
“Every Time I Leave Class, I’m Happy”: Community Perspectives in a Community-University Partnership

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Abstract

The University of South Carolina String Project (USCSP), model site for over thirty community-university partnerships in the United States, offers a unique amalgam of community music and music teacher education. Community partners participate as music makers taught by university students within a teacher education program. The researcher implemented a 14-month intrinsic case study of the USCSP to understand how each group of USCSP participants – the university undergraduates, the community, the faculty and institution – experienced their engagement in the community-university partnership. This article explores the multidimensional experience of community participation in the USCSP as a dynamic community of practice. Dominant themes related to motivation include access and affordability, homeschooling and family musicking; the learning experience; and enjoyment linked to musical challenge and transcendence.

Keywords: community music, service-learning, string music education, qualitative case study, homeschooling, family musicking

“Happiness, knowledge, not in another place, but this place—not for another hour,
but this hour...” Walt Whitman

The University of South Carolina String Project (USCSP) maintains a vibrant community-university partnership in the community of Columbia, South Carolina since 1974. Designed to give USC college students firsthand teaching experiences in music and to foster the growth of string players in the Columbia region, the program evolved into an intergenerational community-university partnership. Through group classes, orchestral ensembles, private lessons and community performances, it now serves hundreds of community members. The *New York Times* featured the program in an article, garnering national recognition for its best practices in higher education as a “distinctive or promising approach to teacher education in the arts” (Polin & Rich, 2007, p. 10). As part of the National String Projects Consortium, the USCSP is also the flagship model for 39 other string projects throughout the United States (Retrieved from stringprojects.org). Barnes (2013) reported too an international community, a profile of the USCSP, including the general program construct, activities, successes and challenges to the international community. Building on that program overview, this study explored and expanded upon insider responses from the USCSP community partners by presenting the results of a 14-month intrinsic case study. While I explored the experiences of pre-service music teachers’ experiences elsewhere (Davis, 2011; 2017), this article highlights the voices of the community partners to extend the discourse around community engagement and higher education, and thus illuminating the motivations that drive participation. Open-ended research questions included: Who are the community partners? How does participation in this community music program benefit and challenge the community partners? What are the implications for the field of music

education? The USCSP participants offer their responses and perceptions about this community-university partnership: their personal perspectives of happiness and knowledge in this place, at this hour.

Literature

There is an abundance of literature regarding service-learning and community-university partnerships in the field of education. Researchers documented the benefits and challenges for participants on both ends of service-learning projects (Barnes, 2002; Burton & Reynolds, 2009; Eyler & Giles, 1999); explored the philosophical underpinnings of experiential education (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000), as well as the need for balanced, synergistic partnerships that engage the community as an asset (Gaffikin & Morrissey, 2008; Schwartzman, 2010). Literature pertaining to community-university partnerships in the field of music education is still developing. There are investigations of community outreach performances (Soto, Lum, & Campbell, 2009); intergenerational partnerships (Bell, 2003; Conway & Hodgman, 2008); partnerships offering lessons and ensemble participation (Barnes, 2013; Dabback, 2008); partnerships for schools with insufficient arts programs (Reynolds, 2004); and partnerships serving community students with no other access to musical instruction (Barnes, 2002; Burton & Reynolds, 2009; Dabback, 2008; Reynolds, 2004). Scholars also studied specific benefits of participation as embodied in social capital (Langston & Barrett, 2008), and support of health and well-being (Dabback, 2008; White, 2016). Multiple authors, however, acknowledged that service-learning research in music education would benefit from a richer investigation into the experiences of community partners (Conway & Hodgman, 2008; Douglas, 2011; White, 2016).

Although the National String Project Consortium (NSPC) maintained activity for 20 years, the research literature regarding string projects and the consortium is still in nascent stages. There are explorations of program structure (Barnes, 2013), site effectiveness and benefits to participants (Barnes, 2002; Byo & Cassidy, 2005), NSPC history (Przygocki, 2009), teaching methods (Przygocki, 2004), and preservice teacher experiences (Davis, 2017; Ferguson, 2003; Schmidt, 2005). The data elucidating community participant experience remain limited. In response, this study adds to the literature as I present the voices of the USCSP community partners, validating their perspectives and placing them in the broader world of community music as a whole. The data presented here confirm prior findings regarding community-university partnerships and explore underrepresented areas of consideration including motivations for participation, homeschooling, family musicking, and transcendence.

Overview of the USCSP

The USCSP is part of the University of South Carolina's broader community music initiative, "music for your life," which includes multiple strands of community music making available to South Carolina residents hosted by the USC School of Music. Offerings include Suzuki classes, a New Horizons band for senior citizens, group guitar classes, and early childhood programs. While community engagement can take multiple forms, the administrators of the USCSP consistently refer to it as a service-learning site. According to Tayloe Harding (name used with permission; all other names in the document are pseudonyms), the Dean of the School of Music, the mission of the "music for your life" initiative is to "serve a higher purpose" and provide a venue for lifelong learning in the community. Each of the music programs at USC contribute to this framework of community engagement and higher education music learning that is powerful and unique. Harding described the program as follows:

The String Project represents probably the most comprehensive and diverse audience for individuals that you could ever conceive for a service-learning project: faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduate students, alumni - that's the university constituency. Then in the community constituency.... Every conceivable socio-economic classification in town and our region... every conceivable ethnicity and racial representation. If the university wanted to script the best possible service-learning activity that could touch all of the bases and be one of those things that you could check off every item on a list of the goals and objectives of a good service-learning program, there is nothing remotely close to the String Project... [Tayloe Harding, personal interview, October 1, 2010]

Diversity within the USCSP applies not only to individuals, but also to the learning context. The USCSP serves both children and adults. The adult constituency expanded since 2004, when the program instituted an adult beginner class in response to the expressed wishes of community members. In contrast with New Horizons programs geared toward *retired* adults (Dabback, 2008), the USCSP provides space for all adults to participate. This results in parents starting instruments along with their children and college students from USC enrolling to learn an instrument they always wanted to play. The age diversity of the USCSP is most obvious in orchestral settings where it is not unusual to see a 9-year-old cellist stand partners with someone easily a grandfather's age. In addition, the demographic diversity roughly imitates that of the population of Columbia, South Carolina. Classes that I observed included Caucasian, African-American, Indian, Asian, and Hispanic students with at least 49% of the population self-reported as non-Caucasian (Jesselson, personal communication, May 10, 2010).

Methodology

The data presented here emerged from a 14-month intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) of the USCSP that commenced with the purpose of providing a detailed, multi-dimensional, rich and thick description of the USCSP as a community-university partnership and the flagship model for the National String Project Consortium (stringprojects.org). The researcher examined the activities, benefits and challenges of participation in the USCSP from the perspectives of the undergraduate teachers, community partners, faculty and institutional members. Multiple and intensive campus visits led to 60 hours of naturalistic observations, extensive field notes, interviews with 33 participants encompassing each facet of the USCSP, artifacts and archival materials, journal entries and personal reflections. Observations covered all aspects of the USCSP including group beginner and second-year classes; private lessons; rehearsals of the Silver Strings, Concertino, and Intermezzo orchestras; string methods classes; meetings with the university student teachers; and end-of-term performances (Appendix A). Of the 33 case study participants I interviewed, 17 were community partners comprising adult students (n=4), parents (n=3), parents who were also adult students (n=3), a parent who was formerly a USCSP teacher (n=1), and adolescent students (n=6). As stated previously, all names provided are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. The initial interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended to allow room for the researcher to pursue threads of salience that materialized during each interview (Appendix B). Follow-up interviews took place based on participant interest and as a part of member checks.

Data analysis for this study followed a spiral beginning with *data collection*, looping through *data managing*, then *reading*, *memoing*, *describing*, *classifying*, *interpreting*, and finally, *representing*, *visualizing* (Creswell, 2007). Spiraling through different levels allowed for

revisiting raw data on multiple occasions and developing a coding list that revealed salient themes surrounding the USCSP participant experience. The coding list and themes emerged from an investigation of patterns, repetition, indigenous typologies (i.e., String Project terms), participant analogies, similarities, differences, word frequency lists, anomalies and theory-related material (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). To increase the validity of this qualitative inquiry, the researcher followed Creswell's (2007) recommendations of incorporating at least two of the eight strategies for trustworthiness. In this case study, I employed six: *prolonged engagement in the field* through fourteen months of study, *triangulation* through collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data, *peer review* through sharing findings with faculty advisors and a research cohort, *clarifying researcher bias* by revealing and acknowledging the researcher's stance, *member checking* through asking for participant clarification of data analysis and interpretation as well as *rich, thick description*. The themes and patterns discussed here were recurrent across field notes, participant observation, personal interviews, archival materials and personal reflections.

Results

In studying the USCSP, I found that the participants came from varied walks of life and demographics, with a montage of prior musical experiences and ranging in age from 14-70. For them, the String Project was a unifying factor in their lives – a valued community experience of musical learning, enjoyment and social support. When viewed as a dynamic community of practice (Wenger, 1998), the USCSP offered participants opportunity, including access and affordability; valued musical experiences including music learning, building a musical identity, and musical challenges encompassing benchmarks, personal edification and enjoyment. I

explored these themes here with special attention to the intersections of community engagement with homeschooling, family musicking, and transcendence.

“It’s a Rich, Rich Opportunity” – Access and Affordability

The USCSP community partners consistently expressed an experience that celebrated opportunity, affordability and access. The String Project filled a void for students who did not have access to string programs in their schools, for homeschooling families who desired broader musical exploration for their children within a social environment; for adults who always wanted to learn an instrument; for those who could not afford private instruction independently and for families who desired to learn and play music together. In describing the String Project, the participants mentioned the word *opportunity* 25 times: “It’s hard to imagine what life might have been like without this. It’s a rich, rich opportunity;” “It’s good, too, for those who haven’t played an instrument – who’ve always wanted to learn. Because it gives them that opportunity;” “It provides... an opportunity that a lot of children may not get, may not ever get. I think it's wonderful;” “I think it’s a great opportunity for kids. I think it would be great if they had more programs around for students to learn instruments;” “It's nice to have another opportunity to play with a group because playing at home, you know, I can practice all I want or I can play with the CD or whatever... But, playing with a group is... a whole different skill just involved in that.” Parents and participants noted that the USCSP provided an opportunity for access to musical instrument instruction, however access took on different meanings for different participants.

The affordability of music instruction within the USCSP was a strong motivator for participation among the parents interviewed. Parents praised the reasonable tuition: “It’s great because it’s affordable for the parents. The cost is excellent. I thought it would be great because the both of us could take it at the same time;” “That’s why I looked further into this program. It

met the deadline and the cost is excellent;” “If you spread out the cost on a monthly basis, it’s really affordable and attainable for all parents.”

In addition to affordability, a number of community partners made it clear that the USCSP provided access to an important educational opportunity for their homeschooled children. As one homeschooling mother explained:

As homeschoolers (you know kids in a traditional school studying have orchestras at school that they can participate in)... It has enabled my homeschooled children to experience stringed instrument private instruction, orchestra experience, and we wouldn't have had that same opportunity.

This mother emphasized how music needed to be a central part of her children’s education and further explained, “My personal philosophy in our home schooling, music was not an option for our girls - it was just as mandatory as math and science and grammar.” Another homeschooling family drove 70 miles from a nearby town to take advantage of the String Project. The mother told me, “It’s worth it! The instructors are good and fun. They make it fun for the kids.”

Several of the community partners I interviewed had close and extended family members who also participated in the USCSP. The opportunity to make music together as a family, otherwise known as *family musicking*, was a motivation to participate. Although musicing and musicking both appear in the literature, I use musicking here to specifically connect with Small’s (1998) broad view of the term. Carter, a father who played in a string quartet of family members, explained, “from a family standpoint, it gives us another venue where all of us do something together. We all share something.” Carter’s wife elaborated, “So not only were our kids learning and not only were we able to observe them learning the stringed instruments, we were learning *with* them.” Another mother pronounced, “We practice at home together,” noting that they had

“musical playoffs” and the daughter would laugh at or tease the mother over not “get[ting] the notes right.” When asked about a favorite memory in the USCSP, it was these playful family practice sessions that came to mind. “It is kind of like a family bonding – we’re taking the instrument together, learning... We're playing at the basic level. But, at the same time, since my daughter and I are both in it, it's fun.”

“It’s Amazing How Much Better I am Musically” – The Learning Experience

Many community partners cited the music learning experience as one of the largest benefits of participation in the USCSP. For Elizabeth, Angelina, Carter, Charlotte and Deborah, those benefits related to music learning and the brain: “It’s amazing how much better I am musically... it’s really stretched me;” “It’s really helping me with my music expertise and I’m really enjoying playing all the music and learning;” “It’s more stimulating than Sudoku.” “I’ve stretched my borders, I know that. I’ll never be a concert violinist, but it’s stretched me intellectually. It’s stretched me just to get out and do something new;” “It’s exciting to me and I’d say that it helps my brain.”

For other community partners, the opportunity to play in an ensemble setting was an important aspect of the music learning experience. As Juliana explained:

I’ve learned a whole lot more than I did before I was in String Project. I was just playing on my own, not knowing what I was doing. I’ve learned a whole lot about different styles of music... how to play certain rhythms... Before I was just kind of flat. I didn’t know how to do certain notes, but since I’ve been in orchestra, it’s really helped me figure out how to coordinate music and figure out notes and how to bow correctly.

The orchestra experience added another dimension to Juliana’s music learning. Instead of playing songs independently, Juliana had become aware of the coordination within an orchestra,

including interpretation of bowings, rhythms and notes as they contributed to a synchronized performance. Taylor agreed: “It's helped that I know more music. And, then I also get a lot more, like I said before, understanding of the orchestra. To have everyone kind of meshing together to make it sound good.” Another community partner wished the orchestra ensemble could meet more frequently:

I wish that we had the ability to have an additional group. You know, so that you got more group practice... I'm playing, really, the undertones. In fact, a lot of times I get lost because I start listening to the tune - the melody and I forget what I'm supposed to be doing myself [laughs] - my part, you know... But, hearing the whole piece come together is really quite thrilling even at the level we play.

While community partners found the music learning experience beneficial, many of them also identified this as their biggest challenge. Nine of the 17 community partners noted various musical problems that arose for them during USCSP activities. Other identified challenges related to personal concerns like arthritis, ADHD, and time management.

“Every Time I Leave Class, I’m Happy” – Enjoyment and Challenge

For many of the USCSP community partners, enjoyment was the primary motive for participation. USCSP partners expressed that the program was fun, it made them happy, they built meaningful relationships with others and they looked forward to coming back to class each week. In the words of these participants, “Every time I leave class, I’m happy. You know, I look forward to coming here on Thursday. And, every time I leave I’m just, ‘Oh that was so nice, refreshing;’” “I’ve been able to do something I’ve always loved;” “The fun part is being in an orchestra;” “Every week is a favorite memory. Every week I look forward to coming. It's the highlight of my week!”

For the older adults who participated, the transcendent nature of musicking was an inspiration to participate, and deeply connected to their expressions of enjoyment regarding participation in the community. In describing a first concert, Carter admitted: “The first time we were on the stage at the Koger. I mean, I was like, this is just *not real*.” The fantastic, otherworldly nature of performing on the grand concert stage and hearing all the parts come together, put him in awe of the experience. Elizabeth similarly described a first performance, “I was so nervous. I thought I was going to throw up. And we went out on stage and just having all the lights on you, you really don’t see. And, just being able to focus on what you were doing and be into the music. And, letting the music take you over. That to me was kind of a revelation.”

Deborah said:

It's just rich. I mean, it's just... it's one of those things... you can't really explain [like] parenthood. You have to experience parenthood for you to understand it. I would liken my experience in orchestra to that. I can't explain it. I can't really put into words. You almost have to experience it... it's just awesome. It's just awesome! It sure is an awesome, awesome thing to come together that many people and end up with a sound, you know, as rich as we do....

Deborah’s use of the word *awesome*, four times in this short passage demonstrates the power that they ascribed to the orchestral experience. Similarly, another participant spoke the exhilaration of having a small place in the context of the large ensemble: “Just to be able to hear it all together. I mean, just the symphony. It’s just amazing for me to be able to hear I’m playing just this one little part, but then to be able to stand back and hear it all.”

Discussion

An analysis of the USCSP community experience offers unique insight into a centralized service-learning partnership, maintained for over 40 years, where the community members felt valued and engaged. In many instances, their voices represented community partners who participated in the USCSP multiple years in a row. Although the focus of the site was community music making, the outcomes of the study may be helpful in considering community-university partnerships in general, communities of practice as social learning systems (Wenger, 1998), and goals for music education. Through the following discussion, I present my observations, reflections and suggestions from the perspective of a participant observer and fellow string music educator.

Community-University Partnerships Should Fill a Recognized Need in the Community

A primary concern of community engagement is building mutually beneficial partnerships that meet the tangible and authentic needs of a community (Gaffikin & Morrissey, 2008). The USCSP provided undergraduate preservice music teachers experiential learning for all four years of their degree while presenting community members with access to expanded cultural experiences and music lessons that could improve their self-growth, self-knowledge, enjoyment and, over time, self-esteem (Elliott & Silverman, 2015), demonstrating a synergistic partnership. In many parts of the United States, socioeconomic status is the determining factor in regards to access to stringed instrument instruction (Gillespie & Hamann, 1998; Smith, 1997) and remains limited, privileged, and reserved for a predominantly white population (Clements, 2006; DeLorenzo, 2012). The USCSP made stringed instrument instruction accessible for all Columbia, South Carolina residents. A typical group class cost about \$4 per session and was affordable for most residents, while scholarship monies were available for families who required

further assistance. At least 25% of community partners reported that they were living below the poverty line (Jesselson, personal communication, May 10, 2008), and yet, the USCSP enabled those families to have access to an intellectual and cultural commodity frequently reserved for the wealthy. The USCSP essentially disrupted the systemic problem of excluding poor students of color by making the program affordable and accessible to all.

In addition, the USCSP filled a need for homeschooling families. As homeschooling continues to grow in the United States, parents often look for activities to expand experiences for their children, leading to an “eclectic mix of modalities of instruction” (Carpenter & Gann, 2016, p. 329). Over 2 million children receive homeschooling in the United States today, and the number continues to grow. Traditionally, many families homeschool their children for religious reasons, but more recently parents report dissatisfaction with local schools and are against the rampant standardized testing agenda. While homeschooler core subject curricula proliferate on the internet, opportunities for musical and artistic enrichment remain limited. Many parents pay for their children to have private tutors, sometimes up to \$4000 a year (Miller, 2012). In contrast, homeschooling families within proximity of the USCSP had the ability to take advantage of the affordable musical experience for their children. The USCSP institutional faculty worked diligently to secure funding from multiple sources to provide services to all community members, including those at the margins.

Partnerships Should Employ Activities That Engage the Whole Family in Participation

As stated earlier, both adults and children participated in the USCSP, and valued the opportunities for *family musicking*. Researchers identified family musicking as an important conduit toward family communication and improved family dynamics (Jacobsen & Killén, 2015; Stern, 2010). Family musicking reinforces familial bonds through affect attunement, the sharing

and mirroring of emotional experiences, and intersubjective communication, nonverbal communication embodying awareness of self and other (Stern, 2010). Carter commented, “We’ve had something that we can share in common. That’s something that at this day and time, kids usually go their own direction, so it was really nice to be able to share something with my kids.” The shared knowing and the shared ritual (Small, 1998) was a motivation to participate. As one mother said, “We just appreciated the opportunity as a family to share this experience.”

Small’s broad view of musicking (1998) may have some additional bearing in this situation, meaning that musicking is not just the act of those playing violin or cello, but “the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity” (p. 13). Those who engaged as listeners, audience members and endorsers of the musical activity were all in the performance and “they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world” (1998, p. 15). With that premise in mind, the USCSP was a performative space for the families involved. The nuclear and extended families of USCSP participants were an eager and supportive presence at String Project performances. After a concert, an audience member could see 10-12 family members surrounding a young member of the USCSP, celebrating with the student and taking pictures to preserve the moment. Participants ascribed meaning through relationships and shared experiences, not necessarily contingent upon the act of making music. The products of family musicking were visible in those moments: mutual celebration, sharing and engagement. More community-university partnerships and music education programs should consider intergenerational learning with active family involvement. The immersion of family members

into the partnership has potential to improve communication across all levels, increase the consistency of attendance and enhance relationships that lead to retention and success.

Knowledge *Is* a Valued Outcome of Community-University Partnerships

Although some scholars caution against focusing on *learning* in the community music setting (Mullen, 2002; Mantie, 2012), and some argue against the imbalanced engagement of outreach models, still others acknowledge that learning is often a perceived and valued benefit for community partners. Sutherland (2017) suggested that challenging repertoire and new skill sets were motivating factors for participants in the London Oratory School, citing that they “wanted to be pushed to the next level” (p. 22). Coffman and Higgins (2012) identified mental stimulation as a benefit for New Horizons members. Dabback (2008) delineated spiritual, physical and mental health benefits for community music participants. The appeal of the music learning experience was evident in the USCSP as the community partners shared. Several of the older participants acknowledged the mental challenge as a valuable benefit of the program. Angelina suggested that the String Project was a source of stimulation after losing her job at work, explaining, “I think it kept my mind fresh.... I think it's learning something new. You know getting those brain cells fired up again that probably hadn't... been used in a while. Maybe I'm warding off some dementia by doing that.” Parents of younger students expressed appreciation for the mental and musical challenges provided for their children including their “brain being trained.” Some parents shared that they felt the program enhanced their child’s academic work. As the Dean confirmed:

What we see... this number is sort of anecdotal, but is 90-95% of either pleased or extremely pleased with what they get at the String Project. And, that's very important because, what parents are telling us when they tell us that, is that their children are loving

music more and are happier; doing better in school... Parents are pleased that their children are engaged with life in a way they weren't before they did the project.

The USCSP community partners cited music learning frequently as motivation for participation because they felt they were growing and happier because of the experience. They also acknowledged the ways in which the teachers made learning fun. This revealed the USCSP as a community of practice, as a social learning system where community partners engaged and participated in the joint enterprise of making music, learning the academic and pedagogical language of the domain, and performing a shared repertoire that led to further immersion in and affinity for the community-university partnership (Wenger, 1998). Music learning in the USCSP, as embodied by the acquisition of musical knowledge and skill was a key motivation for participation and engagement and we should not undervalue it.

Participatory Rituals Shape Experience

In an attempt to understand what it was about the USCSP community experience that brought people happiness and meaning, I asked all of the community partners to tell me about a favorite memory in the program. Across the community partners, young and old, they attached favorite memories to some sort of *ritual*: a benchmark, a uniform, a communal event. For one parent, it was when the daughter received a *license to bow*, a symbol indicative of skill related to bow hold pedagogy. For Angelina, it was moving into the Intermezzo orchestra and receiving the *cummerbund*. For two young students in the Concertino orchestra, it was their *musical portraits*, when they got their pictures taken together with their cellos. For Grace, it was a first performance in a *master class*. In each of these cases, the expressive symbol (Geertz, 1973) – the license, the cummerbund, the portrait, the performance – was a heuristically potent signifier of a special moment for both the individual and the community. These symbols were markers of a

validated musical and collective identity, representative of an increasing level of participation in the USCSP as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), and they were moments of celebration. Similarly, Dabback (2010) linked membership in the group and participatory rituals with a growing sense of social identity: “Structured rehearsals, seating arrangements, the hierarchical leadership of the band, and the ensemble’s repertory reinforced members’ self-concepts of themselves as musicians” (pp. 64-65). Achieving goals, and overcoming challenges are accomplishments that increase our sense of self-efficacy and self-concept and lead to enjoyment and happiness (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). When the participants perform in concert with others as part of a ritualistic experience, they can tap into “resonance patterns” (Haidt, 2006, p. 237) in our brains that tie us to others and make us feel part of something larger in the world.

A compelling aspect of these USCSP rituals was the redistribution of power and expertise. Because the program was intergenerational yet many of the older adults were beginners on their instruments, sometimes 5th or 6th grade students might attain status in the Intermezzo Orchestra before a professional doctor would. In a reversal of roles, the children were expert practitioners while the doctor was a novice. Musical competence reframed the power relationships and offered new lessons to the participants. In the USCSP space, musical achievement neutralized the competing forces of wealth, social status, formal education, race and gender. This destabilization of roles and relationships provided an opportunity to reshape student and adult assumptions about others in their community. These kinds of observations, cultivated through intergenerational experiences, have potential to break down perceived barriers as community partners learn from one another and cross implicit boundaries.

Musical Community Cultivates Transcendence

Recent studies concerning awe and transcendence uncovered the notion that being in *awe* also leads to greater enjoyment and happiness (Haidt, 2006). The USCSP community partners often described their musical experiences with a sense of awe that perhaps contributed to their enjoyment and satisfaction. Elizabeth was emphatic about the ways in which the USCSP enriched life. For Elizabeth, participation was “mystical” and “organic:”

I just think it's such an organic thing. You know, in these days of non-communication, where everybody's texting each other and nobody really wants to talk face-to-face and stuff. This is very in-your-face, one-on-one, all-together. And, these instruments are from the ground, you know. It's wood and it's rosin and it's horsehair. And, it's very organic, you know. It's not electronic and I think it's very wholesome.

For Elizabeth, playing the violin in a community was a way to connect socially and to connect with the earth and the universe. Deborah, Carter and Juliana expressed similar feelings of transcendence related to making music within the USCSP community.

Bernard’s (2009) reflections on “those occasions on which one is making music and feels at the height of his or her powers (a sense of self-actualization), as well as a connection to something larger than him or herself” (p. 10) offer insight. Bernard studied the musical experiences of graduate level student teachers, mining their journals regarding pivotal personal musical experiences and extracting language that pointed toward transcendent moments. In the USCSP, many of the community partners were novice musicians, and yet, they still expressed musical experiences of the same magnitude and import in their lives. They used evocative words like Bernard’s students including *magical*, *mystical*, *overwhelmed*, *powerful*, and *another world*. These similarities demonstrate that transcendence is not contingent upon advanced musical

abilities, but rather an experience correlated with awe. “To the extent that taking part in a musical performance puts humans in touch with the pattern which connects, in whatever form it might be imagined to exist, it is an activity that is always to some extent religious in nature” (Small, 1998, p. 141). Analogously, Elizabeth likened musical encounters to an anticipated role in heaven:

I believe in the redemptive power of music. I just think that... we're wired for sound.

You know... even to the point that when we get to heaven we'll be singing. We won't be drawing. We're not going to be acting stuff out. We'll be singing... it's part of us.

I read these transcendental perspectives of the USCSP experience as an imaginative interpretation of the social world of the string project. For some of the USCSP community partners, they reified the experience of participation in this community of practice as a religious experience and therefore, became an invaluable part of their lives (Wenger, 1998). For others, the musical community was a space for individual growth, challenge and the building of self-confidence that led to a personal transcendence. Either way, the musical community of the USCSP cultivated transformative experiences.

Considerations and Conclusions

This was one study, situated in one particular community where the data were extremely favorable. The respondents were volunteers who were, not surprisingly, eager to talk about their experiences. I was not able to interview those community partners declined to afford me an interview. It is also possible that as Schwartzman (2010) noted, community partners in service-learning partnerships are sometimes hesitant to report negative experiences, fearing that the researcher may ask them to leave the program, which would be an unfortunate consequence.

More research is necessary regarding the string project experience. A negative case analysis might be an insightful contrast. Additionally, the network of 40 sites within the National String Project Consortium could benefit from a comparative examination of replicability, effectiveness, and scope of influence. This could contribute to a means of understanding the deployment of a site of community engagement between widely divergent communities, and how mediating factors of race, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status affect a program's success.

Despite these concerns, the USCSP remains a model of effective intergenerational community engagement. The community partners agreed that the ensembles provided intellectual stimulation, social engagement opportunities and they enhanced mental, physical, and emotional health of the participants. The act of making music in groups embraced physical movement, learning and emotional engagement through musical collaboration, creativity and communication, leading to personal learning, transformation, and enjoyment. The musical life values placed prominently in the USCSP partnership – “happiness, joy, fellowship, friendship, self-confidence during music teaching and learning” (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, p. 202) – led to meaningful, satisfying and transformative musical experiences that kept the community members returning every year, as evidenced by their robust 70% retention rate (Gale V. Barnes, personal communication, August, 20, 2010). For the USCSP community members, motivations to participate emerged from the emotional, cognitive, physical and social benefits they perceived. This has implications not just for the arts, but across all community-university partnerships. Strengthening community engagement and enhancing retention occurs when community members feel their needs are being met, they feel empowered, and they feel they are participating in something meaningful. The themes of happiness, enjoyment and transcendence

are not unsophisticated refrains but rather, evidence of a mutually beneficial partnership built on trust (Power, Bartleet, & Bennett, 2014), communication and sustained engagement. The efforts of the faculty and institutions to secure funding and a designated home on campus enabled a diverse cross-section of the community to participate: from area doctors to students who were living in poverty. For all the USCSP community, weekly hours of participation became moments of transport, transcendence, and transformation. Musickers, happiness and knowledge were inextricably linked in that sacred hour or two hours every week. The community partners freely acknowledged the power of the program as they deemed it to be valuable, life-affirming, edifying and special. In Deborah's words, "the cares of life sit outside these doors."

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Appendix A

Observation Hours Spent at the USCSP

Table A1

Participant Observation Hours

Hours Recorded	Type of Observation	Brief Description
18 1/2	String Project (SP) Classes	Beginner and second year classes with SP community students; classes led by the master teacher, graduate assistants and undergraduate student teachers
12	SP Orchestra Rehearsals	SP rehearsals with the Silver Strings II, Concertino, and Intermezzo Orchestras
5	Teacher Meetings	Meetings for the undergraduate and graduate teachers including orientation, recruitment planning, and ongoing lesson planning strategies
4	Recitals	Community students perform pieces from their private studio classes; The undergraduate teachers coordinate all aspects of the recital presentation
6	Dress Rehearsals	Dress rehearsal time allotted for winter and spring concert performances
3	Recruitment Sessions	Time spent in the Columbia public schools informing students about the USCSP and inviting students to participate
5 1/2	Concerts	Attendance at winter performances and the spring culminating concert at the Koger Center
2	Methods Classes	String methods class for third year undergraduates who lead second year classes with the community students
2	Open House	The first meeting of the year for returning students to the SP; parents and students attend to meet the new teachers and confirm class, orchestra, and private lesson schedules
2	Audition Day	Auditions for the School of Music include students wishing to participate in the string education program
Total hours = 60		

Appendix B

USCSP Community Partner Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Role of interviewee:

1. Please give me a brief overview of your participation in the USC String Project. (Child's years in the program, attendance at classes and performances, etc.)
2. How did you come to be involved with the USC String Project?

Let's talk about the outcomes of the project:

3. What were your expectations for the String Project? Did you have specific goals? How have they been met?
4. What do you feel is key to the String Project's success?
5. What obstacles or barriers have you or your child encountered and how have you dealt with them?
6. Did you have any fears or concerns about working with university students as teachers in the program? What were those concerns and how do you feel since your involvement began?
7. How has your experience in the USC String Project benefited you (and/or your child)?
8. How has your experience in the USC String Project challenged you (and/or your child)?

Thinking about the university's role in the partnership:

9. What have you learned about the university and music education that you were not aware of before participating in the String Project?
10. Are there areas of the program that you feel need to be examined and possibly altered to improve the String Project? In what way?
11. What is the most important thing you would like the university to hear from you regarding your experience in the String Project?
12. We've covered a lot of ground here. Is there anything that I missed? Or anything that you would like to revisit?