mutual understanding amongst peer groups of what the meaning of the music is, and what makes

their music “good.” Music is often connected with peers and may help students reach a point of nostalgia later in life after hearing a particular song (Turino, 2008). For example, many couples have a song that they dance to for the first time, which, over time, reminds them of that person, or an event such as a first dance at their wedding. The same can be said of students in marching band—they might hear a song they performed with peers many years after graduation which in turn can create a sense of remembrance and joy in the reflection of those memories.

Schools foster an environment where students can be encouraged to discover their own identity, and music educators, too, should support students in the discovery of their musical identity (McKoy & Lind, 2016; Silverman, 2022). Giving them the resources to explore music, exposing them to different musics, and allowing them to form opinions and make judgments about music is a key way that music educators can support musical identity development.

Marching band can help students develop a greater sense of musical identity by harnessing the cultural forces the marching band is built upon, as well as the social interaction that is inherent in marching band programs. As Heselton (2011) notes, “Marching band captivates many students by giving them a sense of belonging and identity” (p. 24). This identity is fostered on the field, provides students with motivation, and gives students a significant advantage in developing musical identity development (McKoy & Lind, 2016). In turn, students who have a supportive and enriched development of their musical identity often become full members of a community of practice, which enables them to develop their musical skills even further than without

positive identity development (Hargreaves, 2012; DeNora, 2000). When students are full members who identify with the group, they are more apt to become fully engaged in the practices of the group. This engagement is one reason why students with positive identity development develop more musical skills. In a marching band setting, it could be their visual skills (i.e. marching footwork details or choreography details) that are improved upon.

Leadership

Leadership plays a crucial role in the social structure and cultural structure of a marching band. Leaders are full members who help guide younger members on their path to full membership within the activity. Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015b, 2020, 2021) have evolved their beliefs on what they call systems conveners, which is a specific type of leader within a community of practice. Marching bands have many different leadership styles and levels of engagement in the practice of leadership that can affect the ability and success of the group.

Systems Conveners

Systems conveners are much more than leaders in the community of practice; one of their greatest strengths is that they use the social landscape of the community in order to form partnerships, find common areas of mutual learning, build relationships, and develop common goals, especially between diverse sub-communities and across boundaries (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b). These systems conveners are also interested in bottom-up leadership, or focusing on the entry level, or sometimes thought of as the “lower level” members of the community, where they strive to make a

real difference in others' lives, and do so with flexibility and adaptability, as opposed to strict guidelines or rules (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). This helps to promote new partnerships between all stakeholders and build diverse and synergistic communities of practice across many boundaries (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b, 2020, 2021).

“All communities of practice depend on internal leadership, but healthy communities do not depend entirely on the leadership of one person. Leadership is distributed and is a characteristic of the whole community” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b). In the marching band, there are three key systems conveners that are integral in the development and success of the ensemble. The first one is the band director, who oversees the program as a whole. This person is responsible for managing the other systems conveners and giving them the resources and the agency (Wiggins, 2015) to succeed in their roles as leaders. The next level of systems conveners are the drum majors, who manage and oversee the section leaders, provide on-field leadership where the band director is frequently not present, and are the main problem solvers of the ensemble. The final level of system conveners are the section leaders, which is a team of students assigned to their section to oversee all the members in their sub-community. These section leaders build close relationships with those who are in their section, and reach across the boundaries of other sections to form connections across the band, as well as to be the first line of defense in conflict resolution.

Crafting the Call

One role of all systems conveners is to craft a convening call. Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2021) state that a convening call is:

An invitational narrative to bring people together from across the social landscape. The convening call needs to speak to people's understanding of the world and inspire them to join the convening endeavor. To work across contexts, the call is often adapted for different groups. (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021, p. 22)

A convening call is a common vision for the community (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b), but more than just a goal, it “sets the stage...and guides action” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). The call is differentiated for all potential stakeholders. In the marching band, this message is going to be different for new members, new parents, returning members, returning parents, students in leadership roles, administrators, and so many more.

The intention of the convening call is to “find a meaningful entry point for people to become involved” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021, p. 58). This call has to resonate with their feelings and beliefs, inspire others to take an active role in the community, and bring them together under a common goal.

Earning Legitimacy

In order for the community of practice to become recognized by outsiders of the community, members must first be seen as a legitimate community of practice. Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2021) explain that “systems conveners endeavor to find enough legitimacy to work across boundaries and extend their sphere of influence. This includes building relationships and networks, as well as leveraging their own trajectory

through the social landscape” (p. 22). In order for the group to seem legitimate, the leader at the top—or in the case of the marching band, the band director—needs to be accepted as the legitimate director of the ensemble. This is more than just knowing how to do one’s job; this is building relationships and seeing all members of the community as individuals and members of the community that share a common goal. Even though the marching band is an entity of the school institution, that does not mean that it is automatically a legitimate or accepted group within the greater school community (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021).

After the group sees legitimacy in their leadership, they can then strive for legitimacy in the larger school community. Systems conveners in the ensemble must work across boundaries to inspire all stakeholders to support their cause. This involves not only the band director, but the students of the ensemble, who have a duty to listen to other members of the greater school community, and to build personal relationships with those outside of the marching band community.

Identity Work

The formation of one’s identity is a task that systems conveners use to influence the community of practice. Conveners are open and support the formation of new identities so that they “can create new narratives about what is possible or who they can become” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021, pp. 22-23). Conveners also need to be aware that their work can cause others to dis-identify with parts of an individual’s identity. To support harmony in the greater school environment, conveners must also be supportive and knowledgeable about other communities of practice located within the

school and have non-competitive feelings and feedback about the other communities to their membership.

As leaders support the formation of one's identity, they are helping with the transformative aspirations of the individual, both as a human being and in the context of the community of practice's future. "Identity work is at the core of systems convening—understanding who people are and helping them see themselves differently" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021, pp. 107-198).

Cultivating Agency

Conveners believe in uplifting the spirits of the community and they do that by allowing agency and ownership to be shared amongst the entire community. They want to give the community the power to act in the best interests of themselves and the community.

Systems conveners welcome bottom-up initiatives. A core element of their work is to open avenues for people to have their voices heard and their perspectives taken into account. This entails new forms of capacity development that bring people together to learn from each other and discover vehicles for their agency, individually, and collective. (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021, p. 23)

Conveners know that by allowing for strong agency within the community, they are allowing transformation within the lives of the community, and it allows the collective work of the community to be more visible to other communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021).

The work of systems conveners is to promote the growth of mutual agency within the community of practice. To do this, conveners change the power structures of the

community away from traditional top-down leadership and put emphasis on shared ownership of the community. This results in a more democratic community that values other members' ideas and generally results in a more positive and successful atmosphere that is growth-driven.

Power Structures

“Systems conveners have to deal with established hierarchies and power—strategizing how to work with formal and informal power relationships” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021, p. 23). Power is hard to manage in a community of practice—conveners want to share the power with the membership, but they have to be careful not to give any one entity too much power, otherwise dissatisfaction may occur with the direction of the group and may cause unwanted friction in an effort to take power back (Freire, 2017). The goal of the systems convener is to share power with membership in an organized fashion that promotes agency and identity work (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021).

Power struggles often lead to conflicts within the group. These power struggles can happen between any stakeholder in the marching band: between the students, between the director and students, or between parents and/or administrator and director. Systems conveners focus on navigating conflict while ensuring an appropriate

distribution of power (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Conflict is essential in the growth of the community of practice and according to Coyle (2018), conflict is “the lifeblood of any organization, the key driver of creativity, community, and cohesion” (p. 66).

In a marching band setting, there is an inherent standard hierarchy of power. On the top is the band director, followed by the drum majors, and lastly, the section leaders. The band director must give up power to allow for ownership and agency among the students. Allsup and Benedict (2008) describe a traditional band director role where the director plays the role of the dictator that does not allow the student to have power or disagree with them, thus taking away their ownership and agency in the program. Davison (2007) recommends a facilitative style of leadership as well, as opposed to a dictatorship, for both students and teachers alike.

Other power struggles that may ensue are among the drum majors; they need to consider the communities’ feelings and beliefs into their leadership style, while also giving up some of their power for the group to lead from the front of the ensemble. From there, the section leaders need to have power to have the freedom to teach and direct their section, while also building connections with those members of their sub-community. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the members of the ensemble who do not possess a

leadership role. For them to be successful and not feel oppressed, they need to know that their voices can be heard and that all systems conveners respect them. When everyone in the ensemble shares power, growth and success are imminent.

Articulating Value Creation

“Systems conveners have to find ways to keep articulating the value of what they are doing to different audiences. This includes their accountability to their own organization where their work may not even be recognized” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021, p. 23). This is different than crafting a convening call; this kind of message takes the role of program advocacy for those outside of the classroom.

A teacher-convener’s job is to be able to articulate why something is important. With their students, they need to be able to tell them the value of what they are learning and why it is important. When students find value in their work and are able to make it relevant to their lives, they accept the lesson or skills as important knowledge, and they strive to achieve in that area.

Teacher-conveners must articulate this value on multiple fronts and to different audiences (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021), including the parents of their students. Articulating the goals to them typically helps to get them involved in the program. The goals for parents might be different than the goals of the students. For

example, most of the parents of students will not understand the musical jargon that is used in the classroom, but articulating the extra-musical values of marching band (i.e. leadership skills and social skills) might enable them to allow their students to become members, or encourage them to become enthusiastic volunteers.

In addition to the parents, band directors must constantly articulate the value of their content area to their administration. Directors need to show administrators the band program has worth to the school and district, and that it is worthy of support. This might be through the sharing of festival or competition scores to prove positive press and optics, or through the discussion of the extra-musical values music programs may bring to students in the district. Reimer (2003) argues that extra-musical values should not be the sole reason for the music program's existence. While this is true, the majority of stakeholders outside of the classroom are non-musicians who may not understand the musical value of what the students in the program are learning, yet highly value the extra-musical outcomes.

In our next chapter, we will explore the methodological foundations of this study, where we will use a qualitative methodology, borrowing from both phenomenological and ethnographic techniques to discuss the research design and data analysis.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

For my dissertation study, I will employ a qualitative methodology to examine how culture is formed, grown, and advanced in the context of a marching band, over the course of a marching band season. Qualitative methods will provide a naturalistic setting for data collection through fieldwork and interviews, providing a holistic and inductive lens for data analysis.

Qualitative Research

Often when people think of research, they may first think of quantitative research where research is conducted in isolated laboratories, testing hypotheses, with statistics that give quantifiable and replicable results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, Patton, 2002). Qualitative research, on the other hand, is conducted in the context of the real world, is emergent, and focuses on lived experiences. Qualitative researchers use thick description to share transferable findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell & Poth 2024; Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen 1990).

Research Design

Qualitative research is naturalistic, meaning that it takes place in the real world. Qualitative researchers do not attempt to isolate one particular topic or idea, but rather see the larger picture.

Qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. The phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally in that it has no predetermined course established by and for the research such as it would occur in a laboratory or other controlled setting. Observations take place in real-world settings and people are interviewed with open-ended questions in places

and under conditions that are comfortable for and familiar to them (Patton, 2002, p. 39)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that classrooms are ideal places for qualitative research since “the researcher frequents places where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur” (p. 3). In addition, observing students and teachers in classrooms allows the researcher to be provided with context for the research since they are viewing events where they occur. Location is key, as qualitative researchers acknowledge that human behavior is impacted and influenced by its setting and context. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007)

Naturalistic researchers may choose to include phenomenology, which “describes how one orients to lived experience” (van Manen, 1997, p.4). The goal of phenomenology is to be able to experience and describe various phenomena within the lived human experience. Researchers who are phenomenologists look for a deeper understanding of meaning and meaning-making in the everyday activities of humans.

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences...it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it. So, phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world (van Manen, 1997, p. 9)

Phenomenology begins with unobtrusive observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and study of the participants. Phenomenologists then begin to notice social interactions as they start to gather data about a particular phenomenon. Since “all knowledge is socially constructed” (Wiggins, 2015, p. 14), social interaction becomes the basis of what

educational researchers may investigate and how those social processes affect the participants and their view of the world.

Phenomenological inquiry begins with silence. This “silence” is an attempt to grasp what it is they are studying by bracketing an idea the informants take for granted as true. That is, researchers act as if they do not know what it means and study it to find out what is actually taken for granted. What phenomenologists emphasize, then, is the subjective aspects of people’s behavior. They attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their informants in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives. Phenomenologists believe that multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality. Reality, consequently, is “socially constructed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 25-26)

Researchers in the field of anthropology commonly study the culture of different groups that share similar beliefs and interests (Patton, 2002. Geertz, 1973). This is referred to as ethnographic research, which has found its way into other fields of research, such as education and health care (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Many anthropologists operate from a phenomenological perspective in their studies of education. The framework for these anthropological studies is the concept of culture. The attempt to describe culture or aspects of culture is called ethnography. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 30)

Researching in ethnographic studies has similar research methods as other types of naturalistic qualitative research; it is “establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). One of the most important aspects of ethnographic research is the use of thick description—a detailed descriptive narrative to describe the events taking place in the research, with an emphasis on the context of the events, as well as how the participants’ actions are perceived.

Ethnography, then, is “thick description.” When culture is examined from this perspective, the ethnographer is faced with a series of interpretations of life, of commonsense understandings, that are complex and difficult to separate from each other. The ethnographer’s goals are to share in the meanings that the culture participants take for granted and then to depict the new understanding for the reader and for outsiders. The ethnography is concerned with representation. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 31)

Geertz (1973) describes thick description similarly; he compares it to untying all of the metaphorical knots a culture has woven together to make it unique and that the job of the researcher is to get acquainted with it and then start determining how to pull it apart for the reader.

Ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with...is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. (pp. 9-10)

When designing qualitative research, it is difficult to plan out everything that may happen or control the data, as it is unfolding in real time and in the real world. In quantitative research, one can manipulate the situation or isolate certain aspects of the experiment to control the results to a degree. In qualitative research, because it occurs in the context of life, you cannot know your end results; the data is emergent from the fieldwork.

Naturalistic inquiry designs cannot usually be completely specified in advance of fieldwork. While the design will specify an initial focus, plans for observations, and initial guiding interview questions, the naturalistic and inductive nature of the inquiry make it both impossible and inappropriate to specify operational variables, state testable hypotheses, or finalize either instrumentation or sampling schemes. A naturalistic design unfolds or emerges as fieldwork unfolds. (Patton, 2002, p. 44)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) concur, stating that “people conducting qualitative research develop a focus as they collect data, they do not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test” (p. 2). As the data appear during fieldwork, flexibility is required to shift the research focus (Wetherell & Noddings, 1991).

Qualitative studies must be flexible because they are open-ended in nature. Researchers commonly use open-ended questioning techniques to elaborate on the data collected during field work or to allow participants the opportunity to elaborate on meaning in context. “Design flexibility stems from the open-ended nature of naturalistic inquiry as well as pragmatic considerations. Being open and pragmatic requires high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty as well as trusting the ultimate value of what inductive analysis will yield” (Patton, 2002, p. 44).

Quantitative and qualitative research differ regarding the sampling size of the participants in a study. In quantitative research, one might send surveys to hundreds of participants to find a numerical majority in your study. In qualitative research, researchers look at data in smaller samples, which may only be one person (for example, in a case study). Qualitative researchers use smaller sample sizes to immerse ones’ selves in the lives of others and to understand how a few people, or a small group understands and makes meaning. Qualitative researchers are looking not just for breadth of information, but also for depth.

Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, even single cases...selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth. Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly in order to generalize with confidence from the sample to the population that it represents (Patton, 2002, p. 46)

The goal of qualitative research design is to produce research that is generalizable. The final analysis of the data needs to be applicable to the consumer of the research so that they can directly apply the research to their own setting. “When researchers use the term generalizability, they usually are referring to whether the findings of a particular study hold up beyond the specific research subjects and the setting involved” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 36). Qualitative researchers use smaller sample sizes to foster transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and present a more in-depth final product.

The logic and power of probability sampling derive from its purpose: generalization. The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002, p. 46)

The goal of transferability is to provide the data to the reader so that they can make their own judgements and apply them to their own situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Collection

Qualitative data is gathered through three main sources: “(1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observations; and (3) written documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 4) and can produce “quotations, observations, and excerpts from documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 47). Direct observations are the starting point for qualitative data. With the researcher as the instrument (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), they observe the phenomenon under investigation and take field notes, write transcriptions of audio and video recordings, and look for themes in the observation. Interviews are typically used to gain participants’

insight into the phenomenon under study. Written documents are often studied to gather insight into participants' thinking and potential reasoning behind their actions, especially in educational research.

Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. The data from observations consist of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behavior, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience. Document analysis includes studying excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys. (Patton, 2002, p. 4)

Open-ended questioning is used because it "allows the informants to answer from their own frame of reference rather than from one structured by prearranged questions" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 3). Patton (2002) confirms this by stating that "the purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (p. 21). This open-ended design also allows us to see the emergent data discussed previously as well as to see "how people...think and how they come to develop the perspectives they hold" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, pp. 2-3). The overarching goal of gathering qualitative data is to make meaning of the lives of others. "'Meaning' is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives. In other words, qualitative researchers are concerned with what are called participant perspectives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 7).

Data collection in qualitative research is experiential and may be quite personal. Compared to quantitative research, in which the data often covers large numerical data of pre-designated questions, qualitative research requires researchers to go into the field and form personal connections with participants to view phenomena in their most natural state. From the participants' perspectives, they are an integral and personal part of the data, as they are sharing their stories and commenting on the researchers' observations, many times adding their own views and opinions into the research process and artifacts.

Fieldwork is the central activity of qualitative inquiry. 'Going into the field' means having direct and personal contact with people under study in their own environments—getting close to the people and situations being studied to personally understand the realities and minutiae of daily life. (Patton, 2002, p. 48)

Part of the data is also reflection or recollection of events. This act of reflecting on the data is experiential because the researcher has lived it with the research participants; it was not only something we experienced ourselves, but we are reliving it through our reflection. "Phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through" (van Manen, 1997, p. 10). Schön (1983) describes this as "reflection-on-action," where the practitioner will reflect on their experiences after an event has concluded. This is different than "reflection-in-action," which is adjusting your actions during the event, similar to improvisation or thinking on your feet. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) summarize Schön's ideas by stating that Schön "describes reflection-in-action as research in a practice context in which the researcher in action is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the

unique case” (p. 35). In educational research, data is often collected by a teacher-researcher (Kincheloe, 2003). Teacher-researchers have the advantage of already having a close bond with their students in their study, giving the teacher-researcher credibility and trust through prolonged engagement. This advantage allows the researcher to already have trust with the students; because the students trust their teacher, it enables reflection-in-action to take place.

Qualitative researchers must display what Patton (2002) refers to as “empathetic neutrality.” “Empathy develops from personal contact with the people interviewed and observed during fieldwork. Empathy involves being able to take and understand the stance, position, feelings, experiences, and worldview of others” (Patton, 2002, p. 52). Thus, empathy includes being able to see, acknowledge, and accept the feelings of others. Qualitative researchers, in their observation, need to be able to read and discuss the participants’ thoughts and feelings toward the phenomenon being studied. Empathy is engrained naturally in qualitative research. “Empathy develops from personal contact with the people interviewed and observed during fieldwork. Empathy involves being able to take and understand the stance, position, feelings, experiences, and worldview of others” (Patton, 2002, p. 52).

The second part of Patton’s phrase above is neutrality (2002). As researchers, we must strive to remain neutral on what is being studied. In spite of our inherent biases, researchers must remain neutral to tell the stories of the people in our study. Our role is to live alongside the experience of the participants and tell their stories with little bias and

no judgment—or, if needed, to be transparent regarding bias (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000).

Any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study. This simply means that the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths. The neutral investigator enters the research arena with no ax to grind, no theory to prove, and no predetermined results to support. Rather, the investigator's commitment is to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered. (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

Finally, due to the emergent nature of the data, we can expect the data collection process to take time and be a dynamic and fluid development throughout the project.

Change is a natural, expected, and inevitable part of human experience, and documenting change is a natural, expected, and intrinsic part of fieldwork. Rather than trying to control, limit, or direct change, naturalistic inquirers expect change, anticipate the likelihood of the unanticipated, and are prepared to go with the flow of change. (Patton, 2002, p. 54)

Researchers should be ready to pivot with the data and expect the unexpected as they are collecting and analyzing qualitative data.

Tools for Trust

The most important element of any qualitative study is trust—trust between the researcher and the participants, as well as trust between the researcher and the consumer of the research. Both the participants and readers of the research need to know that the researcher is trustworthy; the researcher needs to honor commitments to the participants, present their culture, conversations, and findings with empathy, and admit their biases. Because of the personal and experiential nature of qualitative research, trust is imperative to present a positive and truthful view of the participants.

Trust is not a matter of the personal characteristics of the investigator...Rather, it is a developmental process to be engaged in daily: to demonstrate to the respondents that their confidence will not be used against them; that pledges of anonymity will be honored; that hidden agendas, whether those of the investigator or of other local figures to whom the investigator may be beholden, are not being served; that the interests of the respondents will be honored as much as those of the investigator; and that the respondents will have input into, and actually influence, the inquiry process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 303)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline many of these tools for trust, starting with prolonged engagement. “Prolonged engagement is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the “culture,” testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents and building trust” (p. 301). In order to have a trustworthy qualitative research project, one needs to be in the field for an extended amount of time. In educational research for example, one cannot be in the classroom for just one day, as one cannot establish rapport with the students or teacher, and that singular visit may have been on a day where there was a fire drill or school assembly, which can distort the data (p. 302). Qualitative researchers need to be in the field long enough to establish context (p. 302) and establish a trustworthy relationship with all participants (p. 303). Bresler (1996) concurs with Lincoln and Guba and states that “prolonged stay is necessary in order to develop familiarity and determine important issues” (p. 134). This prolonged stay helps to establish a professional and personal relationship with the participants so the researcher can help to guide conversations, interviews, and research in a more personable way, allowing the researcher to dive deeper into the lived stories of the participants (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Prolonged engagement also “establishes participant trust which allows a researcher access to what is

often a semi-private setting and observation of participants behaving naturally” (Bresler, 1996, p. 134). Being visible and active for a length of time in the culture and community under study builds trust and helps the researcher to become immersed and part of the community.

Persistent observation also serves to establish trustworthiness. While prolonged engagement is about establishing trust and context of the study, persistent observation provides the details about the participants and their life experiences.

If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences—the mutual shapers and contextual factors—that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied, the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristic elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail. If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304)

Persistent observation in educational research can be achieved in a variety of ways. It could be multiple interviews of the same participants, or it could be rewatching and reflecting upon one recording session. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation go hand in hand, as the only way to get the details needed for persistent observation is to be in the field a prolonged amount of time. It is also the converse, as prolonged engagement is only possible with persistent observation. Both of these tools are important for the researchers to be able to become part of the community they are researching, and allow the researcher to become not just an observer, but part of the narrative.

In order to join the narrative, to become part of the landscape, the researcher needs to be there long enough to be a sensitive reader of and questioner of situations in an effort to grasp the huge number of events and stories, the many twisting and turning narrative threads that pulse through every moment and show

up in what appears to the new and inexperienced eyes of the researcher as mysterious code. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 77)

Triangulation occurs when researchers use multiple methods to collect data and to confirm implications of the research. “The concept of triangulation by different methods thus can imply either different data collection modes or different design” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 306). For example, in addition to prolonged observation, the researcher may need to use persistent observation with multiple participants to find similarities in their findings. Researchers might complete multiple prolonged observations or use any tool multiple times to triangulate their findings. The researcher could use different modes of collecting data to triangulate. For example, I might video record a classroom, but I might also have voice recorders near key informants to pick up and confirm what is evident in the video.

We believe it to be the case that the probability that findings will be found to be more credible if the inquirer is able to demonstrate a prolonged period of engagement, to provide evidence of persistent observation, and to triangulate, by using different sources, different methods, and sometimes multiple investigators, the data that are collected. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 307)

Another tool for trust is peer debriefing. “Peer debriefing...is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Peer debriefing is, in essence, discussing your research with a peer to receive feedback. This is a very common occurrence in doctoral cohorts as well as among higher education research faculty members. During peer debriefing sessions, researchers share ideas with others

who have the expertise to look at the data with fresh eyes to confirm or explore new findings, and to challenge each other with open-ended questions to help guide the research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that peer debriefing is a way for others “to respond in ways that help us see other meanings that might lead to further retelling (p. 60). It is a way to facilitate feedback from the viewpoint of a research consumer, answering questions about credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, and subjectivity.

Multiple purposes are served by such a debriefing. First, and from the point of view of credibility, foremost, the process helps keep the inquirer “honest,” exposing him or her to searching questions by an experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil’s advocate...the debriefing provides the opportunity to develop and initially test next steps in the emerging methodological design. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308)

The final tool for trust is negative case analysis. “Negative case analysis may be regarded as a process of revising hypotheses with hindsight. The object of the game is continuously to refine the hypothesis until it accounts for all known cases without exception” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 309). Essentially, negative case analysis is finding another research study, or possibly a contradicting piece of data within the research and explaining it to the reader. By explaining why something is an outlier, you are making a stronger case for your own study. This method helps to make the data fit together and conform. “Negative case analysis eliminates all “outliers” and all exceptions by continually revising the hypothesis at issue until the “fit” is perfect” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 312).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data is analyzed with a focus on primarily inductive reasoning, as opposed to primarily deductive reasoning. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) note that “they do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypothesis they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (p. 6). As noted earlier, the data is looked at through an emergent lens, as researchers are not controlling isolated parts of an experiment, but rather observing participants in a holistic context (Patton, 2002). Another purpose of the inductive analysis of data is to synthesize information to gain more transferability.

The strategy of inductive designs is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge from patterns found in the case under study without presupposing in advance what the important dimensions will be. The qualitative analyst seeks to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions that emerge from the data without making prior assumptions or specifying hypotheses about the linear or correlative relationships among narrowly defined, operatized variables...Theories about what is happening in a setting are grounded in and emerge from direct field experience rather than being imposed a priori as is the case in formal hypothesis and theory testing (Patton, 2002, p. 56)

Qualitative data analysis is conducted holistically, meaning that one researches the entire continuum of why a particular phenomenon is happening. Researchers pay attention to the context of the phenomenon to see how the context influences the entire situation as a whole. This is the opposite of quantitative research, where researchers are usually looking at one particular piece of the whole.

Researchers and evaluators analyzing qualitative data strive to understand a phenomenon or program as a whole. This means that a description and interpretation of a person’s social environment, or an organization’s external context, is essential for overall understanding of what has been observed during fieldwork or said in an interview. This holistic approach assumes that the whole is

understood as a complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts. The analyst searches for the totality or unifying nature of particular settings—the gestalt (Patton, 2002, p. 59)

In order for qualitative research to be holistic, the researcher must gather data on the setting in which the research is taking place. Researchers also look at all of the social situations and the context of those social situations, and how those are influenced by the setting. Each case is unique to the researcher, where they are able to find transferability between the cases, even though holistic contexts might vary between different participants in the same study.

To support holistic analysis, the qualitative inquirer gathers data on multiple aspects of the setting under study to assemble a comprehensive and complete picture of the social dynamic of the particular situation or program. This means that at the time of data collection, each case, event, or setting under study, though treated as a unique entity with its own particular meaning and its own constellation of relationships emerging from and relating to the context within which it occurs, is also thought of as a window into the whole. Thus, capturing and documenting history, interconnections, and system relationships are part of the fieldwork. (Patton, 2002, pp. 59-60)

In addition to researching participants in a holistic context, qualitative researchers are also concerned with all other contexts in which phenomena occur. “Qualitative researchers assume that human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs, and whenever possible, they go to that location” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 5). The physical setting is very important to qualitative researchers, as it can induce different responses from participants. In educational research, even by just moving classrooms and changing context, it is enough to influence the data. In quantitative research, context is often stripped out of the equation, and the answers the researchers are searching for take context out of the research to present one singular part

of a whole. Patton (2002) states that “naturalistic inquiry preserves natural context. Social psychology experiments under laboratory conditions strip observed actions from context” (pp. 62-63). When one takes context away from the research, the data may be changed enough to misconstrue the findings. Context is needed to present meaning to the consumers of our research (Patton, 2002).

Subjectivity and bias are another piece of the research puzzle that must be addressed in research findings.

“Subjectivity” means that one needs to be as perceptive, insightful, and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and in its greatest depth. Subjectivity means that we are strong in our orientation to the object of study in a unique and personal way—while avoiding the danger of becoming arbitrary, self-indulgent, or of getting captivated and carried away by our unreflected preconceptions. (van Manen, 1997, p. 20)

We all have biases towards most things, even if we do not realize that we do. Peshkin (1988) states, “subjectivity operates during the entire research process” (p. 17). We are frequently reacting to our own subjectivity throughout data collection and analysis and need to focus on “objectively studying the subjective states of our subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 37). In educational research, especially in a teacher-as-researcher role (Kincheloe, 2003), educators may have students with whom they have bonded well, whom they might have a favoritism toward for one reason or another. We might believe that certain parts of the curriculum are less important than others. No matter the case, researchers should document their subjectivity in their field notes. “Qualitative researchers guard against their own biases by recording detailed field notes that include reflection on their own subjectivity...we are talking about limiting observers’ bias, not

eliminating them...All researchers are affected by observer's bias" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 38). Bresler (1996) agrees and states that "as objectivity is impossible, subjectivity should be acknowledged, examined, and negotiated rather than suppressed" (p. 133). As researchers, our subjectivity plays a critical role in the development of our research practices and subsequent analysis of data.

Research Design

I entered into this study with the goal of presenting transferable and trustworthy findings using a variety of methods while also using my own lens as a teacher-researcher (Kincheloe, 2003).

Data Collection

Qualitative data was gathered through three main sources: "(1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observations; and (3) written documents" (Patton, 2002, p. 4) and produced "quotations, observations, and excerpts from documents" (Patton, 2002, p. 47). Data collection took place during a standard marching band season, August through October.

Data collection began with focus group interviews, the first main source that Patton (2004) discusses.

The essential purpose of focus group research is to identify a range of perspectives on a research topic, and to gain an understanding of the issues from the perspectives of the participants themselves. The group environment enables a broad range of insights on the research issues to be gathered in a single sitting. (Hennink, 2014, p. 2)

Focus groups have a few differences from what may occur in individual interviews or group interviews. Where group interviews are about extracting the data from the

participants, focus groups emphasize group collaboration, which in turn, allows participants to “share their views, hear the views of others, and perhaps refine their own views in light of what they have heard” (Hennick, 2014, p. 3). As the researcher, I sought to encourage these interactions and to be attentive to how the group interacted with each other while moderating the questions (Barbour, 2007, Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999, Vaughn et al. 1996). These focus groups allowed me to “understand context, culture, [and] social norms surrounding the research issues” (Hennink, 2014, p. 16) within the marching band and helped produce a different type of data that I would have been unable to gather with individual interviews. However, after transcribing and coding the data, I was able to go back to individual students and ask for clarity or elaboration. I was also able to identify students who had different stories that were able to provide in-depth personal narratives about the social structure of the marching band and their lived experiences.

I also interviewed non-student subjects who had a personal stake in the program. This included my student teacher, who was with me at the start of the season and was able to see the growth of the group and provide an emic perspective of the band program’s cultural development. I interviewed one of our band camp staff members, who was a pre-student teacher from the previous year. She was able to see a change from one year to the next, due to her prolonged engagement with the program. Finally, I interviewed another band camp staff member, who is also an alumnus of the student band program. This alumnus proved to be a helpful key informant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) because they were a student at this school under the former director for two years, and

then became a student of mine when I came to the school in 2016. This staff member was student teaching at a neighboring school, and was able to bring in a unique perspective. These three interviews of pre-service teachers served to triangulate the data gathered from the students, as well as help form appropriate questions during the course of the study.

The second source of data was from observations from myself, using the researcher as the instrument (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As the band director, I was responsible for direct instruction to students, which provided me with an emic perspective of the students and their lives. During the majority of our rehearsals, I was in the marching band tower, overseeing the entire band. This semester, I also had a student teacher, who would occasionally run rehearsals from the tower, and I was able to go to the ground level and interact with students, observing their interactions.

As their band director, I built a strong rapport with the students, and whenever issues arose, whether they pertained to our show or of a personal nature, many students felt comfortable coming to talk to me, allowing me to ask questions and observe parts of their life outside of marching band that still pertained to the study. This was important, as many of those students may become key informants in this study.

The data collected from observations was rich in direct quotations, ideas, and themes; from this, I produced a written notebook with stories and conversations that were not recorded. I attempted to capture expressions and feelings in narrative form that served as the written documents that Patton (2002) states is the third main source of data in qualitative research.

After and during data collected, the data was coded. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence—capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3). Following Saldana’s (2009) method, the data was coded for similarities using multiple cycles; the first cycle was based on keywords of the participants, while the second cycle (and beyond) was focused on longer passages. This helped to create the themes of qualitative research. “Coding is not just labeling, it is linking” (Saldana, 2009, p. 8). Once the codes were linked together, I searched and (re)searched the data for emergent themes.

Data Analysis

During the analysis phase of the study, I began to use an inductive lens during data collection. The data was also observed within a holistic context. It is important, as the researcher, to be aware of and transparent about any personal bias. These are all students that I have a relationship with, and for most of them, over the course of many years. I have known all of these students, and many of their parents, on a personal level and must acknowledge that I had preconceived biases about them. Those were revealed and addressed throughout the study when appropriate.

This study seeks to build trust with the readers, as qualitative research relies heavily on the reader being able to find credibility in the observational data that has been collected. This was done using many of the tools recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The first is prolonged engagement. Since the marching band season is three months, I worked with these students and observed them at rehearsal for multiple months.

This timeline supported persistent observation. Not only did I record focus groups, interviews, and review those multiple times, searching for little gestures and interactions within those conversations, but I also interviewed the same groups and individual students multiple times. These two forms of credibility were also met with triangulation within the research study. I engaged with data from multiple sources to support emergent findings as explored by analysis of the data.

During this process, I relied on my doctoral cohort during peer debriefing sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to share data with other students working on their own projects who could look at the data with fresh eyes and provide critical feedback about method, data collection, and findings.

Context of this Study

This study took place at a suburban high school in a large city, which borders the largest city in the state. The school district encompasses the northernmost part of the city. The students at this school came from a working middle class community. The school was also the assigned school for a few neighborhoods in of another city. The school is designated as a Title I school with about 45% of students having the free/reduced price lunch designation.

This study focused on the marching band that is part of the school music curriculum. Every year there are over one hundred students in the marching band, averaging around one hundred and fifteen total students. While this program is entirely extracurricular, the majority of these students come from one of the school's three band classes that meet during the day. There are a few students (less than 5) who cannot take a

band class for various scheduling reasons, and marching band becomes their only source of music education during high school. There are also multiple students that come from other schools to participate in marching band since it is not offered at their home school (less than 10). The colorguard section is comprised of mostly non-band students, however many of those students are involved in the school's choir program, which is led by the band director.

This is a naturalistic study where I was the band director, and all the participants were my students. This enabled an emic, or insiders' view of the culture within our marching band (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The students in this study ranged in age from 13-18. Many of them I had in my classes throughout all of their high school career. About twenty-five percent of the students (9th graders) were first year students in the band program. However, I had a relationship with many of these students, as I was also their elementary band and general music teacher in their earlier years.

Finally, there were a few interviews with adults that worked with the band, including: a pre-service educator hired to work the school's band camp, an alumni pre-service music educator hired to work with the clarinets year-round, and a student teacher completing his pre-service requirements with me. They helped to provide a more etic, or outsider's, view of the culture surrounding the marching band (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), while still holding some emotional stake in the program and the students' lives.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL LEARNING AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE IN A MARCHING BAND SETTING

In this chapter, I will explore the themes that emerged from the data. The triangulated data included here were collected from focus groups, individual interviews, and my research journal. I will investigate how students in the marching band utilize social learning and its impact on their perception of the community of practice.

Social Learning

Social constructivism and learning play a large role in marching bands (Shively, 2015; Holsberg, 2009). Considering the number of students in a marching band can be well over one hundred, within a large field that becomes the classroom, it is impossible for the director to be the sole facilitator of knowledge. It is important for the students to take ownership and be involved in the social learning of marching bands (Ma & Hall, 2018). Many students, such as section leaders, drum majors, and other older members of the ensemble who do not have a formal title, take on the role of more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978), oftentimes using an apprenticeship model (Rogoff, 1990) to guide newcomers in the community.

Social Learning within the Marching Band

It is common in marching bands for students to learn from and with their peers. While the director and other band staff often provide the students with musical, visual, or choreographic instruction, many social lessons are learned through marching band. When interviewing students in the marching band community, they all described non-musical

lessons that they learned through being members of the community—lessons they all agreed would serve them better in the future than just fundamental music and marching knowledge. Jane, David, and Jayla shared similar lessons about opening up and learning how to communicate with others.

Jane: I really learned how to communicate with people and not be scared of people. I've learned to let myself open up. I was really scared socially of people. So, it taught me how to be a person who functions with other people.

David: How to be more outgoing. Before marching band, I was a very enclosed person. But with how nice everybody was, it was just so easy to talk to everybody. And it gave me so much confidence in my everyday life.

Jayla: I've learned that it's okay to step out of your comfort zone and explore different people. I would never have been as social as I am if it were not for marching band. I used to be a very shy person. I used to be very closed off with no friends. And then I got into band and it just kind of brought the social side out of me. And I was able to connect with so many people. And I learned that it's okay to go out and try new things and step out of your comfort zone.

One would not have thought that Jane started out her high school years as a shy and quiet student. Jane's social experience was rooted in her experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. She started middle school online and missed out on key social and

academic benchmarks for an entire year of school. The marching band provided her with social education that enabled her to effectively communicate with her peers, which is essential in any position she will encounter in her adult life.

Both David and Jayla, older than Jane, encountered the pandemic during the end of their middle school experience. While the social and academic decrease did not affect them as much as Jane, they still believed that marching band was the activity that helped to bring them out of their closed-off and shy demeanors to become skilled communicators. They both started out as introverted individuals who grew into section leaders and mentors for younger students in the community. Jennifer was more specific in the type of communication she gained from membership in the community.

Jennifer: I learned how to take criticism from others. And not every piece of criticism is a personal attack, but rather, it is a way to make us all better performers and people.

Jennifer explained that taking criticism from her peers and adult leaders is a form of communication that differs from just talking about personal opinions. Criticism is focused on strengthening one's skills, and good criticism fosters improvement as a human. One of the drum majors called this type of criticism "constructive criticism"; this will be discussed later in depth. Criticism may feel like an attack on one's skills or character, but it is not always meant that way. Learning to give criticism without harshness and learning how to take criticism without discomfort are life skills that are

required in today's world beyond high school. While Jacki discussed how to take criticism, Naomi discussed how she learned how to make friends and give criticism in marching band.

Naomi: I learned how to be a better friend and person to other people in the band. Everyone gets down and upset sometimes, especially like in the heat. So just remembering not everything should be taken to heart has kind of helped me, and remember not to be as hurtful, or mean, or aggressive when talking to other people when they need help.

Naomi focused on how to give criticism, which is an equally important skill as learning to accept it. She also does not see giving criticism as something negative; she perceives it as helping others. She mentioned that she did not want to be “hurtful, mean, or aggressive” while giving criticism. She attempted to communicate with her peers without forcing her opinion or feedback as the one and only way to accomplish their task, albeit hard to do when one is spending so much time outdoors in the heat! Learning how to give criticism appropriately is a way to build friendship and trust within the community. Sophia expanded on the role of trust in the social learning of a marching band.

Sophia: I feel like teamwork and cooperation with others were the most important lessons I learned. Because when you're in marching band, you really have to rely

on each other. It's not just yourself on that field. And it's not only just about playing the instrument, it's relying on others to help learn their own parts and formations, too. On top of that, you have to trust that everyone else is in the correct formation so that you can guide yourself into the formation.

As Sophia talked about teamwork and cooperation, she felt that trust played an important role in both of those skills. Dagaz (2012) mentions that trust is one of the most important aspects of a successful marching band, as one has to trust other community members, not just that they are in the right spot, but that they also “have your back” personally. Building trust is essential to working in a team, as teamwork requires one to rely heavily on others.

Apprenticeship within the Marching Band

Students learn from more knowledgeable others while traversing the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), typically through a process described by Bruner (1976) as scaffolding. Quite often, the more knowledgeable other who provides the scaffolding is a peer—not a teacher or an adult. Peer scaffolding is ingrained in marching bands because of their size and because the director is located far away in a press box, scaffold, or podium. Rogoff (1990) presents a view of apprenticeship that is defined as a social activity where more knowledgeable others support the development of skills for the mentee. The marching band that I have studied used apprenticeship at every opportunity to help develop not only musical and visual skills, but also social norms and constructs. What is interesting about this is that while most observers would assume the

section leaders are providing the mentorship to their section, many students confirm that is not the case.

Sophia: It's not just section leaders. I see it within like groups of people. If they notice someone is lacking behind or doesn't understand a certain part, they'll go up to them and say – “you're doing this wrong, here's how to properly do it.” And then they can help each other through that.

Jacki: A lot of it's with the section leaders and the seniors. They tend to take the underclassmen under their wing a lot. Like for me, it was Naomi. I was standing in a corner for the first like 20 minutes of guard practice, and then she basically took me into the conversation under her wing. It was honestly the kind of push I needed to feel like I belonged here.

Jordan: Someone could be really struggling with something and can't get it, and people, even someone who isn't a drum major or isn't a section leader, will step up and say “do you need help with this? Are you struggling with this?” And they're really helpful.

Ian: The second that you joined marching band, the juniors and seniors become role models, and you are already looking up to them. There's a lot of mentorship for sure, and not just from the leadership team.

Madeline: I like that the upperclassmen do take pride in working with the sophomores and the freshmen. I feel like every freshman has their senior in band that helps them get through that first year of high school.

Jayla: Everybody in the section helps each other. Everybody is helping to correct things when they see something that they know isn't right. It's like everybody in the section, even though we have section leaders, is a leader in their own way. And I like that!

All of these students believed that they were all responsible for the final product that the marching band produces. They pitched in to help mentor other students as senior members of the community. Wenger (1998) explains that this is how communities continue to thrive after members leave; newcomers are mentored by older members who often do not hold a leadership position or other designation. These systems of students mentoring others is identical to how Rogoff (1990) describes apprenticeship; “an active learner participating in culturally organized activity with a more skilled partner” (p. 39). This is rooted in Vygotsky’s theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, where a more knowledgeable other helps to scaffold (Bruner, 1976) a less knowledgeable other so that they can learn the task on their own, until they can do the task independently (Vygotsky, 1978).

Apprenticeship is an important part of the life force of a community of practice, as it helps to support its newer members so they can experience success and eventually, the newcomers will take their mentors' place once they become older members of the community. Often, these mentorships will expand beyond the community of practice, as David explained.

David: Band kids - A lot of them are super close. And you see them helping out younger kids with everything. Schoolwork, friends, relationships, and many other aspects of life.

These mentorships were important for new students in more contexts than just marching band. These older members worked to ensure that the newcomers were protected and nurtured. I often witnessed conversations in the band room of older students checking in on younger peers during the first weeks of school. "Do you know where to find this teacher?" "Were you able to get into your locker?" "That teacher is tough, let me know if you need help understanding their lectures!" These are all examples of mentor questions that occur outside the context of the marching band classroom, but they were cultivated due to their membership in marching band.

Adults also play a mentorship role, even when that is not their main purpose.

Naomi: Whenever the director is on the podium and you have the staff around them, you're showing us all: the section leaders, the drum majors, and everyone

else, how a team works together and how they can be a cohesive unit. And it's helping to show us how to work together.

The teacher plays a vital role in helping to forge the mentorship relationships between students. Band directors who give the students ownership and agency, and model good teamwork among their peers, create an environment where student mentorship can thrive. The adults working with the community can also model other positive interactions with their staff as well, such as how to handle conflict and how to lead with positivity instead of aggression. The students will create the environment that the band director allows them to create.

Communities of Practice in the Marching Band

The Communities of Practice model (Wenger, 1998) is essential in establishing the social learning and apprenticeship opportunities that are described previously. In this next section, I will explore the community members' viewpoint of how community plays a role in the marching band. I will also share firsthand narratives that newcomers to the community shared when they felt accepted into the marching band community, and the impact that intruders have in the community.

Perceptions of Communities of Practice

In this section, I will explore through open-ended interviews how students perceive different aspects of how the marching band community is built, evolves, and how the needs for belonging among members are met. We will first explore what students' perceptions are on what brings the band together and how the community is

formed among the students' commonalities. We will then discuss why students continue with the program. What keeps them coming back to the field in extreme temperatures during the summer months, late nights during football season, and even on holidays, while their peers are at home with their families? Finally, we will see how students handle conflict, which arises at every rehearsal and performance, yet the members of the community find ways to strengthen their knowledge, bonds with each other, and performance.

What Brings the Band Together?

Study participants were asked what they thought brought the band together, and they overwhelmingly gave similar answers. As one might expect, the first answer described the love and passion everyone in the ensemble has for music and the marching band art form. Taylor explained:

Music. The love for music that everyone shares. Even in the colorguard, you can see, even if it's not performing the music by playing it, it's definitely by performing through visuals. And I think everyone, if they didn't like music, they wouldn't even have thought about joining the group. They would have just stayed as far away as possible. But definitely everyone's love for music combined. You can really see it when they perform. Everyone's either smiling or, you know, if they don't feel like smiling, you can hear it in the way that they perform and the way that the music and choreography comes out in our performance.

Taylor explained that music is the commonality that unites the ensemble and provides a draw to the community to attract new members (Wenger, 1998)—even those who might not have a musical background enjoy being in the ensemble and performing to the music. Taylor also explains that while performing, students are exhibiting physical signs of happiness and joy. Music is the activity that the group is rooted in and is what initially draws other members in to participate and become a member (Cumberledge & Acklin, 2019)

Participants shared that the other thing that brings students together is the promise of social activities and collaboration between friends to put together a unique performance. Erica explains the importance of connection and communication:

One thing I think that brings the band together is definitely communication. And just having similar interests and forming connections. Also, being able to perform together I think definitely brings like more trust. Trust is the outcome of communication and connection, which is essential in a group like marching band.

Erica explained that the drive to form connections and have open communication is an important thing that drives people into the community. Many students find the social benefits of being involved in the community to be more important than musical ones. When students enter the community, they meet new people, communicate with others who share similar interests, and build connections with like-minded individuals (Abril, 2012). Erica also echoed one of the key points that Dagaz (2012) states; trust is a

social outcome of the marching band community that is important in retaining members and is also present in successful marching band communities of practice.

What Keeps the Students in Band?

After students join the community because of their passion for music, why do they stay? While there are other ways to gain musical experiences while in high school, what keeps them coming back to the marching band community? Many students who were interviewed expressed that the success of performances leads them to return to the community year after year. Below is a quote from Taylor that summarizes how and why many students continue to return to the community.

It's definitely the outcome. Being able to see everyone that I've created a connection with, and then being able to see everyone in their element, performing and working their hardest, and then later in recordings or pictures, being able to see how that looks all put together, plus all of the dedication and time that we've put into it, that's what keeps bringing me back. It's performance. It's like you get that adrenaline rush and it's the most fun thing I've done all year!

There is truth in the old adage that “success breeds success.” During the first performance of the season, which is in front of all of the parents and family members of the marchers, one can feel the energy, even after these students have spent the past eight days in the heat, learning drills, choreography, and music for eight hours a day. The students’ first performance is like none other, and that energy carries on into their next

performance which could be weeks later. A successful performance for these members “continues to stimulate the audience's cerebral cortex to produce a series of neurotransmitters such as dopamine, endorphins, oxytocin, etc., the role of these neurotransmitters is to promote the continuous excitement and emotional performance of the human brain” (Jin, 2024, p. 285). Music performance stimulates the brain to provide a dose of “feel-good” hormones. That feeling is one that helps keep students involved in the activity, despite the physical, and sometimes mental challenges of the activity.

Another reason that many students continue to stay in the community is that student identities become intertwined with the activity itself. Many students cannot fathom not being a part of this community. Jayla explained why she continually joined marching band every year.

I felt like if I did quit band, I would have felt like an emptiness inside of me. I feel like band is such a big part of my life that if I just didn't do it, I don't know what I would have done with my life. How would I fill in that empty void that I use band for? Everybody motivates each other to stay in band, stay together. And I do enjoy and love the music and so many fun pieces.

Jayla expressed that she would be lost without the band; she would feel emptiness because she has had so many experiences through her years in the marching band community that are hard to replicate elsewhere. She has grown to be a pivotal member of the community, working hard to become a section leader, growing and

gaining confidence in her musicianship, and reflecting on the past and enjoying her memories.

Constructive Conflict

Conflict is unavoidable in all communities—I observed many conflicts among the students: instances of students having disagreements about where their spots are, or the space between them, section leaders in conflict with their section because they did not handle a situation to everyone’s liking, and the drum majors in conflict with the band because the basics block visual warm-up was not up to their standards and the rest of the band disagreed.

During Drum Major interviews, the section leaders and director had an opportunity to interview candidates for the drum major position. Dean, one of the candidates who would eventually be appointed Drum Major for the following year, was asked about how to handle conflict. Dean mentioned that *“you can turn most conflict into constructive conflict.”* He elaborated and mentioned that *“conflicts can be worked on together with level heads, reflection, and working together towards a common goal.”* Dean’s words sparked inspiration for discussion following his interview, with section leaders thinking and sharing ways they can use constructive conflict for the band in the future. Here is one such example where constructive conflict worked between section leaders:

Teacher: Let's talk a little bit about some conflict. How have you seen conflict handled in the marching band?

Taylor: I think it's been handled pretty well when the guard had issues with other band kids. They would be stepping on our stuff or not giving us enough time or courtesy when we had to change flags. When we brought it up to other marching band kids, we explained that it was disrespectful and hurtful to our section. I think it was handled pretty well. The people that were once being very rude to us changed after they were confronted. I think it was handled well and made us feel more important within the group.

Teacher: Were you happy with how it was fixed? Who helped resolve the conflicts?

Taylor: I think it was a mix between our section leader, because they were friends with the other section leaders and could work on conflict with them without that initial friction, but also our marching band director and coach because they support us, encourage us, and help with these sorts of issues.

Taylor describes a conflict where the instrumentalists in the band were showing disrespect towards the group's equipment. This is a common occurrence between the colorguard and the instrumentalists due to the lack of familiarity between the two sections for what each contributes to the ensemble. This conflict was settled without tears or aggression, simply because the section leaders had the agency to solve these conflicts with minimal adult intervention. This is an example of how community members are able to work through their conflict constructively, and in the best interest of all members of the ensemble.

There is also occasional conflict between me, the director, and the students, with the most prominent example being when the band disliked former dance breaks and visuals that I had developed. They handled this with humor and constructive conflict. Instead of refusing to participate or complaining, a group of section leaders deemed the choreography the “white man shuffle” as they poked fun of the band director in a similar way that he often would—with humor. The director in turn took that constructive conflict and vowed to choreograph the next show without including those dance moves. This resulted in the director learning how to find inspiration and write new choreography. Both the students and the director were pleased with the outcome, and the experience allowed for multiple positive outcomes; first it gave the director a chance to interact with his students in a new way and learn a new skill and more of what his students valued. Second, it allowed the students to observe how the director processes constructive criticism and how he can better his instruction based upon student input. This led to a more mutually respectful relationship between the director and the rest of the membership.

Newcomers: A View from New Members

Newcomers play an important role in any community, especially in one as time-sensitive as a school ensemble. As older students graduate from high school and leave the ensemble, newcomers enter and begin to take on the roles that the graduated members held. Because of this, it is important for those new members of the marching band to feel supported and as though they are members of the community as soon as possible. Therefore, providing them with a welcoming atmosphere is essential to the entire

ensemble's success for the next four years. If students do not believe they have the support needed or are unwelcome in the group, whether that be emotional, social, or academic, they may choose to leave the community, which, if it happens enough, can cause the ensemble to eventually fold and cease to exist. In this section, I will share data exploring how new students described the ways they felt accepted during their first marching band season and how this affected their future in the ensemble.

Freshman Stories

In a typical American high school, freshmen are ninth-grade students. They may be new to the building and only know the students who were in their middle school. In a district as large as the one I studied, not all students from one middle school continue to the same high school. Incoming freshman students play a vital role in the organization, as they replace members who have graduated or cannot fit the time commitment into their schedule. Below is a collection of narratives from various ninth-graders and other newcomer students, sharing when they believed that they achieved acceptance.

Grayson's Story

Teacher: When did you feel that you were accepted by the band?

Grayson: I felt like after that, halfway through that full week of band camp, when I was, I was starting to finally come out of my shell, I guess. And I started to actually talk to people like David and like Kathryn. I started to talk to them, and they started to talk a little bit more to me, and we started to have conversations. And then that kind of just grew from just my section into the actual band. And I

went to like, other sections, and I talked to other sophomores and juniors from other sections. And over time it just grew and grew.

Teacher: Why do you think it wasn't on day one that you felt accepted?

Grayson: I was very nervous. That week before that first day of band camp, I was terrified. I had gotten my lyre and everything, and then I just kind of sat in my room, just contemplating. But then when I got there, it wasn't that bad, but I was still kind of nervous to talk to anybody. They had just put me through the basics and everything. But then it was still just kind of nerve wrecking to be in front of all the seniors and everything.

Teacher: You mentioned coming out of your shell. Did anybody in particular help you come out of your shell?

Grayson: I think I would say probably my whole section. Especially the section leaders.

Teacher: Any leaders in particular?

Grayson: David.

Teacher: What did he do to help bring you out?

Grayson: He was just funny during band camp. So, I kind of just laughed. And I made a couple comments about what he was doing during spirit week.

Teacher: Okay.

Grayson: Because he goes all out for spirit week.

Teacher: Yes, he does.

Grayson: I just made a couple comments about that. And then we started having conversations, like I said before, and that kind of just grew from there. So, I would say probably him especially helped me like come out of my shell.

Grayson was a freshman trumpet player in the marching band; prior to entering the community, he was uneasy about what this could mean for him. A newcomer to a community that was well established, his sense of unease originated inside himself. He admitted to not feeling accepted on day one because he was so nervous that he did not communicate with others in his section. It was not until his section leaders brought him into the conversation and made him feel welcome that he gained the agency to participate in discussions and collaborate with his section.

Grayson mentioned that it was his section leader, David, who helped—as Grayson put it, “to bring him out of his shell.” David was a student who used humor and his loud, boisterous personality to ease newcomers’ minds and show them that it is okay to be yourself and to have fun in the community. During band camp, he would do things that most newcomers would consider “embarrassing.” He would wear a coconut bra and hula skirt during beach day; he would dye his long hair and put it in pigtails for section color day, and would even wear a Speedo-style bathing suit during the end of band camp water balloon fight. Not only would he do these things, but other members of the community would laugh and embrace him for being so silly. This signified to the newcomers that the community is a safe place to be yourself, where the members of the community are supportive of each other. Once Grayson saw David’s personality and saw that David was

accepted and felt safe to make rather outlandish choices, Grayson was able to mitigate his feels of not belonging and become a full member of the community.

Grayson mentioned to me in passing that he applied to be a section leader for his sophomore year of marching band. When asked why he put himself out there and took the risk to do so, Grayson shared that it was his section leaders who inspired him to do that. Grayson explained that seeing his section leaders “welcoming in” the freshman class and having fun, while still getting to work on the music, was something he wanted to give back to the organization. As mentioned previously, newcomers are vital to the organization, as without new students coming in to replace the graduating students, the organization would cease to exist. This is also true of the student leadership team; the student leaders need to provide the students with the agency to become leaders themselves, with the intrinsic motivation to play a part in the success of the ensemble.

Kendall’s Story

Teacher: So you're a freshman. You're a new marcher. When did you feel like you were fully part of the marching band? When do you think you were accepted by everybody?

Kendall: Probably like the first day of camp.

Teacher: First day of band camp...WOW! What made you feel accepted by everybody?

Kendall: Being able to get to know everyone and open up to them.

Teacher: Is there anybody in particular that really helped to bring you into the group?

Kendall: Probably the section leaders.

Teacher: Section leaders. Anyone in particular?

Kendall: Sadie and David.

Teacher: Okay. What did they do to make you feel welcome during marching band?

Kendall: They would be open and honest and be available to talk when I needed them outside of marching band.

Teacher: Do you still talk to them? You're not in class with them and marching band is over. Do you still talk to them at all?

Kendall: I talk to Sadie every day!

Kendall has a different perspective than Grayson. It is possible that she may have felt comfortable with the marching band community early on because she was involved when her sister was a member of the community. Her older sister graduated three years prior and was a section leader to the current section leaders that Kendall mentioned. She also has an older sister who was a part of the program before that! As an elementary and middle school student, Kendall and her mother would volunteer at band camp to make lunches, provide water, and ensure the members of the band were supported. While she had not been an active member of the community, she was a peripheral (Lave & Wenger, 1991) member of the community, seeing the problems, the rigor, and the product over multiple years at a young age. She became immersed in the standards and culture prior to

her being a full member of the community. I suggest that this plays a major role in her feeling of acceptance on the first day of camp.

Kendall also mentioned the influence of her section leaders, particularly Sadie. As I talked with Kendall informally, she explained that she had trouble adjusting to high school life and leaned on Sadie for encouragement and support. Sadie provided her with wisdom about how to navigate high school life. This apprenticeship was the support that Kendall needed to feel successful during her first year in high school. Kendall also mentioned that the mentorship that Sadie gave her is exactly why she applied to become a section leader in her sophomore year; she wanted to provide younger students with the same comfort and success that she felt her first year.

Jack's Story. Jack had a similar story and background as Kendall that supports what she shared.

Teacher: So you were a freshman marcher this year. When did you feel that you were accepted by the group as a whole?

Jack: When they brought me my sign and they all texted me. They welcomed me in on the first day. I didn't feel left out. They, like, brought me into it.

Teacher: Do you think because you have a sister that just graduated last year—do you think that that played a part in it?

Jack: Yeah, because my sister was friends with them, which made it easier for me to talk to people. If I need help or something like that, then I have people that I'm

already friends with.

Teacher: So you knew them ahead of time?

Jack: Yeah. Many of them have been over to my house and still come over to visit my sister.

Jack's story is very similar to Kendall's; both had sisters in the marching band, which introduced them to the culture, the people, and the expectations. The biggest difference between them both is the age of their sisters. Kendall's sister had been graduated for a few years, and only a select few students knew her, while Jack's sister graduated the prior year. This allowed Jack to become more immersed in the community because he lived with someone in the community more recently. Instead of going to his section leaders for help, he would often go to his sister since she was conveniently located right down the hall. This also guaranteed a smooth transition from middle school right into high school.

Reggie's Story. While some students have siblings to introduce them to the community, most students do not have that luxury. Here is one such student, Reggie, who entered the community and took a little longer to feel acceptance from the membership.

Teacher: As a freshman, when did you first feel that you were accepted by the marching band?

Reggie: I would probably say my second week when everybody kept talking to me.

Teacher: How did it feel that first week before people were really talking to you?

Reggie: I was tired, I didn't want to be there at all. But then progressively, I liked it way more and talked to more people.

Teacher: And why do you think you liked it more?

Reggie: Maybe because I was connecting with new people and making new friends.

Reggie did not have any experience with the community prior to starting in marching band. In fact, the middle school he came from only had five other students in the program move to his new school; all of his other friends went to another high school. He mentioned that he did not want to be at marching band rehearsals, but then, as he made new connections, he wanted to keep coming. Connection is crucial in forming friendships and a sense of belonging; simply joining the community does not guarantee a genuine connection. One must connect with others before friendship happens, which is evident in Reggie's conversation.

Reggie craved the human connection that Cumberledge (2021) states was missing from marching band during the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of belonging cannot be understated and is a key factor in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. If students do not feel like they belong, they will not be able to reach their fullest potential in the marching band activity and eventually reach the self-actualized state. The feeling of belonging is an essential part of building a community of practice that is successful and thrives.

Different Pathways: Taylor's Story

Taylor had a different pathway into the marching band community than most other newcomers. As the majority of newcomers have taken years of band in middle school before entering marching band at the high school, Taylor was a junior, just starting her journey. Taylor participated in choir at another school in her freshman year, before transferring to our school in her sophomore year. Many of the choir members are recruited to join marching band as part of the colorguard, as they typically do not play instruments but have a musical background. As Taylor spent more time in choir and became a member of that community of practice, she became friends with many other students who were in the colorguard. Taylor made the decision to join the marching band because of her connections in her choir class. It was a way to spend more time with her friends, earn her physical education credit, and further put her musical training to use.

Teacher: This year you were a new marcher. When did you feel like you were accepted and a full part of the marching band?

Taylor: I think, it was during the first week of band camp. It was after we had finished song one, and we were working on it and making it all together, and everyone was just complimenting each other. "Oh my gosh, you guys, it's so good. You guys look amazing." There were a few little things that we needed to work on, but pretty much all the sections were saying we did so good and definitely, the parent preview was also a very good event. Everyone was just complimenting

each other. We did that as a team, as a big group. And that was probably when I felt very accepted.

Teacher: I see you smiling. That's awesome.

Through my study of the community, I have recognized that the guard and band often operate as two separate units, as the instrumentalists have been together in classes for years, and the colorguard enters this community with little exposure to the students in the ensemble. This can lead to a level of distrust between the colorguard and the instrumentalists. This may happen because the colorguard becomes newcomers at different grade levels; instrumentalists enter as band students from middle school; however, the guard students may join the guard because their friends join. Taylor was no exception to this, joining the marching band as a junior after missing her freshman year at the school. Because of this, she felt like many of the other freshmen in the ensemble; scared and anxious as to what the future holds. Taylor, through other conversations we have had, is aware of this history between the colorguard and the rest of the ensemble.

Despite the void of understanding between the colorguard and the instrumentalists in the ensemble, Taylor mentions the positivity that was shown to the guard after their first week of band camp. While the guard arrives at camp a few days earlier to focus on their choreography, many of them are new to marching, and some do not have a musical background, so the concept of counting beats is new to them. Even after an intense few days of learning choreography, learning how to march, and then throwing in ten pages of drill, they still received compliments for their contributions to the band. This positive

environment is essential to a community member's feeling of acceptance into the community. While many programs (both musical and non-musical) focus on the faults of their team and use negative reinforcement, this band program focuses on the positive qualities and results of students. Renwick and Reeve (2012) explain that this type of approach leads to more intrinsic motivation to participate fully and a greater internalized value of oneself in their role in the community. This in turn causes students to build their own self-esteem and agency, which then serves to encourage them to return and give back to the community.

Different Pathways: Natsuki's Story

On our first day of school, I met Natsuki, a foreign exchange student from Japan. As a sophomore flute player, she was assigned to both the freshman band and the middle band classes. At the end of the first week of school, we had class meetings where each class was assigned a time to hear a presentation from the principals on expectations and standards. She was one of two students still remaining in my classroom during the freshman presentation. She asked to practice, which she was allowed to do. As I did some organizing of the music library and prep work for next week's rehearsal, I heard Natsuki performing the piccolo obbligato to John Philip Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever," as well as the Poulenc "Flute Sonata." It was clear that Natsuki was a much more advanced flutist. With a phone call to her counselor, she was moved into the top ensemble. During her first day in that class, she sat next to the flute section leaders from the marching

band, who, upon introducing themselves, asked, “How do you feel about marching band?”

Natsuki was one of my first exchange students. Very shy and quiet, you never heard her talk, but we could always hear her playing her flute. A month into the marching band season, she asked to join marching band. Because of her advanced skill and high level of agency, I invited her to attend rehearsals for a week to see if she would be able to keep up. Upon watching her, it was evident that she would be able to learn the drill and memorize the music, all while switching to the piccolo.

About halfway through the school year, Natsuki finally started to open up, talking with other students, particularly other students of Asian descent. Tatum (2017) explains that this occurs when students with similar racial backgrounds share many of the same traits regarding home life, upbringing, and lived experiences. We formed a bond because my wife is part Japanese, and I was able to share stories about food, her family, and her lived experiences with which she might be able to relate. It was at this point in the year that I was able to interview her. What I thought would be a quick interview turned into an hour-long conversation about music, life, and the sharing of her experiences in America.

I first sought to find out more about her band experience in Japan. Natsuki shared that band in Japan is an after-school club that meets three times a week, each for three hours. This leads to nine hours of rehearsal a week, compared to an hour every day, for a total of five hours a week here in the United States. When I asked about marching band in particular, she said that only a few high schools offer marching bands; rather, it is

primarily an elementary school activity. She explained that in Japan, as one gets older, most teachers desire to focus on “serious” music instead of performing in what is considered a novelty ensemble. This is similar to large university marching bands in the United States, where most of the membership are non-music majors, and many of the music majors are discouraged from participating so they can focus on their classical music training.

We then shared a few videos of bands from Japan. The videos she showed me of Japanese high school concert bands would rival the best college bands here in the United States. I showed her videos of the Teacher Parade where Japanese bands are often featured. The first one was the Tachibana High School Green Band from Kyoto. She said, “They are the best! They always win gold!” When asked about the ranking system, she explained that all the bands work toward a summer competition every year, where they compete for a gold, silver, or bronze ranking. She then explained that more than one band can receive gold, sharing that it was very similar to the idea of “band festival” that we have here in Michigan. The biggest difference, however, is that anything other than gold in Japan is equal to failure; members of the band and its director will feel shame if they do not perform at the highest level (Herbert, 2012).

It was at this point that I started to understand her background as it pertained to her prior music education experience. The expectation in her home country was to rehearse twice as much as the students in America, and to practice individually for hours every night, in addition to her academic studies. She explained that everything in Japan is

serious when it comes to school. Willson (1986) explains why Japanese bands are successful from a cultural framework:

The best Japanese bands are successful because they spend long hours in rehearsal; students take a prominent role in the organization, preparation, and administration of the ensemble; students participate in only one extracurricular activity; there is a strong sense of fellowship and cooperation; older students are involved in instructing the younger students; and the director is an absolute authority. (p. 47)

This also explained Natsuki's decision to focus only on band when she came to study abroad in the United States; she did not join any other clubs, athletics, or activities but is actively involved in every single band ensemble that was available to her.

When asked about her marching band involvement in Japan, Natsuki replied that she never had a chance to join when she was in elementary school, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Her main motivation for trying marching band was to become a member of as many ensembles as possible. She was also approached by Daisy, one of the senior drum majors, who was also of Asian descent, when the band learned of her arrival on the first day of school. By this time, the marching band had already been in full swing, and they were about to perform at our first football game. When Natsuki asked to become a member, I allowed her to join rehearsals until she was ready to perform the full field show. With the help of the entire flute section and her new friend Daisy, she learned all forty pages of drill and had her music memorized by the end of the week, excited to perform at the band's first football game.

Through this process, Natsuki became friends with about fourteen students. The entire flute sub-community had pitched in and welcomed her into the ensemble, helping

to guide her and teach her the basics of the marching band and field show in about five hours. When asked about the marching band community, she “doesn’t have friends, except band members.” She specifically mentioned her section and the other Asian members of the community. Natsuki explained that since she was so far away from her family, her newfound marching band community had taken the role of her family. As discussed previously, once one is “in” the community, a family atmosphere is provided, encouraging inclusion, comfort, and productivity (Wenger, 1998).

Natsuki’s story is one that exemplifies the need for a strong community of inclusion. Living thousands of miles away from her home and family, with a love and passion for music and learning, she found a community that accepted her and became her support system as she navigated life in a new country. When I asked her when she felt like she became a full member of the community, she replied that it was at that first football game, one week after she joined the community. She said that this was because they “created something complex and fun” that brought them closer together. Her introduction to the marching band was the one major event that allowed her to connect with her new school and with her new peers.

Intruders: Olivia’s Story

“Someone who occupies space but who, knowingly or not, does not honor the principle of mutual engagement of uncertainty becomes an intruder” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020, p. 23). In a marching band, an intruder can blend in very well. They are often well-liked, have friends in the ensemble, and occasionally enjoy being a part of the ensemble. Many students, at one time or another, become intruders to the

marching band; when it gets hot and exhausting, many students do not want to be a part of the ensemble. They disengage from the rest of the group, or lack the desire to be a part of or work with the group, to focus on their own personal needs, such as comfort, rest, and access to air-conditioning. It is important to note that sometimes intruders do not know that they are disengaged from the goals or mission from the rest of the group.

The vignettes below combine my experience with the clarinet section's account of one such intruder: Olivia. Olivia entered our school as a freshman clarinet player. She entered the marching band without realizing that she had not committed to the group's social norms. As time went on, she became increasingly disengaged and aware of her disengagement until her departure from the band program entirely.

As we transferred from the band room to the football field, the clarinet section leaders approached me. These three had just witnessed an argument between two freshmen; I needed to intervene. "Kevin and Olivia were fighting, and we don't know how to address it," one of them said. I asked the drum majors to lead the band in their morning basics while the clarinet section leaders brought both students to my office.

As I sat down with both students, it became clear that something was amiss between them. Kevin was a shorter student, clearly an easy target of bullying and name-calling, while Olivia seemed more "put together," charismatic, and had many more friends than Kevin. Both accused each other of bullying the other and

of establishing a pattern of bullying while in middle school. Both students were reminded of the rules and expectations of the band before they were sent back to join the rest of the band. Little did I know that this was the start of having an intruder among us.

During this first exchange, it became clear it was embedded with lies. Both students had similar stories: they had been bullied by the other student dating back to middle school. After investigating with the help of their middle school band director, it seemed there was a miscommunication between them years ago which started their feud. There was no trust between these two students, and due to the new nature of our relationship, there was no mutual trust between these two students and me. Kevin seemed more likely to be the victim of bullying, but regardless, I watched them both closely during the remainder of the season to see how their stories would evolve and how their positions and attitudes about marching band would grow.

As time went on, I started to see a pattern. Many students would come to me with stories of how Olivia was telling them something that was different than what she told other students. She was telling different stories about her life to different groups of students, all of which were untrue, but because of her charismatic nature, everyone in these different groups of students believed her.

At this midway point in the season, Olivia had an identity crisis. Trying so hard to fit into every subgroup of students, attempting to be a chameleon and blend in with everyone, she told them what they wanted to hear. The problem, however, was that when students try to blend in, they do not seek out different groups of students, and they tend to stay with the same friends. Unfortunately for her, many of the students who belonged to these different factions of students were multimembers in overlapping groups.

Toward the end of the season, Olivia started a rumor about what Kevin had said about one of their section leaders. While the story ended up being false, it created tension within the ensemble. The entire clarinet section did not trust anyone in their section; their section leaders had all threatened to quit, and the entirety of the section was not having a good time. Students were turning on each other within the section as all communication had broken down. Nobody in the section was engaged in the musical or social learning that marching band provides. Marching band, which provided a release from the stress of normal teenage life, was now the cause of the stress for many members of the community.

Olivia's lies became more and more damaging as time went on. It caused students to dread attending rehearsals, and many students became disengaged with the ensemble at this point. While there is always drama, with rumors among adolescents as students struggle to find themselves and form their identity, the band is usually a place of acceptance where rumors and drama are squashed and kept at the door. The sense of

community that some of these students had grown to love and identify with was quickly becoming the opposite of what they had come to expect: an additional chore as opposed to a place of passion and fun.

“Mr. Teacher...Mr. Teacher...did you hear about Patricia? She committed suicide early this morning!” Upon a conversation with Naomi, one of the clarinet section leaders, I asked how they learned of this information. “From Olivia...she is friends with her!” When trying to dig for more information, Naomi received a phone call. Patricia was on the other line and asked why everyone was calling her.

This is yet another example of a lie told by Olivia that threw the band into chaos. The loss of a friend causes grief and confusion in an adult’s life and can cause serious depression or other mental health crises in the lives of adolescents. In former vignettes, it was clear Olivia was struggling to find her identity within her new school and within the band, and here we see much of the same. Olivia was making up stories to become close to other students and make friendships. It was at this point that Olivia had no interest in marching band at all, merely a member of the ensemble for identity formation and friendship. As I will discuss in the next chapter, those two things are very important and prevalent in high school marching bands, yet with a focus on the musical and educational development of oneself.

Upon returning from the holiday break, after the season had been fully ended for a few months, Olivia had completely disengaged from all ensembles. She stopped bringing her instrument to class and participating in the community. Many members of the community refused to talk to her, and her presence was becoming a disruption. She was also hostile to all marching band staff, including the director. She ultimately decided to leave the community at the end of the year.

When Olivia made the decision to leave the community, it was a relief to many members. The section leaders focused on healing the members of their section; they hosted bonfires, organized lunch outings on half days of school, and focused on restoring trust in their section. Even a year after encountering an intruder, they were still healing, as many of the disruptions turned some students into enemies of other members.

Olivia's story demonstrates how intruders infiltrate groups and the havoc they can wreak on a social level with their peers. Olivia entered the marching band with seemingly honest intentions, to become a member of the community and connect with the music. While starting her marching band experience, she struggled to find her place in the community. She attempted to become a multimember within different factions of the band, but that resulted in members of the other subgroups finding flaws and developing negative feelings towards her.

Olivia's story may have much to do with her own personal identity. When she began her season in the marching band, she conformed her identity to what she thought the rest of her section wanted. She then tried to make friends with other sections of the

band but tried conforming her identity to what that sub-group wanted. This may have resulted in conflicting identities among different groups of friends, some of those within her own section. Presumably, that desire to become the friend that every group wanted was her social downfall, as her chameleon personality was exposed, and trust was broken.

Conclusion

Students involved with the marching band share a love of music and culture that is built over time and encourages members to continue with the activity for not just musical reason, but mainly social reasons. Students learn many lessons, both musical and social, with an apprenticeship model that is deeply ingrained in the fabric of the culture. The students, staff, and director all build a community of practice that is welcomes newcomers and handles conflict constructively. This is all done while intruders are sometimes present and disruptive to both the learning and culture of the community.

We can also see the importance of trust within a community of practice. Trust has to be had between all of the members, regardless of their title, up to and including the band director. Trust provides a space for the students and the culture to thrive and evolve, and it provides students with the opportunity to develop their identity into their most authentic selves. In the next chapter, I will present data and discuss how the identity of community members is affected from their participation in the marching band.

CHAPTER FIVE

IDENTITY FORMATION WITHIN MARCHING BAND CONTEXTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the themes that emerged from the data regarding identity formation in the context of the marching band. I will also explore, through data collected from both open-ended interviews and personal accounts, how membership in the marching band community became a central part of students' identities, and how that identity influenced other aspects of their lives.

A key construct in Wenger's (1998) theory on communities of practice is how those involved in the community develop their identity through the community of practice. I will specifically look at how students described their identity as impacted by being a participant in marching band. I will also share a firsthand account of one student's journey through the marching band program and how their identity was affected. In addition, I will look at students' sharing how their cultural identity through marching band led them to success or failure. Finally, I will explore how students who are members of other communities of practice within the school take their marching band identity with them into their other activities and communities.

Identity Formation within a Community of Practice

When one thinks about a band student, what comes to mind? In most American schools, there is a stereotype or basic profile that the majority of students fit into, and that can vary between schools. They all commonly have a passion for music, but as discussed in the previous chapter, they also have a desire to socialize with their peers in the

ensemble in a supportive environment (Wenger, 1998). Social factors impact a student's identity as they are shaped by their environment.

Marching Band Identity

Through the interview process, I asked students how marching band had impacted their identity and the data demonstrated that the reasons were primarily social instead of musical. Below, Devin explains that those who are not in the community of practice can also identify him as part of the marching band community.

Devin: I am known as a band kid...At least I know, at the magnet program. My teachers sometimes see me fidgeting and drumming a lot. I know I saw my chemistry teacher at a band event once, and she said, "Hi, Devin, it's nice to see you here in your natural environment."

Devin explained that he is frequently drumming on things in his other classes. It is not uncommon for students who are in the drumline to be seen hitting things with their fingers or pencils, or sometimes even verbalize cadences and new drumming rhythms. I have even witnessed this outside of schools at grocery stores or graduation parties of people I have never met, but it always turns out they are a member of their school's drumline. Devin's informal drumming has caught the attention of his chemistry teacher, who jokes with him when he witnesses Devin drumming. His teacher can tell he is a member of the community, as he uses physical motions to showcase his identity in class. While Devin rarely verbalizes that he is in the community, some students, such as Jacki,

explain that they use their community membership as a source of pride when talking to others.

Jacki: Honestly, I build a lot of my identity on being a part of the marching band. It gives me a place that I feel like I belong. When I describe myself, I go, "Oh, I'm in marching band." It is one of the things I always drop because it is part of who I am!

Jacki verbalized to others when meeting them that she is a member of the school's marching band. She saw this as a source of pride, as she mentioned this is a community that made her feel welcome and she relates to, so much so that it was a central part of her identity. This was also apparent in Jacki's mother, who was also in marching band; during every interaction I have had with Jacki's mother, she shared stories of her time as a member of a marching band. Students who are accepted into the community, embracing the norms and traditions of the community, take this identity that has formed into other areas of their life and frequently see themselves as an emeritus to the community upon graduating.

Kaia: I think marching band does affect your identity. Usually in school, it's difficult to find your people and find your group because there's such a societal norm and a stigma around being weird. If you like anime or video games, you're considered weird. You're automatically like out of that realm of being normal.

However, for band, it just felt like I could be myself. I was able to find my people and I've been with them since I started. I think marching band has really helped me find a place to be comfortable with myself.

Kaia explained that marching band helped her to find her peers who share similar interests and allowed her to be herself. Kaia, who is of Asian descent and a member of the LGBT community, found that marching band was able to give her the confidence to connect with students who shared a passion for music and allowed her to be her true, authentic self among her peers. This also translates to outside the band room—as she worked on her identity in the band room, she was more confident and more willing to display her identity outside of the band room. As she became more confident in her identity, she was elected student body vice-president. This was evident in other students as well, such as Naomi.

Naomi: Being in marching band, it's helped me come out of my shell a lot more. It's helped me be more open, more willing to talk to people and ask for help if I need it. It's helped me become a lot more of who I am right now. Before I wouldn't really talk to people; I was quiet. Marching band helped me come out of that shell a lot. Because marching band is where I started to become more social; it started to become the place where I found myself socially.

I observed that Naomi spoke a lot about coming out of her shell, meaning she became more outgoing and less shy and reserved. She had been able to practice her social skills, but also integrated marching band into her identity. Naomi integrated the positivity of the community while rejecting the social stigma that comes with being a member of the band community. This, in turn, allowed her to become more social and fit in with her peers. In her senior year, after her three years in marching band, she ventured into the choir program, where she took much of her marching band identity into the classroom and used it to form connections with those students, most of whom were not in marching band.

All of these stories share how students not only identify with being a marching band student, but also the effects on their identity outside of the marching band space. Students share that their time in marching band allows them to become more social and find their group of friends. Outside of the band room, they continue using these skills; enhanced communication skills that have been practiced, the location of more friends who share similar interests, and their outlook and positivity of the social spaces they create for themselves.

From “Kid in Band” to “Band Kid”: Jennifer’s Story

As the band office door burst open, there stood Jennifer. “I cannot stand my section!” she exclaimed.

Jennifer was a junior at the school, and outside of the band, she was seen as a defiant student whose attitude would sometimes cause negative consequences. In band,

she was disengaged but participated. This was a student who was never going to pick up her instrument after she graduated from high school and seemed to be in the band solely for social reasons.

“What is going on with your section?” I asked. Jennifer responded with a loud “all of these band kids are annoying and nerdy,” she said. Puzzled, I asked her, “Wait a minute...aren’t you a band kid too?” She smiled as she said, “I am NOT a band kid, I am a kid in band, and there is a big difference!”

Jennifer’s identity within the band triggered an inquiry while collecting data. The intriguing part of the above conversation was her distinction between being a “band kid” and a “kid in band.” When interviewed at the end of the season, Jennifer gave this response for the difference between band kids and kids in band.

Teacher: You identified as a kid in band but not as a band kid. Could you explain the difference?

Jennifer: Band kids are just weird and nerdy, and I was more normal. I have a life outside of band and don’t go home and practice every day.

Jennifer’s distinction between “band kid” and “kid in band” came down to their demeanor. While “band kids” are in band, they have a type of loyalty and excitement about the ensemble. Many of the students in band wear their membership as a badge of

honor; it becomes a core part of their identity, while this is the opposite for a “kid in band.” For a kid in band, they might try to hide their involvement in the ensemble; they might not wear the band apparel in the hallways of school unless required, they might not do any of the extra performances, and they might also be involved in other groups at the school.

Jennifer is describing the stereotypical band student portrayed in the teenage movies of the 1980s, a stereotype that some people refuse to ignore despite its inaccuracies. Students in these movies are often wearing thick glasses, consistently wear marching band apparel that makes them vulnerable to bullying, breathe heavily, have trouble talking to others, and may have many other seemingly undesirable features. In the 1999 movie *American Pie*, one of the main characters exhibits many undesirable traits while constantly using the tagline “this one time at band camp.” During my time teaching beginning band, many parents asked me if their child joining band would get them pushed into lockers. American society has placed a stereotype on students in band; the result is that those not involved with the activity have negative perceptions about a band student’s high school experience and identity. Jennifer still had these perceptions in her mind when she talked about “band kids,” which is why she attempted to distance herself from this stereotype by calling herself a “kid in band.” Even after clearing up her perceptions of the two phrases and her dislike for her classmates, I asked her what kept her involved in her school band program.

Teacher: When did you start to enjoy being in band?

Jennifer: When I switched to baritone in my sophomore year.

Teacher: Why was that the turning point for your band experience?

Jennifer: I connected more with the instrument because it was easier for me.

Teacher: So, what motivated you to try marching band then? Because you weren't in marching band your first year. What motivated you to try it your sophomore year?

Jennifer: There were students who always said that I wasn't in it because I couldn't handle it. I wanted to prove them wrong.

Teacher: That's it? You just wanted to prove you were better than a few band kids. Was there anything else?

Jennifer: I saw how much fun everyone else was having, especially some of my other friends who were a part of the band.

Jennifer's initial involvement in the program came after she spent a year at the high school. Her involvement was due to multiple factors: first, her mentality. Her motivation was to prove everyone wrong and that she could do it. Secondly, I was seeing a few of Jennifer's friends who identified as "kids in band" who saw some value in what the marching band had to offer. It is apparent that the value that she and her friends found in the band was for fun and social reasons, but not musical reasons. These reasons are also why Jennifer auditioned to become a section leader her senior year.

Teacher: So why did you want to become a section leader? Because you're still telling me at this point, in your junior year that you're not a band kid—you're a kid in band.

Jennifer: Because all of the other section leaders from when I was like in sophomore and junior year, I just didn't like the way they ran things. They really did not make me want to keep going in marching band.

Teacher: So, you were trying to prove people wrong or prove that you could do something?

Jennifer: Not so much with section leader. I think that was just me taking action because I disagreed with how things were going. There was also a moment when I came to complain about my section leader to you, and you said, "Why don't you interview and become a section leader then?" I never considered that until you said something!

This is where I began to see Jennifer mature in her narrative. She was now a fully participating member of the community and was making decisions about her future in the program. When Jennifer did show up for the leadership interview, she was poised, positive, and gave a clear and detailed plan for how she wanted to be as a section leader. Prior to her interview, I did not think she would be successful, but she changed my mind and flourished. As section leader, she befriended the freshman, encouraged them, and rehearsed her section differently than past section leaders, leading with empathy, positivity, and sometimes tough love when the situation required. Something clicked for

her, and it was at this point that I wanted to know when she made the transition from “kid in band” to “band kid.”

Teacher: When did you start identifying as a band kid? It seems like at this point in our story, you have bought into the values and traditions of the band.

Jennifer: Probably sophomore year when I had concert band with Anna.

Teacher: What about that experience made you a band kid?

Jennifer: My first year, I hated it. You switched me from trumpet to baritone, which took me a minute to get used to, but I ended up liking it. During sophomore year, that's when I got to play in band with Anna. She was in the same position as me a few years earlier with moving to baritone. She encouraged me and helped me out, and I even played two solos that year. I just did not go around telling everyone. I was a closeted band nerd.

The above narrative further adds that Jennifer was afraid of the judgment she might face from her non-band peers. She described herself as a “closeted band nerd,” meaning that this feeling happened in secret. She did not want to be judged based on the stereotypes described above. She also met someone and worked with someone with whom she could relate. Anna was the type of student who did what was asked and loved playing in band, but never showed a passion for the music itself. She was content being in band just because her friends were there. In this way, their identities were almost

identical by the end of Jennifer's sophomore year. I did ask Jennifer how many of her friends were in band, and she responded with the following:

Jennifer: Most of my friends are in band.

Teacher: If you had to give me a percentage of your friends in the school, what percentage of those friends are in band?

Jennifer: 90%.

Teacher: 90%! Why do you need to be a closeted band kid then? If 90% of your friends are here, the other 10% surely know that you're in band.

Jennifer: Well, I still have to keep that normal side.

Jennifer confirmed once again that she needed to appear “normal” to her other friends who are not involved in the community. She did not want to be connected to the social stigma of being a “band nerd.” She strove to hide this part of her identity from her friends, including those who were involved in the activity. The group of friends that she spent the most time with in band were very different: there was one group of friends that also tried to hide their identity, whom I witnessed her spending time with in the hallway, blending in like chameleons outside the band room. The other group was the stereotypical band kids; the drum majors, the ones whose whole lives revolve around band, and many kids who have that same personality and identity outside of the band hallway.

Overall, Jennifer is now a student who has become comfortable in band and feels successful within the program. This is the way that she connects with the school, as all of

her extracurricular activities, such as gymnastics, do not have any school affiliation.

Jennifer seemed to need band so she could feel connected to her school, be provided with appropriate social interactions that would help to shape her future behaviors and decision making, and to show visible growth in social norms and leadership skills.

It's the final football game of the season. All of the students are ready to take the field in their full uniforms, seniors without their hats, as is the tradition. They are doing a special show tonight, the Senior Show—a show where the seniors pick their favorite song from each year they were in band. Jennifer is in the front row marching forward, as the senior class leads the band onto the field. As she plays, I notice something different in all of the seniors' faces, it is their final time stepping onto this field, and their final time performing with their friends, playing music that they found special.

As the seniors march off the field, the rest of the band reaches the stands and salutes the seniors as they march by, and as they pass all their friends in uniform, saluting them for their service to the community, tears are forming on almost every senior's face. One who was not exempt from this, as I would have originally guessed, was Jennifer. As the seniors stop and start giving hugs, I approach a big circle of kids. The baritones, and all of Jennifer's close friends are surrounding her, hugging her, and crying with her. Once she sees me, she runs over and embraces me. "You were right, Mr. Rose...I was a band kid all along."

Identity and Cultural Success

Haritha and Bilquis (2022) state that “positive youth development motivates youth to achieve their full capacity and energizes themselves for active engagement in meta-development. The establishment of a sound positive environment around youths is a key to their effective functioning” (p. 205). I sought to see if the same was true for marching band: do the members of the community believe that the culture of the marching band, and the personal identity of its membership is positive? And will this positive identity development result in a better musical performance? Kaia expressed her opinion that using positive reinforcement and making others feel welcome fosters the performance aspect of the marching band.

Kaia: I think the culture does affect the group. If you're not close with your section, they won't really like respect you in a way or they won't really have fun. And I think marching band is always about having fun, with everyone striving to be the best and we're always motivating each other. I'm really big on positive reinforcement—If one kid doesn't feel comfortable enough to ask for help, then the performance will be affected by that, because they feel negative about themselves.

Kaia explained that a positive culture is effective in creating a more successful performance. If members do not feel welcome and are not met with positivity, they tend to shut down channels of communication. Communication is key in a marching band, as

the members during the show need to be able to rely on each other and trust each other for field placement and musical decisions (Dagaz, 2012). The membership benefits musically and visually from students being comfortable with themselves and with their peers in the ensemble. Naomi agreed with Kaia but added more of an identity focus to the question.

Naomi: The performance is definitely better when we are all together. Everyone is always so different; everyone has different interests. There's so much going on, so many different personalities coming in, that need gelling. We have a supportive environment that allows us to be ourselves and that in turn helps us gel and work together without judgment.

Naomi echoed many of Kaia's sentiments. She included one additional point—that being in a successful environment allows members to be their true selves. When students feel like they belong, and they feel comfort and safety within the community, it allows them to focus on their educational tasks and reach their highest level of achievement (Maslow, 1943).

The Negative Impact of Outside Influences

Throughout my time with the band, it was discovered that negativity, both inside and outside of the ensemble resulted in performances that were deemed by the students to be unsuccessful or not their highest quality. Jacki brings a firsthand perspective to this topic.

Jacki: There was one rehearsal before a football game where the guard had a lot of drama. This continued the next day into the football game, and it caused us to have our worst performance that season; nobody was in sync because we all were worried about other things and not attentive to the music. What is going on with the band affects how the music is performed.

Jacki gives this summary of a lived experience (van Manen, 1990). She explained that when the group is not focused on the performance task, their performance suffers. The background to what Jacki describes as drama was actually an identity crisis for one of the colorguard students. One of the members of the section came out as a member of the LGBT community and was struggling with the realization that they were a member of that community. Guard members were afraid of any potential mental health crisis that could occur, as this student did not feel safe in their own home while coming out to their friends. Students in the guard were worried about their friend's identity and safety, and in turn, that became the focus of the performance rather than the performance itself. If we look at Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, we see that students that do not feel safety or belonging will focus on meeting those needs instead of anything else that is currently taking place. The students of the guard felt an intense sense of belonging with their section. This caused them to want to support the belonging needs of their fellow colorguard member. Due to the family environment that marching band fosters (Matthews, 2017), these students saw a need to focus on the needs of their section mate

over the performance (Adderley et al., 2003; Siegal 2023). When students are comfortable with their own identity and accepted within their community, audiences gain through a more cohesive performance. Devin supported Jacki's claims using a different example of how the culture and identity of members can affect the performance.

Devin: I have a friend who is a section leader in the clarinet section. They had a lot of conflicts in their section last year. That led to some discrepancies or inefficiencies with how the overall section performed. They lacked communication with each other and things became troublesome. Luckily, the drumline tends to be normally together on things, but when there have been conflicts, it has caused people to be distracted when they perform and not be at their best.

Devin echoes Jacki's story, which suggests that conflict causes emotional distractions to the performance. As mentioned in the previous chapter, conflict is unavoidable; however, our drum majors always tried to turn the conflict into "constructive conflict," which was not personal and not meant to hurt or demean members, but to solve problems collaboratively and acknowledge all parties' stake in the community. When conflict is not constructive, that is where the distraction Devin mentions occurs; members in their respective sections are so concerned with non-band issues that they are unable to perform to the best of their ability. These non-musical distractions typically cause a disruption in the student's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) and will take their attention and focus away from the performance and their own

identity development. While students are in conflict and may not feel a sense of belonging, the formation of their identity is stalled as they seek shelter from social fallout.

Emilia gave another perspective on how distractions within a negative culture can affect the performance of the marching band.

Emilia: I think sometimes it might, because when we're on the field, if someone is very harsh on a kid or multiple kids and trying to get them to do better, and they're being very harsh about how they say it, they're either not going to want to be there, or they're going to try to fix it, and if they can't fix it, they're going to go down on themselves, which then messes it up during the performance. A lot of people are not like that, but there are always a few.

Emilia discussed yet another perspective to consider. Emilia talked about what happens when there are negative section leaders and senior members of the community. When there are community members who are being negatively criticized or have suffered through the negative reinforcement of their skills, they tend to back off and not participate to their fullest, leaving room for mistakes and inaccuracies to occur.

All of the student accounts above show that distractions from a negative cultural environment can have a negative effect on the musical performance. Members need to be treated with respect and given a sense of belonging to keep participating. Members of the community also need a safe space to develop their identities without fear of judgment and

with support from the community. Emotional distractions can have an adverse effect on the performance of the marching band. When unhealthy conflict, a negative environment, or emotional distractions are in play, community members will halt their individual identity development to focus on their belonging needs (Maslow, 1943) and in turn, will suffer from a negative performance.

Multimembership: Beyond the Band Borders

Wenger (1998) describes the construct of *multimembership* as being a part of multiple communities of practice where the boundaries can overlap. In a high school setting, this means that all groups within the greater school community have some overlap, and anyone involved in multiple groups within the school community would be *multimembers* within the school. I sought out to find how *multimembership* functioned in my own school community with the students in the marching band. I asked them what communities they were a part of and then asked how those cultures differed from the culture in our marching band. I also asked if they ever brought part of the marching band culture with them into other groups. Taylor explained how her participation in marching band influenced her actions in choir.

Teacher: Are you a member of another school community? Another group within the school?

Taylor: Choir and show choir.

Teacher: Okay, what's their culture like?

Taylor: Everyone is very, very close in choir. Pretty much everyone knows each other. Besides just singing together, we text each other often, and we send each other videos. We have inside jokes. It's very tight-knit.

Teacher: Okay. Do you bring bits of the marching band culture into the choir, then?

Taylor: Definitely. When I'm with marching band, I want everyone to start at the same time. Everyone needs to be on task and focused, but we do get sidetracked often. I do like having little side conversations, but not where there is work to be done. I am usually the one to tell the sopranos to focus and give them suggestions to improve. I do think that I bring elements from marching band like the timeliness and the focus, into choir.

Taylor brought in a unique perspective since she was a choir student who recently joined colorguard. She had told me before that she loved the environment that had been created in the choir classroom, and that was what convinced her to try marching band. While the culture between these groups was similar, rooted in a love of music, there were enough differences to create a boundary between these two communities. The groups were similar in terms of a family-type atmosphere which Taylor confirmed. What she brought to the choir that she took from the marching band was the discipline and rigid structure that was required of band members; for example, standing in identical fashions, moving together, and memorizing music. This structure helped her become a leader in the choir classroom and helped to quell any disruptions prior to the guard starting practice.

Jacki, another choir and colorguard member, had another school group that she joined that helped her with her identity and living as her authentic self.

Jacki: I am in the GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance)

Teacher: Okay, what is their culture like with GSA?

Jacki: It's very bound by acceptance. We all know we're kind of a little bit more off putting to other people. And we bond over that, but it's very acceptance based. We know we're kind of on the outskirts of what's cool and we accept each other. And I also feel like that relates back to marching band. Band kids aren't exactly the popular kids. So we're all kind of just there for each other. You put us all in a room and we're all coming out laughing.

Teacher: Okay. Do you feel like you bring parts of marching band culture into your GSA group?

Jacki: Honestly, yeah. How we interact with each other in both groups is very similar. We're all positive, supportive, and accepting.

Jacki spoke about being in the GSA group, a group of students who bond over the fact that they are members or allies of the LGBT community. The central tenet of this group is all about exploring your identity and becoming your true, authentic self. It encourages students to love who they want and to be proud of the fact that they are the way they are and that they are not alone in their struggle to feel a sense of belonging.

This group is largely responsible for advancing LGBT acceptance within the school boundaries.

Jacki specifically described how this group is similar to the marching band community in terms of acceptance. Most of the students in both the marching band as well as the GSA are marginalized communities within the average high school. Both communities allow for exploration and development of themselves, with the support of their peers and community members. Both groups provide the acceptance and belonging needs that are required of students to be successful with their academics. Kaia is a member of another school community and has had a very different experience than what Jacki was given in the GSA.

Kaia: I'm in the leadership class.

Teacher: Let's talk about leadership. What's the culture like in the leadership community?

Kaia: It's very different from in marching band. The culture in leadership is heavy on the idea of being normal. If you act differently from the rest of us, you're not cool. And for a long time, I struggled with that. I felt different because like that, that class consists of...I don't want to generalize, but it's like the supposed popular people, and I'm not, popular like that. I try my best to not judge but within that class it does feel a bit judgy. It feels like there is a lot of pressure. When you first come in, you feel very, very different from the rest, and you'll find your clique in there, and it's much more cliquey than marching band.

Teacher: Okay. Do you ever feel like you bring bits of marching band culture into that classroom?

Kaia: Honestly, I went to a leadership summer camp, and I brought what I learned there into the marching band. What I learned about being a leader at the camp has helped me be more outgoing and work on being a strong role model for others.

Teacher: What about the opposite? You mentioned how a leadership camp influenced the marching band culture, what about the opposite? Do you bring anything from marching band into the leadership classroom?

Kaia: I don't think so. Just because anyone that isn't popular becomes an outcast very quickly in that classroom. If I go in there and talk about band, nobody will listen to my ideas or take me seriously.

Kaia unpacked a lot here and connected many of the previous points in this chapter. The leadership class was full of, as Kaia mentioned, the popular students. These were students who connected with their peers very easily and often were in activities that marginalized students are not a part of, which was the opposite of the GSA and marching band communities. Kaia's description of the culture suggested that the leadership classroom was not accepting of differences. This could stifle a student's personal identity development. Even Kaia, who was a very active band student, tried to hide her membership with the marching band when she was in the leadership classroom. She seemed to be afraid of not fitting in and wanted to do what she could to maintain a

positive rapport with her peers in the leadership classroom. Even at the end of this interview, she mentioned that she did not bring any of her band life into the leadership classroom, despite being a section leader and drum major candidate at that time. This confirmed that outside of the band room, there are still areas where students must hide their identity to feel acceptance. Devin had a different experience outside of the band room at his math and science magnet program.

Devin: I am in classes over at the magnet center!

Teacher: All right. What's the culture like over at the center?

Devin: It's definitely pretty tight-knit. The classes are decently small, and the schedule is organized in blocks, so you're with the same people for all three hours, and usually they don't change too much between semesters. So, you're just kind of stuck with the same people all year. Everyone knows each other, and it's very fun, encouraging, a friendly place for you to ask questions and develop growth.

Teacher: That sounds like an amazing place to learn! Do you ever bring any of your marching band culture into the magnet center?

Devin: Maybe leadership qualities like helping other people and taking authority in situations if it's needed. And being friendly with others and open with others as well.

It was clear that the magnet program had a similar feel to the marching band; like-minded students were attending that center, passionate about science. One can tell by the conversation that Devin was comfortable talking about his experiences with the center's culture, unlike Kaia, who needed a little more coaxing to get a response. Devin spent half his day at the magnet center, where he felt comfortable around the students, and in turn could be his true, authentic self with the other students at the center. He did not seem to need to conceal his identity or move about the different schools likened to a chameleon.

The final interviews provided firsthand accounts of students who are *multimembers* in both the marching band community and the athletics community. The band program prides itself on having students in every varsity sport on campus. Some of these students held leadership positions in both areas of campus life; for example, the cheer captain was the incoming drum major for the band. She cheered during the games and then participated in the pregame and halftime shows with the band. Naomi gave her story of how she brought the marching band culture with her to the bowling team.

Teacher: What's the culture like on the bowling team?

Naomi: It's a lot of the same. It's very small because our team only has like 5 or 6 people, so it's very small, but we get a lot closer, a lot quicker. And then the bowling team in general, there's 3 or 4 of the guys' teams, but because we're such a small team, we practice a lot with them sometimes, and that's kind of helped us grow closer with them. It's really very different because of the size.

Teacher: Okay. How is it different from marching band culture?

Naomi: Well, in marching band, we're supposed to work together more. We're supposed to talk to each other and collaborate more. In bowling, while you're collaborating with your team, you're not really relying on them in the same way. You're trying to enhance your skills alone, so it's different in that aspect. What I've learned in marching band has helped me kind of grow on the bowling team and communicate with them better.

Teacher: Okay, so you would say that you bring bits of marching band culture into bowling.

Naomi: Oh, for sure. I bring a lot of the leadership and communication skills that I have learned in band and try to bring the positivity of the marching band to our bowling team.

Naomi pointed out that the cultures between the marching band community and the bowling team are very similar, the biggest difference being the size of the group. In contrast, the marching band has many subcommunities or different sections; the bowling team is just one community. She also highlighted that even though bowling is a team sport, it is based on one's individual scores and not an overall team score. While they might want to be supportive of teammates, which they certainly are, students are focused on their own progress as a single bowler. Marching band cannot work that way. For instance, if you are not relying on others, the form you are trying to accomplish might be out of alignment—if a student is focused on their individual space, rather than the form as a whole, then the student may be out of the context of the shape they are trying to make.

Marching band requires a holistic approach to be successful, while bowling does not.

Emilia has similar experience in her position on the swim team.

Teacher: What's the culture like within your swim team at the school?

Emilia: Very close. We can all talk about everything. We're a family. We can rely on each other for anything. Not a lot of judgment either.

Teacher: Okay. Do you feel like if you were to compare the culture between band and swim, would you say it's similar, or are there big differences? I am really interested since your swim coach is a former student of mine!

Emilia: It's definitely different with swim, since there's only a few girls. It is not as big as a marching band, right? Or even in band class. You don't talk to some people in band. They'll stick to their groups and stick with the people they know, and they won't talk outside of that circle. But with swim, you've talked to everyone a hundred times.

Teacher: You're talking a lot about size and giving swim an edge when it comes to culture. What causes swim to have a better culture than band?

Emilia: I think for me, I think the environment that swim gives is better than band. I feel like with band, with having so many people, that comes with people not liking each other, that comes with drama.

Teacher: Okay. So with a larger group, there comes drama.

Emilia: Yes.

Emilia explained that the size of the group is what leads to the issues within the marching band. Emilia was a student who had mentioned to me on multiple occasions that the reason she came to school was for band. But even with band being something that was so big within her life, it did have its negative points—the drama of a large group being the main concern. Emilia explained that her swim team was close-knit, mostly because of their size. They had roughly ten students while the marching band had 110. The sheer size of the band made it impossible to have a deep connection and friendship with every single person. With more students, one has a greater chance of encountering students who have issues with others, such as Olivia from the previous chapter.

Multimembership is a common experience among students at many American high schools. There are numerous opportunities for students to explore their identity in various ways. Marching band, athletics, clubs like National Honor Society and the Gay-Straight Alliance, and magnet centers all have different cultures, but students take pieces of each culture with them to other activities. As one can see with many of these communities, many are supportive of students and allow them to be themselves, however, there are some outliers, such as Kaia's leadership class, where members seemed to force peers to fit into a mold to be a part of the community.

In the next chapter, I will present the data pertaining to leadership and its influence on band members identities, specifically using the *systems conveners* model presented by Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015b & 2021). I will explore how the *system conveners* model of leadership within a community of practice can be applied to

all three groups of leaders within the band: section leaders, drum majors, and band director.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SYSTEMS CONVENERS MODEL OF LEADERSHIP IN THE MARCHING BAND: SECTION LEADERS, DRUM MAJORS, & BAND DIRECTORS

In this chapter, I will explore the emergent themes pertaining to the ways the section leaders utilized the *systems conveners* model as described by Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015b, 2020, 2021). Systems conveners go beyond traditional leadership as they use the social landscape within the community of practice to build relationships, find areas of mutual engagement, and formulate norms and goals within the community. I will explore the main traits of systems conveners:

- How they support individual identity work
- How they cultivate agency within the community
- How they handle the power structures and dynamics of the community
- How they craft the call to action for their peers
- How they earn legitimacy in the greater school community
- How they articulate the value of what they do and share with others why what they do is important (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021).

I will also explore the systems convener's model on three different levels: the section leaders of individual sections, the drum majors who lead the band from the podium, and the band director who oversees the entire program. Each level of systems convener brings a different perspective to how the band operates as a community of practice. For both the section leaders and the drum majors, transcribed interview data will be used to support the findings. For the band director's perspective, I will include notes

and vignettes from my field logs and journals as the band director and teacher-researcher (Kincheloe, 2008) while in the field during the collection of this data.

Identity Work

As discussed in chapter five, Wenger (1998) states that identity formation is crucial to the development of a community of practice. In 2021, Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner take this a step further, stating that systems conveners should create opportunities to support identity development and share narratives about how others can grow through membership in a community of practice. As noted above, students crafted a convening call and worked to show potential new members how their lives could change from being a member of the marching band. Both student leadership and band directors can create a space for students to discover their identity and help them see the potential in their future identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

While it is very common for marching bands to share parts of their identity (Odello, 2022), the goal of the leadership team is not to engage in determining or dictating the identity of its members. The goal of identity work is to support the individual in growing and exploring their own individual identity (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). The leadership team does this by providing a caring and non-judgmental environment that allows their peers the freedom to explore their identity and adjust as they see fit. Most students in leadership roles do this by motivating their peers to explore their environment and boundaries to promote growth (Dweck, 2017). A typical byproduct of successful student leaders is that they become role models for younger students, who try and model themselves after those peers. While it is not a goal of the

community to create similar identities in its members, it is a by-product of positive band members creating a comfortable environment with their peers and how they encourage them to develop their identities. Student leadership was asked how they motivate, encourage, and inspire others, and why their peers seem to look up to them as leaders.

Isla: I like to talk openly and positively to my section. I always try to use encouraging and uplifting words to help them.

Teacher: Are there any kids that look up to you?

Isla: Yeah.

Teacher: Why do you think that is?

Isla: Because I do a lot in the program and I try my best to do everything that I can. I know that kids look up to me because when I had my injury earlier this year, they stepped up to play in different ensembles that I would normally cover parts in and even take over my solo in marching band when I was in pain. I feel like I have inspired others to serve.

Section leader Isla encouraged identity work in two different ways. First, she built relationships with her peers by encouraging them, while speaking openly and honestly with them. Secondly, she did this in positive ways. As noted above, one of the goals of both the band director and the student leadership team was to ensure a positive atmosphere. Positivity helped to foster an environment where students were free to

discover and adjust their identity, and the relationships built with peers helped to serve as a guide to others.

When asked if she had any students who admired her personality or leadership, Isla explained that she did. She knew students who looked up to her, and one of those reasons was because of everything she gave to the program. She consistently played in all of the concert bands, jazz bands, brass chamber groups, and the marching band. When she was faced with a medical condition earlier in the season that left her unable to play her instrument, other students were inspired to fill her spot. Many of these students were those whom I would have never thought might step up and take over her parts. This demonstrated not only the camaraderie and dedication to the program, but also the respect they had for her, as they wanted to make sure that the section sounded its best in her absence. These students were encouraged to become leaders in the band and to step into that role as it appeared, forging stronger leadership identities for the students involved.

Section leader Sadie had similar ways of inspiring her section but had a much different way of explaining why some of her section looked up to her.

Sadie: One of the things that I would hope that people would look up to me for is my playing ability. It's not that easy to get good at something. I also like to think that people look up to me because I consider myself a positive person. I always try to be as open and warm as I can to other kids, and I try to be there for people as much as I possibly can. And I hope that people who do look up to me take that stuff away—that they try and be more understanding, positive, and kind.

Sadie hoped that she was positive, open, warm, and kind, and tried to spread that message to others. Even though she originally thought that her musical ability was what people looked up to, she quickly pivoted and discussed how she wanted the environment to look and feel for others, so that they could feel safe to explore the community and themselves. This type of environment and culture is important for students, as it enables them to explore their identity with the understanding and support of their peers. Sadie's goal was not to develop the students' identity as musicians, but rather to give them a positive and nurturing environment to explore their own identity formation. While the identities that are formed are influenced by the community, they will not conform into a single type of identity, as there are many outside influences (multimembership, home life, social life outside of band) that assist in identity development. The goal was not to require conforming to a single identity, but rather to develop one's own identity.

Section leader Naomi wanted a similar environment in her section but had a different approach to creating it.

Naomi: I try to always stay upbeat. And if I know I'm not going to be upbeat, I try to keep the negative energy away from them.

Teacher: Are there any kids that look up to you in your section?

Naomi: I think so.

Teacher: Why do you think they look up to you?

Naomi: I always go and just I talk to them, just for fun. And I don't try to baby them. I keep it real with them, but I try to help them give them. If I criticize, it's

going to be constructive, but I also give them their props. It's just a balance of being a leader but also being a friend and being there for them.

Naomi, too, kept a positive environment for her section. Even when she may have been upset or stressed, her goal was to make the band a safe and comfortable spot for her section. She explained the differences between her friend and section leader personas. She explained that she had to balance being a friend and what her leadership role required. She did this by keeping criticism positive, not bringing others down because of it, yet not spoon-feeding her section. Naomi seemed to have two different sides to her—a serious leadership side and a friendship side. She supported others while being friendly and forming connections, simultaneously demanding the most from her section and working to keep them motivated, efficient, and growth-oriented (Dweck, 2017). This allowed her peers to still feel like they can explore and grow in their individual identity, while learning and growing musically.

Drum Major Erica repeated many of the sentiments that her section leader peers did, but with a bigger platform.

Erica: I try to keep the energy up. Because they're not going to be motivated if I don't bring the energy. They won't bring the energy if they don't see a reason to.

Teacher: Are there kids that look up to you?

Erica: I feel like Reggie does a little bit. I feel like he kind of aspires to be like me.

And his attitude has changed to align with mine over the course of the year.

Teacher: Why do you think he looks up to you?

Erica: Maybe it's my confidence or how I play. Maybe something they aspire to work on that they might see in me.

Once again, Erica stressed the importance of a positive environment. During identity work, students need to experience a supportive environment while exploring their identity. What is different from the other student leaders was Erica's experience with Reggie. Erica mentioned that Reggie was a new member to the community who looked up to her as they played the same instrument. Erica gave Reggie suggestions on different mouthpieces to try, and they could often be seen practicing together while Erica played the role of more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978). Erica concluded that Reggie had "latched onto" a few things: their mutual love of playing the euphonium, her confidence, or possibly that Reggie could see himself as "the next Erica," fulfilling what Markus and Nurius (1986) describe as becoming his *possible self*; looking at goals and traits and modeling yourself after those traits to look at what they would like to become in the future. In this instance, Reggie modeled his identity after his role model, Erica. Her personality and identity traits influenced who he would like to be in the future.

I recall many times this has played a role in my life in a marching band community; I, too, had influential community members in my high school marching band who helped shape my leadership ideas and personality. As I decided to become a music educator, I modeled myself after influential teachers in my life. Adults do this as well as students.

In my experience working with high school band students, I have noticed that when an inspirational senior graduates and leaves the community, there is usually someone who was influenced by them who steps up to take their place, similarly to how Wenger (1998) describes this phenomenon. This is Reggie: he has already earned the role of section leader, a feat that Erica accomplished in her sophomore year, like Reggie has done. Reggie also aspires to be a drum major, similar to Erica. Reggie wants to take lessons from the same teacher as Erica. What Reggie is doing is adapting his identity to align with Erica's identity. Once Erica leaves the community, he will have the opportunity to take the parts of Erica's identity that he is truly attached to, while also adjusting parts of his identity he chooses to change.

As the band director, I took a similar approach in providing the community with a space for identity work—the opportunity for them to explore and evolve their identity how they would like to see it expand.

The most important part of helping students work on their identity is to provide the space for them to do so, without judgment. Positivity helps the students feel safety and security so they are able to take part in this important work. As a band director, you also get to see this play out over multiple years: from newcomers in the community to graduating seniors, and sometimes even as adults when you run into them later in life. Identity is also more than just what we hear in today's political climate. Most of what we hear about identity cannot be changed: race,

sexual orientation, physical attributes. The part students need work on is their personality traits that make them good humans.

Positivity is once again noted by me as the band director. There is also another strong point in this narrative: the identity of what can be changed, and the band director's goal in striving for identity work—it is not about making musicians; it is about making kind, smart, productive citizens. As mentioned in previous chapters, many students join the marching band for social reasons, and when they graduate, they will often leave the community and likely not join another band community. The tools that the band director tries to apply to his students are those life lessons and identity development that produce successful adults, not just successful musicians.

Cultivating Agency

Cultivating agency amongst the community is one of the most student-centered things a band director strives to do, as it gives students a voice and empowers them to take control of their own learning and the direction of the program (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b). Cultivating agency in a community of practice must start at the top—if the band director does not allow students to have a democratic say in the direction of the community, then the student leaders will have no way to help their peers share in that mutual ownership of the community (Zemelman et al., 2005; Wenger, 1998). Because of this, I will begin this discussion with my thoughts as the band director about how agency played a role in the marching band.

Ownership is important in the greater band community. Students want to have a say in their learning and in their programs, so it is an important way to get students on your side. There are many things that the director needs to have total control over; for example, a logistic or communicative process should remain a teacher's responsibility. Good ways to give students more agency would include having the drum majors lead warm-ups or visual blocks with your supervision, you can give section leaders the time to break away and fix things they might see, or you can give students the opportunity to have a say in what is performed by the ensemble, with director supervision. When you allow the students to have a say in their education, they are more engaged and focused. (April 12, 2025)

The band director brings strategies for fostering student agency in the marching band. One of these strategies includes having the drum majors lead warm-ups. In this way, the director steps back and allows the student leaders to develop their leadership skills. While they may make mistakes, they can be encouraged by the director or even other students. This feedback provides them with the sense that not everything is a top-down structure of power. Secondly, I mentioned that section leaders can break away and help to correct mistakes. Something as simple as letting a student leader step out of line to let the section know how their feet are supposed to look is more powerful than having it come from the adult on the scaffold. Finally, giving the students an opportunity to have a say in their musical literature builds agency on the field, as the students will want to practice and perform the music and will be more invested in the final product. For

example, listening to the music they listen to and finding arrangements of popular songs is one way to foster musical agency (Davis, 2008).

Increasing independence for the students in the band is a key component of supporting learner agency (Bruner, 1996). While the director is focused on transferring ownership to the students, the students in turn are tasked with taking control of their community but must do so with increased levels of independence (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch et al., 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). The question that the student leaders were asked was regarding how they help their peers become more independent. Drum Major Erica gave an example of what she did to support another student's feeling of independence.

Erica: I would always give him the choice of what he wanted to work on since he struggles with so much. Lately, he has been setting goals for himself on what he knows he struggles with and that is really important. He's heard it so much from so many people that he knows what he needs to work on now. For example, his organization, he used to be really dependent on me, asking me about, times, dates, what we need for rehearsal. But now instead of going to me, he tries to find the resources on his own to make sure that he's ready for rehearsal. I showed him where he can find the information and how I keep track of it, and it has helped keep him organized and on time to rehearsal.

Erica talked about her experience with a less independent student. They both played the same instrument, so they already shared a bond due to their proximity during

rehearsals. While Erica was very organized, this other student was not, leading him to be absent from or tardy to rehearsals. She showed him how to stay organized and where to find the information on required dates and times. In this vignette, both of them came into my office to ask to include him in e-mail blasts so that he receives the information sent directly to his phone. This lesson from Erica played an important role in his future success within the community. Erica also helped to instruct him on how to march and how to play.

Section leader Isla had a different approach to answering questions and facilitating her peers' independent thinking.

Isla: If someone asks for something, I'll try to rephrase their question and try to see if they can figure it out on their own, because we won't always be there to help them.

Isla came from a long line of educators; both of her parents are educators, and one of her grandparents is an educator. Her idea of rephrasing and restructuring questions to see if others can solve the problem on their own fosters independent thinking (Bruner, 1976).

Section leader Sadie provided another important way of how she encourages her peers to become more independent.

Sadie: Working with them one on one to get them to better understand what they're doing, and then once they actually understand how to do something or how to play something, then it'll come easier for them later on. It's more than just telling them to do something, it's about teaching them to interpret it and do it on their own. They become more independent later because they know what methods to use in the future to help them work through the problems that they're having on their own.

Sadie explained that she works with them, sometimes in an individual capacity, so that they can learn how to do things on their own. This might be a musical passage, a choreographed movement, or marching fundamentals. What she is explaining is the process of scaffolding through the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Wood et al. (1976) state that “the intervention of a tutor...More often than not, involves a kind of ‘scaffolding’ process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (p. 90). She explained that she helps other students and supports them until those supports are no longer needed, and they are dismantled when her peers reach a level of mastery and can function independently. Even more powerful is that this is being done by a peer and not by the band director, or even the drum major; this is “boots on the ground” leadership and peer teaching.

These accounts show that agency and personal independence are a group effort, starting from the top down (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). Band directors

can find ways to give students the autonomy to function as a community with guidance as needed, as opposed to an authoritarian teaching model. Students also need to have proper modeling (Bandura, 1977) of educational techniques so that they can also help students model mastery and achieve independence.

Power Structures

In a traditional classroom, the teacher is typically seen as the authoritarian ruler of the room; they make the rules, determine the curriculum, and have the final say in all classroom matters. Systems conveners work not only to give power back to community members but also to utilize the existing power structures to promote agency and identity work (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). The band director and all members of the student leadership team must work together to avoid power struggles, which are common in all communities of practice (Coyle, 2018; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). In this section, I will examine power struggles that student leaders have faced, as well as how the band director can work to give power back to the community. Isla shared her ideas about a power struggle in her section and how it was handled.

Isla: Last year when I was a junior, there was a group of seniors where they

wouldn't listen to anybody because they all thought they were the oldest ones.

They thought they knew the best and they thought they were the best, so they

didn't really listen to any of us and they just kind of fought with everyone in the section.

Teacher: How did, how do you balance being a friend, while also being a leader?

Isla: I know that there's a point where you have to be strict with them and tell them what needs to be done. You can have fun and whatnot and be friends with them. But at one point you need to set the boundaries between being a leader and friendship.

Teacher: And how did you accomplish that?

Isla: I talked with them all individually, with the drum majors, and told them that we had upcoming performances and goals, that they were not being team players, and that even seniors had to be leaders, even if they were not section leaders. They seemed upset, but at the next rehearsal it went really smoothly.

Section leader Isla encountered a problem that most band programs will face—senior students who have been in the community for years, who think they are in charge, and who struggle with the power dynamic, especially if those seniors do not hold a title such as section leader or drum major. This power struggle can happen for a variety of reasons: jealousy for not having a leadership position, believing that they are the sole decision makers as the ranking members of the community, or even because they want to make their final year in the community the best or most memorable, so they are more aggressive in holding onto power. Isla reported a conversation in which she invited the drum majors to be part of the process, informing them about the goals and upcoming events. She reiterated expectations and norms to remind her peers of their shared goals within the community. While those students were unhappy to receive that talk, Isla was able to draw a line between friend and leader, and engage in constructive conflict

(Bondesio, 1992) with them, resulting in a more positive rehearsal the next time. Drum Major Erica also encountered a power struggle based on the age of her peers.

Erica: In one of the sections, one kid who was older than some of the other section leaders, just did everything. And some of the younger section leaders didn't know how to tell them that they had a job to do. If you take everybody's job, how are we supposed to learn how to lead, or even provide for our section-- They're not going to see us as leaders. It was a power struggle for sure.

It is natural for the oldest and most experienced members of the section to want to be in charge, especially as they are the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) in the ensemble. However, power must be shared between those in leadership positions, and those not in leadership positions. If those younger students do not experience empowerment, they may struggle with leading when they are the senior members of the community. Both Isla and Erica's story show the importance of shared power within the ensemble.

While section leader Sadie and I agreed that her section had not had its share of power struggles, she described how she works with her peers to draw the line between friend and leader.

Sadie: Sometimes, you're going to have to be a little bit harsher with your section, but you have to do it in a way where it won't hurt anybody's feelings and where it

won't make them feel like you're targeting them. So when it comes to being more authoritative, I try to assess the situation first. I try to talk to the group as a whole and not talk to individuals because I don't want to single people out, which is a way that I'm trying to also be a friend to them because I don't want to put them on the spot and tell them they are always wrong. Instead, I talk to the whole group and say, "I'm noticing that we're having a couple issues with these things and we can all work to get better at them instead of doing that." It's a way of being there to let them know that you understand why they're struggling and how they're struggling instead of yelling at people when they're wrong.

Sadie once again used the power of positivity to help distinguish herself as both a leader and friend. Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2015) mention systems conveners are “upbeat and persistent. They tend to be optimistic, even overoptimistic, and their positive spin often fuels the endeavor, especially in the early stages” (p. 115). When one person was struggling, she discussed it with the whole section, not allowing one person to be singled out. She also did this calmly and did not “bark” commands or orders at her peers. Sadie tried to balance her role as friend and leader by using this positivity to her advantage, avoiding power struggles because she had formed a friend persona built on trust and acceptance within her section. As the band director, I shared my thoughts on power structures within the community.

Power and agency go hand in hand; as directors, we give up power to give the students the agency that they need to take ownership of the community. As a director I want to use power structures to my advantage to help grow the success of the community. That includes using student leaders to take responsibilities for certain social aspects of the band. For example, I want to teach my student leaders how to build, maintain, and grow their peer relationships so any social issues can be squashed before it gets to me. I want to teach my student leaders how to solve problems collaboratively so their agency grows without my intervention. And I want to teach my student leaders how to give and receive criticism so they can model that to their peers, and then everyone is aware of how to handle criticism with peers that have different personalities from their own.

(April 23, 2025)

In my research journal, I provided examples of different skills I wanted my student teachers to learn regarding power structures. It occurred to me after reviewing my journal that I wanted all of the students to learn these skills, as these skills are not only an important part of leadership, but are important non-musical skills for everyone to know. These are skills that are, fundamentally, more important than learning how to play scales or read a drill chart. These are life skills that move across disciplines (Ros-Morente et al., 2019). In teaching students how to navigate power structures in the community of practice, they have the opportunity to learn a transferable skill to other communities of practice that they are currently in or may join later.

Crafting the Call: The Power of Positivity

Crafting the call is an important first step in creating a welcoming and positive environment for potential new community members. This call needs to establish a common vision among the leadership of the band and should guide the actions of the leadership team. Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2021) state that “the convening call needs to speak to people’s understanding of the world and inspire them to join the convening endeavor” (p. 22). Section leader Isla was asked how she “hooks” others into our community.

Isla: Usually, I show them how fun it is at first, and I show them all the fun stuff that we play and all the fun things that we do, and sometimes explain what we do, because others don’t always know. It’s all about making them excited to join us.

Teacher: Explain to me how you show them the fun and show them the music that you play.

Isla: I always have pictures and videos on my phone. I have shown videos of our favorite marching band videos to freshmen, and I am always sending and sharing pictures of what we do. Even my home page on my phone has a fun band photo of our trip to Disney World!

While what Isla was talking about seems like standard recruiting, there are a few small things she does to craft a call to action. First, Isla explains that she showed the potential new community members how the group has fun and the type of music they

play. She did not solely use words to help gather other members into the community; she used visuals to convey her point to potential new members. A video of a marching band show was a much more effective tool than language alone, especially when nobody had seen one before.

The second thing Isla did when crafting the call was explain what the band does. While this would eventually lead to articulating the value of the group to veteran members of the community, she crafted the call by explaining the marching band's actual motivations. To an outsider, especially to a prospective member, they might not have ever seen a marching band, and for many reasons, it might look overwhelming or silly. Part of crafting the call is explaining the values and direction of the community.

Finally, Isla's goal was to make it seem exciting to potential new members. For example, Isla could say that we marched in the Thanksgiving Parade, and it was cold, three miles long, and we had to be at the school at five in the morning; or she could say that we marched in the Thanksgiving Parade to a million people in person, another few million in a nationally televised performance, and we took "best in show." While both examples are true statements, one side of the story will foster excitement in potential membership and provide a vision for the ensemble's future.

Expertly crafting a convening call (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021), Isla used the band's atmosphere of positivity to gather new community members. The positivity expressed by Isla and the other section leaders helped to provide new community members with an entry point into the community.

Section leader Sadie had a similar response to how she crafted the convening call with positivity and openness.

Sadie: Me and the other section leaders try to show the incoming kids how close of a bond we all have with each other. I just try to show them how much of a family we really are. And it's not just like at marching band. You're with them a lot and you do stuff outside of band.

Teacher: How do you show them that you're a family and have a tight bond?

Sadie: When we are meeting incoming freshmen, we try to interact with each other in a fun way and keep things positive.

Sadie did the same kinds of things that Isla did; she attempted to show new members how close they were rather than just saying words. The section leaders made a conscious effort to show incoming members the perks of being a part of the marching band and why they should join the community. Sadie also mentioned that positivity needed to be present. Positivity is a main factor in the success of the marching band (Hash, 2022; Jones, 2009). Ariel once again stressed the theme of positivity in the community:

Having a positive attitude is so important during marching band. If you don't have a positive attitude, it makes rehearsals awfully long.

It seemed abundantly clear that the section leaders worked diligently to keep a positive attitude as much as possible. They knew that if they did not have that attitude, it would be hard for their peers to stay positive as well.

Erica, one of the drum majors in the band, echoed the same sentiments.

I try to show my enthusiasm and my passion for band, because I feel like if they can see how it's affected me, they might want to have a similar sort of experience, obviously a positive experience. I want to give them some sort of vision on how it could be for the next year.

From the drum major perspective, again her goal was to show her enthusiasm and positivity to incoming members. She did this to show incoming members what they could be after joining the community. She functioned as a “walking billboard” for the effects of being involved in the marching band community, and as drum major, the section leaders looked up to her and emulated those traits. It is interesting to note that none of them discussed winning competitions, earning superior ratings, or surpassing the rival school’s band. They were truly doing this for their own good and the good of the organization, rather than flaunting superficial records or awards that are commonly found in athletic communities. These students had absolutely crafted a convening call that created the overall welcoming atmosphere and put the message of positivity in front of both current and potential stakeholders. That positivity guided their actions.

As the band director, I also shared how I strove for positivity in my research journal.

The student leadership team is constantly talking about positivity and how it affects them. They have mentioned on more than one occasion that positivity helps to keep them going through tough times, in ninety-degree heat, during rain and snow, or even during a crushing football loss. At a recent recruiting visit to the middle school, I observed myself being even more positive and animated than I typically am. Once those students join the community, they also obtain positivity day in and day out. I know during those hard rehearsals where the kids are burnt out, when I have pushed them and I myself have turned negative, they are much less productive than normal.

I also try to motivate students in unorthodox ways. Usually on the Wednesday of band camp after lunch, the students are exhausted and I always put on calming music and lead them in ten minutes of yoga, which gets them motivated due to the positive and calming energy surrounding the activity. We have special cheers, chants, and traditions: for example, when we are really working a set and the students hear “reset one set,” they yell it back since it is a common phrase of mine. They know that being positive even during tough segments of marching band can help themselves power through it. We even have students create their own chants; in my first year, we had a student nicknamed “Mr. Marching Band” who would commonly yell “MARCHING BAND” really

loud and the rest of the band would chant it back. Positivity has worked much more successfully in my career than negative reinforcement. (March 29, 2025)

As the band director, I found myself motivating students constantly, and after studying my words from earlier in the season when the theme of positivity emerged, I realized that the director is the one who sets the mood and atmosphere for both the daily rehearsals and the community as a whole. The director creates a call that the students may (or may not) buy into, and the leaders spread that call to all members, both current and future. Positivity is more than saying positively affirming things:

- Positivity is being animated in front of your group so that they feel the emotions of the music
- Positivity is being spontaneous and unpredictable during certain activities (such as marching band yoga), while still maintaining a sense of predictability and appropriate standards
- Positivity also allows students the freedom to create a literal call to arms like “Mr. Marching Band” had done in the past.

The band director must model positivity for the students to also strive for a positive environment (Bandura, 1977). All eyes are on the director for the direction of the program, and the positivity that band directors show is so important to communicate to all stakeholders, including those that do not have the same high level of interaction with students as the director might (i.e. administrators, parents, and community members) (Matthews, 2017).

Earning Legitimacy

A challenge for students in the marching band is to earn legitimacy in the greater school community. This is difficult because, as previously discussed, there are negative stereotypes of band students that are consistently portrayed in the media. Every school culture is different as well; for example, at our school, when the football team consistently experienced losing seasons, the audience at football games would leave after halftime—staying for the band performance and then leaving. This audience included parents, school faculty, and the general student body. During years when the football team was making the playoffs and had winning seasons, more hostility (name-calling, disrespectful comments, etc.) was directed toward the marching band. At other schools I have observed, band can be either the reason for Friday night community gatherings or just a sideshow; it depends on the overall school community.

Earning legitimacy in the greater school community must begin with the band director (Carter, 2014; Hash 2022); the band director must build relationships with key stakeholders, such as the administration, athletic directors, coaches, and other Friday night teams (such as dance teams and cheer teams), to collaborate and move forward as a school community. The student leadership, including section leaders and drum majors, also has the important task of establishing legitimacy with their non-band peers. They must show the other students that their activity is one deserving of recognition (Dagaz, 2012). This is typically done in their non-band classes. They can wear band apparel, invite classmates to performances, and most importantly, show their enthusiasm and positivity. I asked the section leaders and drum majors how they think others perceive the

marching band, and if they ever try to change the perception of their non-band peers. The following was the conversation between section leader Isla and me.

Teacher: How do you think people not in marching band see the marching band?

Isla: I think kind of nerdy.

Teacher: Do you ever try and change people's minds about that?

Isla: Yeah! I try to explain what we do, and that we're not nerds, that we just put a lot of time to it. I try to compare it to a sport or just flat out say it is a sport, even though a lot of people don't really say it as a sport. But we do a lot of physical stuff and even get PE credit from marching.

Isla attempted to relate the band to something that many non-band students can relate to—athletics. Isla is a member of the athletic community in the school and she relates the band community to the athletic community, attempting to earn legitimacy from her peers. Isla is relating the level of physical activity band members exert and the fact that marching band students earn physical education credit through the state as justification for marching band being considered a legitimate activity. Section leader Sadie shared many of the same sentiments that Isla shared, but took a slightly different approach when discussing marching band with her peers.

Sadie: I know that a lot of people definitely see us as weird, but that's just because of the stereotypes and generalizations that the media puts on marching band.

Yeah, there are a couple odd people, but everybody's odd in their own way. I feel like the school sees this as a positive group, too, because at football games, if you didn't have the marching band, it's not as fun, it's not as exciting. You're not going to have the same experience without the band being there, because we're what pumps everybody up and gets everybody excited. Pep rallies, basketball games, the homecoming parade; without the marching band, the school wouldn't have as much spirit. So yeah, a lot of people will think that the marching band kids are weird, but I also think they see us as a positive addition to the school environment.

Teacher: Do you ever try to change anybody's mind about the band being weird?

Sadie: Yeah, because everybody's weird in their own way. People can't sit there and say, this whole group is specifically weird, when the majority of us fit into what the school and society would say is normal. I feel like people look at the way that individuals that express themselves freely, and that's who they see in the marching band, but they don't actually see the other students that just go through regular day life and they don't make it like their personality. I feel like the people that they think are weird are the ones that make band their personality.

Sadie reiterated that sometimes band students are classified as weird or outsiders, and also mentioned that this is a stereotype portrayed by the media. Sadie explained to others that all students have quirks and could be considered weird. She continued to say that the ones that outsiders would call the stereotypical band kid would be the ones who

make it their personality. These are students for whom band plays a key role in their identity. The students Sadie is talking about are those who mention their membership in the marching band when asked about themselves. Drum major Erica tied ideas from both Sadie and Isla.

Teacher: How do you think those not in the marching band see us?

Erica: Hopefully hardworking. I know a lot of people might not recognize this as much because they only see us for half time. But I feel like they know that we're passionate about what we do, which is really good.

Teacher: Okay. Do you ever try and change anybody's minds about how they may perceive us?

Erica: I don't get a lot of negatives. I don't hear a lot of the negative reputation that we might get. Now, the negative that I have heard, I just try to give examples of what we actually do. This is a whole different community. And it's not like learning your algebra. It's something we want to do. It's something we're working hard for.

Erica mentioned that many people already appreciate and respect the band due to their performances at halftime. This contrasts with both Isla's and Sadie's statements that there are students who treat band students as outcasts. This data may be conflicting because of the other communities to which these students belong. Sadie and Isla were involved in many other school clubs and athletics, while Erica was only a member of the

band community. Erica was also involved in more advanced classes than the other two, which tend to have a higher percentage of band students. This may be why she did not hear as many negative messages about the band.

Nevertheless, when she did hear negative comments, she was eager to share stories about what they work for and how they actually accomplish their performances. Erica also stated that, “It’s not like learning your algebra. It’s something we want to do.” Erica explained to others in this statement that the students in the community become part of the community because they want to, not because they have to. This is a powerful statement that demonstrates to her non-band peers that the members of the community have a passion and dedication to the community that may explain the reason behind why some students in the community use the band as part of their identity.

In my research journal, I also commented on the notion of earning legitimacy in my role as band director, where my approach targeted a different demographic than the non-band students in the school.

When I think of earning legitimacy within the marching band space, I think of building relationships. You have to form relationships with two different groups of stakeholders – those directly involved in the community and those that are not. Those involved in the community include the members and their parents. If you build relationships and the students trust the director, they will work on earning legitimacy with their non-band peers. Those stakeholders outside the community involve those employed or directly work with the school. Building relationships

with administration is important because they provide vital monetary resources for the program. Building relationships with athletics (director and coaches) allows you to work jointly to support multimembered students. And building relationships with other staff members allows leniency when band events come up and you need to take students out of their classes. If you build relationships with every stakeholder, they will support your mission. (April 4, 2025)

“At a ground level, a lot of legitimacy is simply based on personal relationships...and careful listening” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). The director is expanding one’s influence across the social landscape. Relationships help the director to leverage what they want and need within the school community (Hash, 2022). For example, if the band needs to use the football field, relationships with football coaches and athletic directors will help all parties to see the legitimacy of the programs and the need for the use of the facilities.

Relationships with the students are also a key factor in earning legitimacy (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). If the band director does not have a good relationship with students, those same students cannot be expected to go into their classrooms and defend the band community or earn legitimacy with their non-band peers. Building relationships with the parents is also key. Suppose the parents do not have a relationship with the director and they do not see the program as legitimate. In that case, they will be less likely to volunteer for key positions to support the band, or they might convince their student to try a different elective or activity.

Articulating Value Creation

The final trait of systems conveners is the ability to articulate to others the importance or value of the community as a whole (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). This is how members of the community advocate for the community to each other and to outsiders. Different from crafting a convening call, as that call is primarily geared towards recruitment of new members and establishing goals and norms for the community, articulating value creation is meant for sharing the value that marching band brings to all stakeholders in the greater school community (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021).

The band director needs to be able to articulate value to administrators, parents, and community members to gain support from those stakeholders. The director also needs to communicate the value to the students, who must affirm this value so that they can dedicate their focus to the community's goals. Students also must be able to articulate the value to others, namely to the director, because that would give insight into the values of the students, thus making value creation a mutual enterprise between the director and students. Student leaders must share the value with their peers in the community to help them all have a shared understanding of the goals and norms of the community (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021). I focused on the peer-to-peer process of articulating value when interviewing students and asked them how they tell their peers that what they do matters. Our Drum Major, Erica, discussed her strategy for articulating value to her peers, which is very similar to many of the other interviewed student leaders.

Erica: I like letting them know that they play an important role in the band and praising them for being in the group. I also like to send younger members the videos of our first performance. Up until that point, they never see the show as a whole and once they watch our first performance, they get to really see how important they are and how irreplaceable they are.

Erica, similarly to how she crafted her convening call, was all about showing rather than telling. While she gave members praise for being a part of the community, she articulated that there is much more power in showing peers rather than using verbal feedback. Her strategy of showing the new members their first performance is helpful, as up until that point, they see everything from an atomistic point of view. It is not until they see how they play an essential role in the ensemble, visually, that they understand the holistic nature of the marching band activity. In my research journal, I shared my thoughts on the director's way of articulating value to multiple groups of stakeholders.

As the band director, it is important to articulate the value of the marching band to every group of stakeholders. Administrators need to hear about the value that marching band brings to the school as a whole. As the most visible organization on our campus, we have brought positive attention to our school by being the official marching band of the city, performing in a nationally televised parade, and performing on a regional news program. This positive publicity and attention

provides value to the administrators so they may continue to financially support the program and support the scheduling needs of students to be involved in band.

When it comes to parents, I use the “music makes you smarter” argument and tell them how our alumni get into the top colleges because admissions officers see participation in marching band as a positive to college enrollment. Since the parents are seeing the value of better future chances for their child, they are more apt to continue paying for camps, lessons, and reeds.

Finally, students need to see the value in what we are doing, and since I see them every day, they need to see that the value lies in the day-to-day social experiences band provides, plus the opportunities for travel and for the chance to win a competition or earn high marks at a festival. (April 29, 2025)

When I considered the different groups that needed to hear about the value of marching band, I realized that each stakeholder required different types of value communication. The band director must appease these different groups in different ways to support the community to the best of their ability (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b). The band director becomes a type of spokesperson, advocating for the program’s value to various groups of people.

Conclusion

While many programs focus on either the traditional approach of top-down leadership, or take the servant-leader approach (Coyle, 2018), Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2021) define the systems convener approach that encompasses more than just how to lead one's peers or subordinates; the systems convener approach to leadership focuses on total program transformation, utilizing multiple levels of leadership with their own tasks and goals in order to support the program as a whole and not just the interests of the individual or a small group.

Systems conveners play a vital role in the total program culture by embodying these traits. They craft the call to rally new members to join the community, they earn legitimacy as a community of practice to stakeholders and those who come into contact with the community, while also focusing on identity development and empowering members to engage in personal identity work. Systems conveners also cultivate agency and relinquish partial ownership to all members of the community, they examining power structures and the effects they will have on all members of the community, and articulate value to all members of the community to gain a mutual understanding of goals and norms, while also articulating value to non-community stakeholders who can offer financial and other support to the community. By modeling (Bandura, 1977) systems convener traits to the student leadership team, the band director demonstrates to students how to become systems conveners, a skill they can apply to any other communities of practice they are in or may join in the future.

CHAPTER SEVEN FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Our institutions, to the extent that they address issues of learning explicitly, are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching...As a result, much of our institutionalized teaching and training is perceived by would-be learners as irrelevant, and most of us come out of this treatment feeling that learning is boring and arduous, and that we are not really cut out for it. (Wenger, 1998, p. 3)

Throughout my dissertation journey, I sought to answer the question: what role does social learning play in the cultural contexts of a high school marching band, and how is culture built and maintained in the marching band context? Wenger's (1998) *Communities of Practice*, as well as many of his subsequent writings, served as a framework to guide my data analysis. The purpose of this research was to identify how marching band directors could create a culture of belonging to improve educational outcomes for their students and program as a whole. Throughout this journey, I considered what the building blocks of culture are in a high school marching band, how students build and evolve their identities in marching band, and how that affects the entirety of the band, the importance of leadership at multiple levels, and how that leadership affects cultural change in the greater marching band community.

In this chapter, I will review the findings from each of the central themes: social learning, community building, identity formation, and systems conveners. I will discuss the common theme of belonging and how leadership, mentorship, communication, and positivity were found to be foundational to the belonging aspect of marching band. I will suggest ways for marching band directors to use the data in ways that may benefit

teaching and community building in their own classrooms, while simultaneously connecting these ideas to previously discussed literature in chapter two. These ideas may be transferable to other areas of music education, such as choir or orchestra ensemble classrooms.

Social Learning

“The social learning space is what participants create among themselves. It is their response to their condition, shaped by their own understanding of the learning agenda...a space that participants create by investing their drive to make progress collectively” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). As noted in the data, social learning is prevalent in a marching band setting (Ma & Hall, 2018; Matthews, 2017), as students begin to take on leadership and roles within a supportive and caring family atmosphere (Cumberledge, 2021; Dagaz, 2012; Matthews, 2017). One of the most important skills students learn as part of a marching band is how to effectively communicate with their peers, as well as how to mentor and instruct others in the context of the community.

Community Building

“As we build communities of practice through participation, we work out our relations with each other and with the world, and we gain a lived sense of who we are” (Wenger, 1998, p. 192). The central focus of Wenger’s work is on how communities of practice are built (1998) and how their social structures operate. The research data collected and analyzed for this study within this marching band community aligns with

Wenger's ideas, including why communities retain their members and how conflict is confronted and handled.

Retention in Marching Bands

Marching bands may experience difficulty retaining students for a variety of reasons. One theme that was consistent among participants was that the social aspects of marching band kept them coming back. Almost every student who was interviewed said that social benefits were the most important thing to them in marching band. The main justification for this is that marching bands develop a family atmosphere for students (Cumberledge, 2021; Matthews, 2017). Many marching bands are extra-curricular, start rehearsing long hours in the summer before school starts and into the fall, and then include the time spent with each other on buses, performing, etc. Some of these students will see their friends and fellow band members the same amount, or even more than their parents and family. Because of this time spent together and this family environment, marching band becomes its own social ecosystem.

These relational connections that the students make with each other are a key motivation for many of them to stay in marching band. Throughout my time as a director, I have witnessed students quit—and it almost always is for social differences; they might not show up to enough rehearsals to build the connections with others, or they might create conflict, causing them to be outliers (Wenger, 1998) of the “family.” Marching bands with strong cultures and family atmospheres, where students feel connected to others and supported by their peers is a dynamic tool for retention.

Identity Formation

“Community membership gives the formation of identity a fundamentally social character. Our membership manifests itself in the familiarity we experience with certain social contexts” (Wenger, 1998, p. 162). Forming an individual identity is essential for the process of growing and forming a positive group atmosphere, similar to the family atmosphere that Cumberledge (2021) and Matthews (2017) use to describe typical marching bands. This individual identity is impacted by the group identity of the marching band, or as the students commonly call themselves, “the band kids.” All the students interviewed shared that their participation in marching band had a positive effect on their identity, fostered by their shared group identity as a “band kid.”

The effect positivity had on the ensemble was a leading piece of the data. Positive attitudes and interactions enabled students to become more open with others, allowing them to express themselves more freely in performance and socially with their peers in the ensemble. Examining negative interactions that were found in the data, one can see that these incidents prompted students to shut down emotionally and socially during rehearsals and performances; this hindered the students' experience of the family atmosphere, producing a lack of motivation during rehearsals and performances. The interviewed students believed that these interactions led to a lackluster performance, and that positive interactions enabled the group to communicate better both on and off the field. The positive interactions allowed students more freedom of expression; for example, students who felt the positivity from others were more open to express themselves in terms of gender and their exploration of self.

Finally, multimembership (Wenger, 1998) had a significant impact on students' identity as marching band members, as well as their personal identity. All of the students who were interviewed said that if they were members of another community of practice within the school, they brought some of their marching band identity into that group, and they also brought some of their identity from other groups into the marching band. This allowed students to explore their identities and share their values in other settings that may not have provided the same positive environment as the marching band. In addition, students who were not part of the marching band community began to inquire about the marching band and potentially investigate the possibility of joining the ensemble.

Belonging: The Social Purpose of Marching Band

A sense of belonging is the cornerstone of marching band, a place where everyone is accepted as they are, relationships are fostered among peers, and a family atmosphere is developed (Matthews, 2017). Maslow (1943) wrote about belonging, stating that to climb up his theoretical pyramid of human needs, people need to feel a sense of belonging, among other things. Humans require certain things, food, water, shelter, but after those physical needs are met, students need to feel emotional safety and belonging to learn and thrive. Belonging is a process that takes time and constant maintenance. As Coyle (2018) explains, "Belonging feels like it happens from the inside out, but in fact it happens from the outside in. Our social brains light up when they receive a steady accumulation of almost invisible cues: We are close, we are safe, we share a future" (p. 26). Belonging is both in the fabric in the nature of marching band, and can be nurtured as well. "A community of practice is not just a website, database, or collection of best

practices. It is a group of people who interact, learn together, build relationships, and in the process develop a sense of belonging” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 34).

Communities of Practice foster a sense of belonging within the community, which in turn strengthens the community in a cyclical manner. This sense of belonging and the formation and development of the community are strengthened by four key building blocks: leadership, mentorship, communication, and positivity. To foster a strong community and a strong sense of belonging, these four building blocks strengthen the relationship between community and belonging. While one of these blocks may not be as strong as the others, strengthening that one block will help to create a stronger sense of the belonging needs of students and, in turn, strengthen the community and create a family environment. The foundation of our community is built with? Through? positivity and effective communication. Students cited those two key areas as being the most important for everything else, with mentorship and leadership following them. When these four building blocks are at their strongest, everyone feels like they belong, and the community is strengthened; it truly is a place where the family environment can flourish at the center of everything that we do (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Key foundational building blocks that support and strengthen a sense of belonging in a community of practice.

Systems Conveners and Leadership

Many high school marching bands implement student leadership teams; however, their roles can differ greatly between programs. What was implemented during this study was a systems convener (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015b; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2021) model of leadership, where all three levels of leadership—section leaders, drum majors, and band director—worked together to implement the key qualities of a systems convener as discussed in chapters two and six. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2021) explain that these systems conveners employ “a particular kind of leadership that creates synergies, often between unlikely learning partners. They are interested in doing what it takes to make a real difference, more than in complying with convenient metrics, following strict job descriptions, or making showy moves” (p. 17).

Mentorship in Marching Band

Apprenticeship is both evident and prominent in the marching band. Apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990) involves the scaffolding (Bruner, 1976) of a newcomer’s learning by senior members of the ensemble through the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Every student interviewed had a story about how they were mentored by another band member. Often, these mentor-mentee relationships extended beyond the marching band field and into other classrooms, the hallways, and even outside the school entirely. This helped to build communication skills as previously mentioned, while continuing to support the family atmosphere that many students experience as a member of the marching band.

Naomi (participant) mentioned that the band director was someone who modeled (Bandura, 1977) good mentorship to the entire marching band. Naomi shared that the band experienced my interactions with other adults and with the students in the ensemble, allowing them to see how I lead students and staff as well as helping them understand new concepts; they took those lessons with them to the field.

Communication Skills

A key social skill that students learn from being an active member of the marching band is how to communicate with each other. In today's digital age and with personal communication devices in every teenager's pocket, I have had many conversations with adults about the lack of in-person communication skills among students. As the world changes, especially in the post-pandemic era, and the role of communicative technology grows, it has had a negative impact on learning essential communicative skills required in school and work environments.

Through analyzing the data, it became evident that participation in marching band had been an important part of expanding communication skills among band members. Jane, David, and Jayla mentioned how marching band forced them to interact with other members while they were newcomers and uncomfortable with its common social interactions. This type of interaction taught them how to have appropriate communication with peers (Wenger, 1998). These social interactions are often modeled by senior members of the ensemble (Rogoff, 1990). Band directors may also seek to nurture these interactions. A silent rehearsal style where the director expects complete silence from students will not help to reinforce these skills. It will make marching band feel like any

other class where students may sit and receive information from their teacher in a lecture format, while also not allowing students to have the agency and ownership that students desire (Wiggins, 2015).

Sophia's (participant) comments echo that of Dagaz (2012), describing trust as a skill that can be built upon in the marching band experience. As these students spend a considerable amount of time together refining their craft and building new friendships, a family environment begins to form (Cumberledge, 2021; Rothbard & Lewis, 2006; Matthews, 2017; Odello, 2002). The data demonstrated that communication builds trust, and trust builds family groups. Families and relationships are built on trust (Dagaz, 2012) and require communication and problem-solving in order for the band family to be a successful one.

Good communication between band members was crucial in creating a strong sense of belonging. When students had either goals or problems, they had to communicate effectively with others to achieve their goals or address their problems. Communication played an important role in recruiting and retaining members of the community, and also helped to fortify the family atmosphere that was created within the band.

Constructive Conflict

The implementation of constructive conflict within the band is closely connected to the nature of communication among band members. As previously mentioned, many students saw communication skills as one of the greatest extra-musical skills gained from marching band participation. Part of communicating with others is resolving conflict,

which, when you spend considerable time in a family environment, is sure to arise (Bondesio, 1992). Conflict may arise from disagreements about music, about social choices, or in the case of Olivia, it may come from past misunderstanding and bullying practices. Whatever the situation or reasoning, conflicts must be resolved before they inflict damage to the culture of the group as a whole (Wenger, 1998).

By focusing on constructive conflict, the students focus on solving the problems that will result in a stronger social bond between them. Johnson & Johnson (1994) explain that students need to confront the conflict and be able to talk freely and openly about the conflict to use problem-solving strategies to resolve the conflict, sometimes with the help of peer or adult mediators. The goal of making conflict constructive is to openly communicate the issues at hand for the betterment of all parties directly involved, as well as other bystanders in the community of practice as appropriate.

The Power of Positivity

Many participants in the study cited how they used positivity within the social fabric of the marching band, as well as experiencing the power of positivity when they first joined the community. Positivity was mentioned frequently by participants in every area of the study. Students who experienced positivity with the community were more likely to lead with positivity as they became the senior members of the ensemble, as well as take that trait of marching band out into the greater school community with them. Positivity must be modeled by all systems conveners (band director, drum major, and section leaders) to be effective. If you recall Olivia's story of not feeling any belonging, she did not use any positivity in her interactions with others, which caused social

problems for her and the feeling of abandonment at the end of her tenure with the band. Olivia's story goes on to show how important positivity is, as negativity can wreak havoc on other community members and prompt them to lose that much-needed feeling of belonging. If positivity disappears, students are less likely to communicate and participate, leading to less social interaction, a lessened sense of belonging, and a weaker community.

Conversely, if you look at Jennifer's (participant) story, you notice that she encountered positivity along her journey. That positivity allowed her to work on her collective marching band identity, transitioning her from "kid in band" to "band kid." The negativity she encountered from past section leaders gave her the drive to change her leadership methods when she became section leader. As she took a more positive approach, sharing her hidden love of band with others, she encouraged community members to stay in band and continue to feel the success and transformation that she felt.

Marching Forward: Building the Family Dynamic

While analyzing the data, it became evident that the band director is someone who has the opportunity to model good communication and relationship skills to the students. Anecdotally, the students during marching band season sometimes spend more time with the band director in rehearsals than they do with their own parents. Band directors can be leaders and role models, allowing students to see their public interactions in a positive light—including tough conversations and conflicts that may arise. The band director ought to be willing to show students how to handle conflict and resolve problems without the use of negative strategies such as yelling, name-calling, avoidance, or being

disrespectful to others. Students who experience these negative interactions from their band director would be more likely to use them, causing communication breakdowns. Band directors could also help students through conflict and be a mediator to conflict to give students a front row seat to how conflict can be solved positively and generate growth between those at odds (Dweck, 2017).

The data in this study affirms that marching bands benefit greatly when a family atmosphere is fostered within the ensemble. Not only do band directors model and mediate good communication skills, but they also set that standard with their band students. Every year, the section leaders attended a multiple-day training on becoming leaders in the band. This involved communication exercises and conflict resolution exercises in which the students would participate. This would enable section leaders to identify problems before they arise in the social landscape and confront conflicts head-on. The activities allowed the group identity of the ensemble to be student-driven (Odello, 2002), while promoting a positive and servant attitude (Coyle, 2018) among the leadership team.

Another activity that could be important for developing a community mindset is to allow time for the section leaders to give feedback to members of their section. In the study of this marching band's community of practice, allocated feedback time provided leadership opportunities through practice of giving feedback while other students received feedback, thus building more positive communication throughout the band. It allowed for growth in student agency and for band directors to reach more students indirectly. Members should also feel agency and ownership in the community and feel

safe to express their opinions to other members of the ensemble, including student leaders and band directors.

To build a family atmosphere that students want to be a part of, it is helpful to offer activities that are non-band related in which students can participate. For example, the students participating in this study performed the national anthem at a local ballpark for a semi-professional team and then enjoyed the park with other band members. The social committee sponsored events in the band room (i.e., movie nights or game nights) to allow social interaction and positive communication to be at the forefront of their experience so that they could build relationships, practice communication, and finally experience the family atmosphere that they had created.

Community building is essential for the overall culture of a marching band group, retention of current members, and recruitment of new members. Freshman members overwhelmingly reported during their interviews that the mentorship provided by older members was crucial in helping them succeed in their first year of high school. One of the things this band found successful was starting a mentorship program within the marching band. Freshman students at the end of the year who were identified as having leadership potential by both current student leadership and the director were invited to become student mentors. When new freshmen joined the ensemble, these mentors would be one of their first contacts. These mentors were from different instrument sections than the one the students were in, thus allowing for more contact with different people with whom they might never have met or formed friendships. This allowed for more cross-pollination and was successful in bringing the different sections closer together. When

sophomore students served as mentors, they were able to relate to their mentees with a more recently shared and similar background. Not only do newcomers have both their mentor and section leaders, but they also have their entire section to bond with during band camp and beyond. This resulted in higher retention rates for new members and gave the mentor students a new set of communication and leadership skills, preparing them to eventually lead their own section.

The Transformative Power of a Community of Practice

*“You know, marching band is more about the culture than it is about the music!”
-Marching Band Staff Member, August 2023*

After deep reflection, review, research, data collection, analysis, and more reflection, I can agree with this statement to an extent. Culture is the driving force behind any marching band. Culture with a strong community is the force that propels a marching band to success. When coupled together with transformative leadership, expert mentorship, strong communication, the power of positivity, and with a little bit—or a lot!—of music sprinkled in, what results is nothing short of magic. Marching band is an activity that pushes students both mentally and physically, allows them to forge their own identity and path forward, and helps them experience something larger than themselves.

Perhaps my greatest lesson throughout this study is the transformative power of a *community of practice*. I have heard many coaches of different sports, as well as band directors, talk about building good cultures, but truly, when you build a great community, it transforms into one that

- allows students to take ownership,

- allows them a space to grow and develop on their own terms,
- and provides them with both a social and musical outlet.

Marching band allows students to feel part of a family, and a community that is unique to the ensemble's group identity. This family is imbedded in a strong community of practice that fosters a deep sense of belonging in its participants. All of these marching band students' lives are transformed by mentorship, which connects students to one another on a personal and musical level. Students are touched by the leadership, first being led by outstanding peers who represent the best the community has to offer, before eventually becoming leaders themselves within the band. Our students also learn superior communicative skills that allow them to solve problems and take ownership within their social circles because of their willingness and ability to communicate effectively. And of course, with the power of positivity, students are drawn to the community, and more willing to be risk-takers and work tirelessly towards their community and individual goals. All of the building blocks are the foundation of the band family, the force that gives rise to this dynamic human enterprise we call marching band.

APPENDIX A
INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD
EXPEDITED REVIEW APPROVAL



Institutional Review Board

Date: June 28, 2023

Study #: IRB-FY2023-260

Study Title: The Formation and Development of Culture in a Marching Band

Submission Type: Initial

IRB Decision: Approved

Research Team:

Jason Rose

Deborah VanderLinde

Based on applicable federal regulations, the above referenced study has been determined to involve no more than minimal risk to participants and to be Approved, with the following expedited categories:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Letter and Consent Document:

This letter along with three IRB approved (date-stamped) consent documents and a recruitment document can be found in Cayuse in the [Submission Details](#) page under [Letters](#) and [Attachments](#), respectively.

The IRB approved version of the consent document must be used in consenting participants. Federal regulations require that each participant receive a copy of the consent document unless a waiver is granted by the IRB. Signed consent forms must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project. Please remember that informed consent is a process that continues throughout the project, starting with recruitment and assurance of participant understanding of the project, and followed by a signed consent form when applicable.

Permission from Research Sites:

Please note the following:

- This IRB approval letter means that the research has met the federal criteria for approval per 45 CFR 46.111 Criteria for IRB Approval of Research.

- Before the research is initiated, permission to conduct research at a given site must be obtained from all research locations listed in the IRB submission. You must keep copies of all such permission letters for your records.
- It is the responsibility of each researcher to follow all applicable policies and procedures of any outside institution where the research will be conducted.

Modifications:

Any changes to the approved project must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation by submitting a MODIFICATION request. Do not collect data while the changes are being reviewed. Data collected during this time cannot be used in research.

Incidents:

All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others, serious and unexpected adverse events, non-compliance issues and/or serious complaints regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB by submitting an INCIDENT report.

You are approved to start the research. Please retain a copy of this notification for your records.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office.

Thank you.

The Oakland University IRB

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