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A Tale of Two Good Bands: Students' and Directors' Perceptions of Middle School Non-Varsity Band

Carson Ross
clr17d@acu.edu

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Varsity Band

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Abilene Christian University

Abstract

This action-research study was conducted with two middle school bands in West Texas. The researcher primarily studied student and director perceptions in the non-varsity band to identify recurring themes within the ensembles. Fifteen non-varsity band students were given a survey, and eight were interviewed. Four directors participated in small focus groups at each of the two campuses. Data was coded to observe any major themes that occurred simultaneously in the collection process. The findings of this study indicated UIL was a contributing factor to these schools' non-varsity bands. Another significant factor was the importance of challenging music and social relationships in the non-varsity bands.

A Tale of Two Good Bands: Students' and Directors' Perceptions of Non-Varsity Band

"Oh yeah, the bottom band was a scale jail." I had never heard the bottom band being referred to by this derogatory term; however, I knew exactly what my colleague in music education meant. During my high school and undergraduate time in band, it was always fascinating to hear the stories of people around the country tell me about the bands they participated in during their educational and professional careers. Unfortunately, the stories that stick with me as an educator are not about the state championship-winning and Division I rating bands; it was the horror stories of being in the non-varsity or bottom band. It was not until early January of 2023 that I received a phone call from a former band director from my undergraduate program that things began to change. Our conversation shifted to me asking him questions about the non-varsity band setting. He began to tell tales of successful directors from throughout the State of Texas who had great non-varsity bands. An idea I heard from him and a director in this study was the idea of two or more good bands. This mindset put the emphasis on high expectations for every ensemble.

Purpose

This research study examined students' and directors' perceptions of the non-varsity band setting. For the sake of this study, the definition of a concert band is the non-varsity ensemble at the middle school level. This study aimed to examine two middle school non-varsity bands in two West Texas middle schools. This study looked at these students' lives and their entire band experiences in order to try and understand students' perceptions within these two programs. Directors' perceptions of their ensembles were also crucial to the role of this study, as their perceptions of the totality of their program might provide additional insight into their bands and their students. These were the questions raised for this study:

- **Research Question 1:** What are students' perceptions of middle school non-varsity band?

- **Sub Question:** How do middle school non-varsity band students perceive their musical future?

- **Research Question 2:** What are directors' perceptions of a non-varsity band?

The setting where this study took place, and the story of these two bands informed the context of this research. This study occurred within the concert band class period at John Middle School and Eleanor Middle School (names were replaced with pseudonyms). The concert band at both middle schools is considered the non-varsity ensemble at each campus. Students from seventh and eighth grade made up the membership of both programs. John Middle School concert band had 21 members, while Eleanor Middle School had 32 members in their concert band. During this study, both bands participated in the University of Interscholastic League (UIL) concert and sightreading competition in the spring semester. UIL is the major force in overseeing statewide public-school competitions in the State of Texas. This was the first time either non-varsity ensemble participated in UIL. Both schools chose two pieces listed as grade 1 with another piece listed as a grade ½. Grades are difficulty levels of music either prescribed by the state of Texas or music publisher.

I was a year-long clinical teacher in an M.Ed program working at John and Eleanor Middle Schools. In addition to conducting this research during the provided rehearsal time, I also served as a sectional coach for students in both bands. These responsibilities contributed to how I divided my time and the unique nature of studying two different programs that fed into the same high school. This school district serves over 15,000 students in a West Texas city of 125,000 people. The two schools utilized in this study have a student population of over 800 students, with 69.3% being economically disadvantaged.

Literature Review

A study by Weidner (2020) discussed the idea of directors incorporating a high level of independence within the high school band student, emphasizing large ensembles; however, the application of teaching agency in students is something the author listed as necessary for all music groups (p.74). This study operated from a grounded theory framework to observe students' musical independence. Band educators have tried to study how to increase the personal motivation and independence of students in their ensemble. Weidner (2020) stated that his study included members of non-varsity ensembles. Additionally, he drew from multiple high school bands and their directors to collect data through qualitative means. In an article by Allsup (2012), he argued that band in public schools holds as much validity as it does within a higher context (p.183). His implication for this claim involved music education empowerment that allows students to engage in a higher level of creativity in a wholly unique space. In a Midwest clinic presented by Clark (2014), he outlined a sample of what directors can do in their warmups. Part of his warm-up routine stated, "Make players accountable" (Clark, 2014). This accountability and independence are factors to be studied from the students and the directors as seen in this study.

Competition drives musical decisions in the State of Texas on multiple levels. The first level of competition that drives a significant portion is UIL. UIL is a driving force in Texas music education's evaluation of ensembles across the state. Every spring, ensembles participate in a formal evaluation of playing standard repertoire and sight-reading. My study was conducted during this UIL process of preparing repertoire and equipping the students to sight-read.

According to Powell (2021), athletic team designations such as varsity, non-varsity, and sub-varsity influence ensemble designation at UIL (p.24). Despite the use of these names by

UIL, these classifications are rarely seen in an informal setting. Some terminology seen in the field of band is usually labeled but not limited to titles such as "concert band," "honor band," and "wind ensemble." However, UIL sets the standard for registering ensembles regarding the naming scheme in aligning the arts and other extracurriculars (*Constitution and Contest Rules — University Interscholastic League (UIL)*, n.d.). Music competitions have been subject to criticism on standardization over the years. Scheib (2016) identifies chair tests as another form of competition in the classroom. While he highlights the benefits of these competitions, he warns that students will not develop a pure love for music. UIL and inter-classroom competition served as present factors in my study.

Physical education researchers have written studies on non-varsity groups in sports. The academic term that is cross-curricular between sports education and music education is ability grouping; this term means students are placed and assessed within an organization based on the ability levels of the individual. One study by a group of researchers suggested that teachers use strategies other than skill grouping (Mahedero et al., 2021, p. 1898). Regardless of how the students were grouped, they improved their pre-assessment scores at the end of the volleyball unit. Another study by Wilkinson and Penney (2022) examined students' perceptions of mixed-ability grouping in physical education. Wilkinson and Penney (2022) found that some students appreciated the assistance they received from their higher-skilled counterparts (p.949). This finding was also referenced by the previous study on ability grouping, which found that higher-skilled students had opportunities to help and assist in learning. Both these studies were used to observe the framework of ability grouping as an established system in the middle school band setting. Both studies also utilized interviews to collect students' perceptions of growth and

membership in physical education and team settings. These studies were vital in their cross-disciplinary applications to music education.

The following studies of director and student perceptions conducted in a music education context, specifically band, all dealt with qualitative methods. The first study by Rawlings and Stoddard (2017) used descriptive statistics and adapted materials to capture students' perceptions of peer connectedness in a band classroom. A case study by Scheib (2006), relied on capturing students' data by conducting a series of interviews with one student. This study attempted to create a complete picture of a student's day-to-day life as a middle school band member. Directors' perceptions were also captured through selecting the student chosen to participate in this case study. An additional study by Gibson (2016) was conducted on band students' perceptions of high school marching band. This study looked particularly at students' perceptions of participation in the marching band setting. The major theme found in that study was peer influence leading to participation or disenrollment from marching band. Students' and directors' perceptions have been studied in a limited context. However, the structure of these particular studies informed the format of qualitative research for my study.

The action research study I conducted contributes to the perception-based studies of non-varsity bands through qualitative means. There are no action-research studies conducted in this context with this emphasis on students' perceptions. This not only adds to the body of literature for studies looking at student perceptions in band but also the lack of literature in non-varsity and sub-varsity band settings. Although there are research studies conducted with non-varsity level ensembles, this study focuses on examining the context of learning in that setting through the lens of teachers and students.

Methods

Intentionality and comfort were foremost important when crafting how to conduct this research. This study was a balancing act in respecting the musicianship of young middle school students while also collecting data on their victories, struggles, and overall demeanor in their programs. A challenge in implementing directors into this study existed in how directors were implemented into this study. Equally, it was important to capture the data of how these directors operated and felt about their programs unbiasedly and to hear the directors out on their hopes, obstacles, and growth as directors. These tools crafted for this study were brushes for painting an imperfect picture.

Participant Selection

The participants in this action research study were from John and Eleanor Middle School's concert band. I sent the parents and guardians of the students an information letter and permission form to begin the participant selection process. Students in each of the two non-varsity bands were given an assent form. Fifteen students (n=15) assented to the study between the two campuses. John contributed to eight student participants (n=8), and Eleanor had seven student participants (n=7). The gender distribution of the students broke down to eight female students and seven male students. Four directors (n=4) from John and Eleanor Middle School were adult participants in this study. The gender distribution of directors at John Middle School was two males, while the directors at Eleanor Middle School were two females. The ethnicities of the student participants were the following: five Hispanic, seven Caucasian, and three African American. The ethnological information about the directors were three Caucasian and one Hispanic.

Data Collection

The first form of data collection was in the form of surveys administered on the first day of conducting research with those students who filled out the permission and parental consent forms. According to Hubbard and Power (2003), "Surveys can also give you a sense of where to begin in your research" (p.70). The goals of the surveys helped inform the future observational notes and interview questions. The surveys served as a guide in the research process for collecting data later in the study. Open-response questions and Likert scale questions were included in this survey. Surveys were carefully crafted in terms of questions to mitigate the students' feelings of potentially feeling less than their varsity-band peers. This was a concern of a few of the directors in this study at Eleanor. According to Wilkinson and Penney (2022), students associate ability grouping with their identity in organizations they participate in (p. 942). Based on this concern, the students were not referred to as members of a non-varsity ensemble; rather, the language used reflected their status as members of their respective concert bands. This language was more familiar to them and addressed the directors' concerns.

Additional data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the students and some focus groups with the directors. According to Hendricks (2017), "Throughout the semi-structured interview, you should ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses" (p.193). The formality of having set questions and the freedom to inquire further makes the semi-structured interview model attractive. Students in each program were identified in two different ways. The first way was through identification with their directors. The directors were asked to identify "average non-varsity band members" to be selected for interviews. The second way was from the survey and observation data the researcher collected to choose appropriate candidates. When there was a notable moment in rehearsal or an interesting response on a survey that I wanted clarity from regarding perceptions of non-varsity bands, it signaled to me to ask them to

participate in an interview. Eight interviews were conducted in total (five at John and three at Eleanor). Each student interview lasted about 10 minutes. Director focus groups were conducted as two different focus groups on each campus, with the head and assistant directors for about 20 minutes each.

The final data collection form occurred through observations and notes taken during the concert band setting. These notes manifested in the form of the rehearsal structure along with students' perceived focus and behavior. Some aspects of rehearsal that were observed were warm-ups, student and director remarks, and the macrostructure of the rehearsal. These notes were collected during most rehearsals in some head notes for about three weeks, as the researcher assisted the band during class while collecting this data. A head note is a way to collect notes through data down after the event happened. A benefit of this particular form of notes was the ease of these notes in a busy classroom schedule. While teaching and assisting in class, the researcher wrote simple phrases that could later be expanded upon in a journaling process. After rehearsals, the researcher unpacked the data through journaling.

Data Analysis

The data analysis portion of this project utilized coding from the three listed collection methods: surveys, interviews, and field notes. First, the interviews were transcribed into a word processor by hand and coded using NVivo coding software. After the interviews were transcribed, I coded and grouped that data to uncover recurring themes or discoveries. The next form of data analysis examined the surveys for the Likert scale questions and short responses. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the survey questions. The final form of data analysis looked at the observational notes to patterns in rehearsals or how the students respond to certain aspects of those rehearsals.

According to Tracy (2013), codes should express clearly the themes the researcher is trying to express (p.194). Codes, or a theme in the data, were assigned throughout all three data collection forms. From the three data collection methods, thirty-two level 1 codes were created. Level 1 codes are the simplest codes formed from the data that are a few words or phrases long. Level 1 codes were generated by looking at 20% of the data as it was emerging, and these codes were applied to the other 80% of the data. From this process, level 1 codes were organized into four level 2 codes. Level 2 codes are bigger ideas from the data that capture a recurring theme found between other codes. This organizational method of applying thematic material to codes can be seen in the codebook of this study (see Appendix A). Additionally, for each level 2 code, a memo was created to express the meaning and purpose of that code in the context of the study, along with an index to show where the level 1 codes are found.

Findings

The findings of this study may shock no seasoned band director in the State of Texas. However, universal concepts that will be discussed, like good people and good music, always seem to be at the forefront of every Texas Music Educators Association, Texas Bandmaster Association, and every other music educator convention. The findings of this study will not magically tune one's flute section or raise an army of all-city quality musicians. However, band directors should ask what the story of their non-varsity band will be? In this section, I will attempt to paint a complete story, one of triumph and students and directors coming together to try something new with their ensemble. As an observer, I will describe how followers became leaders, non-varsity directors evolved into master planners, and explain how UIL fits into that narrative? Each heading represents one of the level 2 codes formed in this study.

Influence of UIL On Findings

Mr. A, the assistant director at John Middle School, approached the podium to do the general announcements for the non-varsity ensemble. The students were a little unfocused in playing their daily drill on this particular day, but nothing new. However, the speech he gave to the students was notable regarding scores. Mr. A proclaimed, "I would pass out if we got sweepstakes!" Was this statement of doubt coming from a place of self-confidence as a director? Or rather, was this the director revealing how he felt about his confidence in the playing of his students? This was not a study looking at the directors' or students' perceptions of UIL; this was a study about students' and directors' perceptions that formed during the contest season. Aspects of the contest crept into the minds of every party involved in the process through the music they played to the sight-reading that awaited them in the distance.

Choosing music that was appropriate for the ensembles came from the perceptions of the directors of their ensembles. Miss. A and B from Eleanor Middle School talked about choosing music based on the makeup of their students. From their perspective, you can set your students up for failure in the UIL process if you choose music that is not developmentally appropriate or puts too much pressure on sections of the band that lack the players. However, students in Eleanor's Concert Band liked the appropriate challenge. Multiple students pointed to the piece with the hardest grade on their concert program as being their favorite. One student remarked on the other students needing more of this challenge based on how they enjoyed playing that one piece of music. That student advocated for more challenging music by saying, "Definitely play a lot harder music because these people they can play harder music." This was a response regarding a need for more challenging music like the one grade 1 piece that Eleanor was playing at UIL. The Eleanor directors were aware how their students would perceive that music by

saying, "The more fun a song is, the more kids will practice it." Directors also carried this sentiment of the importance of knowing the players in your band when programming for UIL repertoire. Mr. B, the head director of the middle school, talked about building the players through daily fundamentals. He also took the chance to highlight the strength of the non-varsity ensemble due to the emphasis of their programs on strong fundamentals that transferred skills into concert music.

Sight-reading was a concern for both bands that shaped perceptions of the contest season. Eleanor's non-varsity director, Miss. B spent the last few minutes of class on some days simulating the sight-reading experience for her students. The music she put on her stands consisted of simple music that was not the same length as real music used in the Pre-UIL experience. Sight-reading in the Eleanor band was not aligned with what would happen on the actual day of the competition. The music curated for classroom instruction lacked the variety and unpredictability of what happened at the Pre-UIL competition. Both middle schools used the idea of "playing the game" when it came to sight-reading. This phrase was repeated throughout the process except in the room. It appeared that how fundamentals were implemented throughout UIL informed how teachers perceived the needs of their band in sightreading. Inversely, students tended to focus more on the performance side of the UIL process as important and enjoyable. One student at Eleanor remarked on their feelings about sight-reading by saying, "I think the biggest part is I'm just mostly scared. Not like scared. But I'm anxious to get the sight-reading portion."

This finding was not a critique of the process of how these four directors led their non-varsity ensembles through UIL. This study took place during a time of trial and joy for both of these non-varsity groups. This struggle came from these two non-varsity ensembles participating

in the UIL competition for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic. John Middle School almost pulled their non-varsity ensemble from competition due to some students' lack of class attendance. Despite this, due to high expectations and carefully choosing music, the students and directors completed their UIL season as victors with division two ratings in both concert and sight-reading portions. The bands both scored an Excellent rating, also known as a division two, in concert and sightreading portions of their contest as determined by judges.

Directors' Perceptions: Installing Routine

"Enter the room silently" was a phrase heard every Tuesday and Thursday from Miss. A when researching at Eleanor Middle School. A zero-tolerance talking policy was a routine and expectation for all students in the band program. When asked about band policy, the Eleanor directors brought up the necessity of routine for students, especially students who are exceptional learners in the classroom. One of the directors highlighted their unique way of classroom management on their campus by saying "Structure is key; you walk down to the other parts of the building in some classrooms they are not structured." Students in this non-varsity program were held to the same standard as their varsity peers in this respect, if not more. Immaturity and the potential for behavioral problems could totally derail rehearsal. Behavior was never an issue with this ensemble due to routine based on the directors' lens they used to view the needs of their students. In that same vein, the battle of the backpack rack at John Middle School needs an introduction.

It was the heat of the concert season, and students from eighth grade and seventh grade trickled into the cramped band hall. Backpacks and cases would burst like water balloons spilling their contents all over the tile. Some students would engage in forum discussions from the rolling backpack racks like the great old philosophers. The timer that cued the students to their seats

remained unmoving, unwavering, and undeterred from their delinquency. Another issue took root for the students that chose not to meander at the rolling backpack rack; cases were strewn about. Students at these schools customized their cases with all sorts of stickers and trinkets. These students at John loved their cases and could not part with them at their seats. These plastic and wooden cases were sleek predators of clumsy directors weaving throughout the band hall. Something needed to be done; order needed to be restored to this lawless band.

The directors created a solution, which included moving the backpack racks outside the door for students to leave their backpacks on before entering the room and leaving the cases at the back of the band hall. At first, this idea was foreign, with pushback from the students being bountiful. As time went on, students became more compliant with their role of leaving the backpacks at the door. One student even requested to roll the backpack rack himself before the other students reached the door. Mr. B commented on this phenomenon by stating, "They know what the routine is, even if they push against it like with the backpacks. You change and tweak it just a little bit, then they understand that there's an expectation when they come into the room." Behavior management based on a director's perceptions of the maturity of their students is nothing new. The directors knew non-varsity students may be in the lower ensembles due to behavioral concerns or a lack of awareness of their actions. John Middle School's non-varsity band lacked routine but maintained high expectations from their directors. Yes, the non-varsity ensemble lacked discipline and maturity in many forms. The directors were very aware of this fact, and the ones in this study seemed both proactive and reactive based on their perceptions of their individual students.

Students' Perceptions: The Good, The Band, The Ugly

Student participants were asked on the survey (see Appendix B), "How excited are you about concert band?" I anticipated widespread feelings and answers based on the students who assented to participate in this study. Some kids might really enjoy concert band, while others would dread it. However, the results for this question leaned heavily one way. Figure 1 represents the results from that question.

Figure 1

How Excited are You About Concert Band?
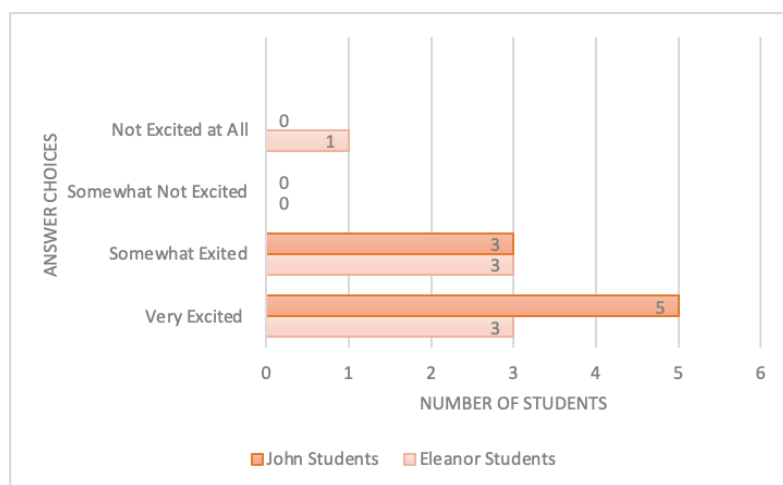
Note. This bar graph represents the answers selected by students on the first question of the survey.

Ninety-three percent of the participants (n=14) selected a choice of excitement. Only one participant (n=1) chose the choice of Not Excited at All. Additionally, 53% of participants (n=8) chose Very Excited. This one question reflects the enjoyment students experienced in their non-varsity ensembles. Students enjoy playing music and making social connections even at the non-varsity level. Eleanor students frequently mentioned the social component of band being an important factor. When asked how concert band was on a good day, a student from Eleanor commented, "It's super fun to just be with my friends and all the opportunities." This comment

magnifies the social component that is vital to keeping students motivated in the non-varsity setting. On the music-making aspect of non-varsity band, students from that school frequently pointed to their most difficult piece being the most enjoyable to work on in class. Non-varsity band has the capability to provide meaningful experiences in both social and musical aspects. Overall, students perceived excitement in the non-varsity band. It would be convenient to conclude students enjoy and are excited about band every day that they walked through that door; however, that discredits the complexities of a non-varsity ensemble.

The best way to examine the complexities of the non-varsity experience would be by illustrating a story from a particularly interesting clarinet sectional. The handful of novice clarinet students struggled with part of the previously mentioned difficult piece of music they were preparing for UIL. It was apparent that these students never worked on their part alone, and there was not enough time in this thirty-minute sectional to spoon-feed two separate clarinet parts. As the teacher in the room, I asked the class why they were not practicing their part. One of the students spoke up immediately with a flustered tone, "I don't have time to practice because I have track every day after school." The second part of this example looks at the conversation between two students in the classroom. In the same sectional, the same student spoke up and asked a student if they wanted to be their friend. From an outsider's perspective, it seemed as though these students had never interacted before. This example was used to show how for better and for worse non-varsity ensembles are student-driven. The friendships and musicianship in that 30–45-minute period was decided by the students.

It seemed like a convenient answer to say the students drove the learning in non-varsity band; simultaneously, a paradox formed within these same rehearsals. Some students found the music too difficult; others felt no challenge from the music. This was a finding at both campuses.

One student who we will call H, wrote a humorous response to a question asking them to justify

why they chose the level of challenge they felt in concert band. Figure 2 captured their entire

response of that level of challenge.

Figure 2

Student H Survey Response
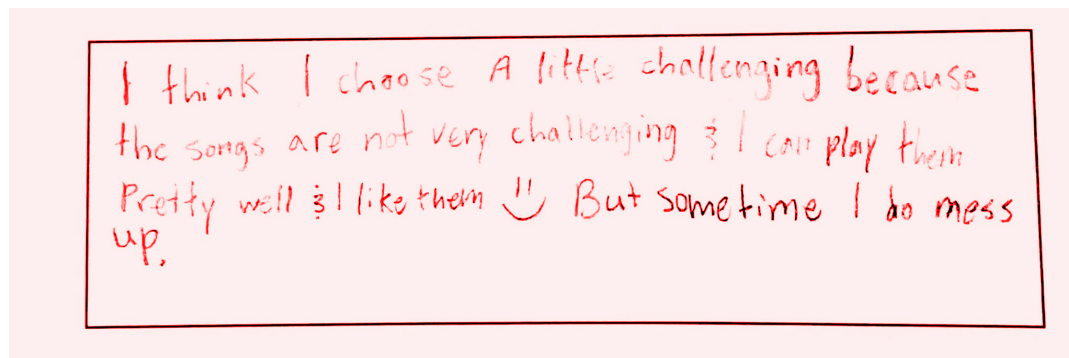
Note. In this survey response, a student justified why they believed non-varsity band music

provided a little challenge. This student also mentioned that mistakes happen even when they

perceive the challenge level as easy.

In a broad sense, students in non-varsity band had positive perceptions of their experience

and directors. Yes, students in non-varsity band dreaded the music they had to play every day

because it was either too challenging or way too easy to perform. Also, yes, there was duality in

the non-varsity ensemble. Not every student was practically the same skill level as a beginner,

and not every student was an all-city caliber musician right after their first year. I already

established that students in non-varsity bands were excited for band at some level. Students in

these bands were in band to have fun with friends and play enjoyable music. If those two needs

were being met, they had a positive perception of band. A student from Eleanor summed up their

needs being met in band by saying, "It's super fun to just be with my friends and all the

opportunities." The social aspect of band will persist even if the directors are unaware of these layers, but directors do drive what music is played in their classroom's concert season.

Where Will They Go?

In each interview, a question asked was what were their plans for band going forward. This was based on questions on the interview protocol (see Appendix C). Some of the participants were advancing to the next grade, either eighth or their new home at the high school. The specific ensemble they would be participating in throughout the next academic year was yet to be determined. A few would be moving up into their respective middle school varsity ensemble in the upcoming fall; others would be staying in the non-varsity groups. At all points of the study, the student participants were asked how "optimistic are you about your future in band?" Figure 3 shows how that question was answered by the concert band students.

Figure 3

How Optimistic are You About Your Future in Band?
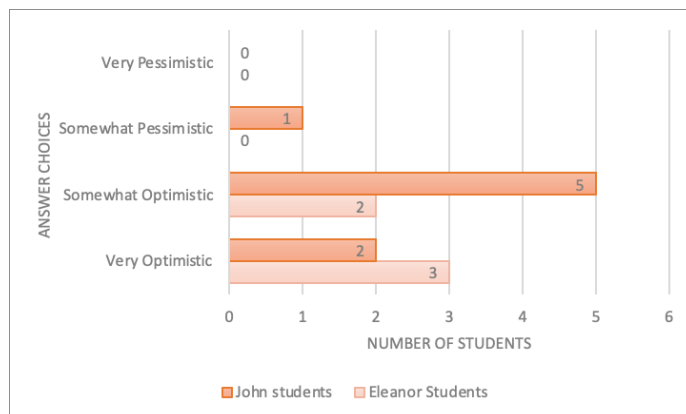
Note. This bar graph represents the fourth question from the student survey (See Appendix B). Overwhelmingly almost every student, 14 out of 15, chose an answer from the optimistic category. Forty percent of participants chose the Very Optimistic answer choice.

When they got to that question in the survey, some students needed an explanation on what optimistic and pessimistic meant in the context of this study. Both of those words were described using other synonyms like hope and hopeful. When asked what their future in band might include, students talked about various things in their future, such as higher education and future careers. Another fascinating factor that was mentioned was the inclusion of band. One student at John mentioned, "I would like for it (band) to be in my future, but I would also like doing welding and business." Students in the non-varsity ensemble wanted their musical future to continue well into high school and even at college. None of these students mentioned being a future professional musician or music educator, but the overwhelming majority of these kids wanted band to be in their life in the foreseeable future.

This aligns with a point Mr. B illustrated in the director focus groups: "You don't know what their story is going to be." He would later highlight how an ultimate goal of his teaching is to set up students to pursue music even if they have chosen a totally different career path in their life. One specific example he gave was students playing in church or community band. Students in these bands want to continue doing something fun in the future because the groundwork has been set that band is fun. One student from Eleanor mentioned their motivation for why they joined band by saying, "The only reason I did band was because back in fifth grade, they came over to our school, and they were like you could go on the spring trip one day." Students liked participating in an organization that did something exciting. Mr. B labeled his eighth graders "contributors to the high school band." A student from that band would support this point by stating, "I'm excited because he taught me stuff that I'm bringing that to high school and showing them what a concert band person can do." Retention is a big buzzword in fine arts programs today and a good place to find passionate young people for the future would be in the

non-varsity bands. Even if a student did not feel confident in their musical future, they all felt

pride and belonging in band regardless of ensemble placement.

Implications for Teachers

The first major finding was UIL was perceived as a worthwhile opportunity by non-

varsity students and directors. Though there was a feeling of anxiety with the non-varsity

students, they perceived the experience of performing more challenging music as a positive

experience. The directors of this study revealed their perception of their non-varsity ensembles

and their students though planning. The lack of maturity from non-varsity students was a reason

for installing more structure and routine in the classroom. The most surprising finding was how

positive students perceived playing in their non-varsity band due to social and musical aspect

being present. Finally, the future for band looked optimistic with non-varsity students in regard

to their next step in band. Due to band being perceived as fun even in the future at the high

school level was cause enough for those students to stay in band.

This study was intended to explore students' and directors' perceptions of two modest

West Texas non-varsity, middle school bands. Some of the findings may be valuable reminders

or a tool no matter the location or ability level of the non-varsity band one may teach. After the

conclusion of this study, I will share the whole story from my perspective with the directors.

Victory, struggle, friendship, and the joys of making music daily were all aspects found

throughout this story. As these bands' stories continue, it would be interesting to see how the

students' perceptions mold and change over time with changes in the program and personnel.

Now more than ever, routine and structure must be in every band director's toolbox. The

very different behavior policies at both campuses had a common thread: high expectations no

matter where the student is developmentally and musically. Even if a director does not have the

luxury of taking an ensemble to a contest or UIL, getting students in front of authentic learning experiences is vital. Both schools participated in their high school marching bands' middle school night. I believe in providing non-varsity students with performance experience and the opportunity to socialize with future peers and collaborators. Another factor that I felt strongly about was getting the students in the non-varsity bands good or equal trip opportunities. John Middle School Concert band had high expectations placed on their musicianship from the start but did not get the same opportunities to play as their varsity peers at a local music festival. I am not saying the varsity ensemble should not get the more premier or exciting performance opportunities. What I am asking is, what would it hurt for a non-varsity band to play in the community somewhere? If we want to fulfill our obligation as directors to provide all our students with performance opportunities, it would be to our advantage to look towards our community in providing our students a chance to be successful in front of others.

When coming into the classroom, I had a worry about hesitancy to work with these non-varsity students in this study. What were they trying to hide? As time passed, I saw these directors' care and love for their non-varsity students. They were not scared I would uncover some sort of dark secret with the non-varsity band; they were trying to protect their less mature members from being frightened by questions used in this study. In turn, every student, even those I only saw saying things under their breath in rehearsal, could not say a bad word about the character of their directors. Mr. B, in the Fall semester, would repeat a phrase along the lines of, "I don't want to be liked; I want to be respected." Through teaching the whole child through a non-varsity band setting, he not only earned his students' respect but their adoration as well.

Each school's daily drill came from well-established methods and best practices. Having that sacred time to work on fundamentals should not be trampled upon. However, the

fundamentals found in the classroom to plan for non-varsity bands may be limited to what a

director has in their setting. John Middle School used a certain method book not because it was

the director's particular favorite but because it was simply easier to use the resources of what

they had and not pay more money for a class set of a different method book. These directors

knew their students well and chose music they believed would help grow the players in their

band. Based on this study, the key to picking appropriate music is knowing the skills of your

musicians. If a band has a weak trumpet section, pick something that provides an appropriate

challenge that stretches them to be better at their instrument and as a well-rounded musician.

John and Eleanor Middle School had their own notated daily drill they put in front of their

students. John's Daily drill was a little more flexible, and they read the entire 8-10 exercises

every day at the beginning of class. If a director has the time, they should consider writing their

own classroom daily drill. I would also strongly encourage a director to play whatever drill daily

they decide on in its entirety every day to establish those classroom routines.

In the future, non-varsity bands' relationship to UIL should be examined. Do we plan

sound classroom instruction based on our perception of scores at UIL, or does UIL plan our

instruction for us? As mentioned before, UIL was not the focus of this study, but its influences

were undeniable. Further research could be conducted on the perceptions of non-varsity students

regarding UIL concerts and sightreading contests. Additional studies on non-varsity bands across

the State of Texas would also prove valuable. Generally speaking, a band from the Dallas and

Fort Worth metroplex will be different from a band in far East Texas. In the future, it would be

interesting to work with directors across the state in studying non-varsity bands.

This was a very rewarding study to conduct with non-varsity band students. As someone

so far removed from a non-varsity band student, it is hard to imagine what they think and why

they do what they do in a rehearsal context. As music educators, we view our non-varsity

ensemble as a training ground for better things. I think the better things we long for in our

students' future tend to leave out the great things in the present we can cultivate. Friendship,

challenge, and excellence can all be achieved now if we know where our students are. Take a

step back and acknowledge what you know about your non-varsity students, and you may find

yourself telling a tale of another great band. This would not be an epic tale without a great poetic

work. A poetic transcription creates a poetic work from the interview transcriptions and

recontextualizes them into something new. According to Glesne (1997) the new thing being

created was new voice from both the researcher and the interviewees words and ideas they both

brought to the table (p.214). The process of making the following poetic transcription was from

multiple transcriptions from directors and students.

"Non-Varsity Metamorphosis"

Have I gotten better?

Better sounds,

every day, try my best!

How I have grown!

From sixth grade to seventh grade,

I feel like that is a big change.

Stuck, some people don't try as hard,

Those trombones not putting in effort.

Concert band? You could do better if you tried!

The more fun a song,

the more kids will practice.

It's a ladder, a step, a system.

Think at a higher level;

succeed at a higher level,

helping each other out

as a family.

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Appendix A

Codebook

Name	Level	Description	Example
Directors' perceptions develop classroom instruction	2	Band directors inform their instruction based on how they perceive their non-varsity ensembles.	Students were rowdy today coming in. Timer was not set, and teachers were not ready to begin. Mr. A made them walk out and try again. A Stern but not harsh tone was used. (March 22nd Notes)
Directors need to plan based on the instrumentation and skills of the ensemble.	1	Band directors expressed the need to play to what they perceived as stronger students musically.	"Being small. Instrumentation is important. So, you can find grade one stuff out there, where you have two parts, but that would be detrimental." (John Director Focus Group)
Directors perceive the need for procedures with non-varsity students.	1	Directors see non-varsity students as less mature and in need of additional support in their procedures.	"Behavior and talking were big concerns in this rehearsal. Multiple new behavior management strategies have been implemented in the last week regarding backpacks" (March 6 Field Notes)
Directors perceive the non-varsity player as growing in their musicianship.	1	Director highlighted the growth of the members in their non-varsity groups	Miss A. can speak to this on her what she believes, I think that you can go as far as you need to go. And you can add gradually. So, like at the beginning of the year for concert and we'll start with descending Remington group one, and we don't move on. And it's not that you just go one through whatever and just run it and move on. It's a building process. And it can give you the concepts that you need to teach slowly at. (Eleanor Director Focus Group)
Directors take into consideration the ability and personality of their students in ensemble selection.	1	Band directors look for more than just playing in an audition when choosing which members go into ensembles.	So, I would look at my strengths. I'm going to look at my stronger sections. (Eleanor Director Focus Group)
John middle school	1	Directors expressed hope and	Mr. B emphasized the high expectations

directors have high expectations for non-varsity students.		good expectations on their non-varsity ensemble as it related to UIL.	of this group. (March 6th Notes)
Non-varsity students are in a training ground for varsity.	1	Directors view non-varsity as a stepping stone to work musicians to eventually go into a varsity ensemble.	But the non-varsity is treated as a training ground for the varsity. (John Director Focus Groups)
Outside factors develop the curriculum and practices in non-varsity band.	1	Other directors and resources develop the instructional planning of directors.	Kind of tagging on what A. was saying. The reason this method book is used is that's what we have. Personally, don't necessarily like it. It's not my favorite, but it is available and handy. (John Director Focus Group)
The pace of the non-varsity band student varies	1	Directors have to know their students and how they are progressing in their musicianship.	I feel like I learn stuff faster so it's easier. (John Survey)
Non-varsity band is student-driven.	2	Students' perceptions of their ensemble setting are vital in the success of a program.	A bad day is when people don't start together, and they don't play the right notes. (Student I interview)
Concert Band is a social experience for students	1	Non-varsity ensemble members highlighted the relationships and activities they engaged with as being vital to them.	The girl from the previous point asked another girl in the middle of my instructions, "do you wanna be my friend?" It seemed a little strange however this was the first time I have seen these students interact. (February 21st Notes)
Concert band is to learn new music and have fun	1	Students see new music and having a good time as being essential to a good concert band experience.	Concert band means to have fun and learn new things. (John Surveys)
Non-varsity ensembles need members to have independence.	1	Non-varsity ensembles lack the skills to be independent in the playing of their instruments.	Size. I mean, 20 kids, they all have to play, and they are playing. But you have to have everybody play. Nobody can hide. (John Director Focus Group)
Students in Eleanor middle school non-varsity band value athletics more than music	1	Eleanor middle school students value athletics over their fine arts education.	When the directors were announcing pre-UIL this week a few students had a few concerns about a practice track meet on the same day. The directors seemed upset at this news and one of

			the directors left the room to talk to the track coach. (March 7th Notes)
Students in non-varsity band lack confidence when playing alone.	1	Solo festival and sectionals with non-varsity members grind to a halt due to a lack of confidence in their playing.	K. Oh yah the solo. You don't like that? A. Yah. Mostly wherever I played wrong, it becomes a bad day. I get stressed and wants to make it good. Make it better. (Student A interview)
Students understand band is fun and also serious	1	Students are able to differentiate between being serious and having fun in a non-varsity ensemble.	Concert band is a fun elective where you learn how to play your instrument and go to concerts and contest and have fun. (John Survey)
Students value performance.	1	Students enjoy and see the benefit of performance through concerts.	Concert band for me is a way to show other what I've worked hard to accomplish. (John Survey)
Non-varsity students' and directors' perceptions of UIL were vital to learning.	2	Non-varsity students and directors throughout the semester had different approaches to UIL concert and sightreading that informed both the teachers' and students' choices in the classroom.	K. What part of their teaching do you think helps you feel supported in band? Is it their method book? Is it the music they're teaching like UIL stuff? J. UIL stuff! (Student J Interview)
Director's perceived scores differently between ensembles.	1	Eleanor and John directors perceived the idea of receiving a Superior (I) rating as more difficult to attain.	Mr. A "I would pass out if we get sweepstakes" (March 6 notes)
Directors did not mention scores as much as the varsity ensemble	1	Scores were not a priority for the two non-varsity ensembles as observed in rehearsal.	UIL - this is a rubric-based competition in four weeks. You earn your division rating. Sweepstakes and division 1 ratings were not talked about as much with this band compared to the 1rst band. (February 21)
Personal success was a vital part of the non-varsity experience.	1	Students were very self-centered in their reflection of their playing and progress.	K. You answered yes very quickly. Why is that? I don't know. What part of concert band makes you feel supported? E. I Feel like I'm good. (Student E Interview)

Students in non-varsity perceive sight-reading as the most worrying aspect of UIL.	1	Students in non-varsity band struggled the most with sightreading as observed during the process.	Not simulated like actual sight reading. It was only a few measures of music. Students lacked the confidence to play out. (March 21st Notes)
The judging process was associated with feedback	1	Directors highlighted the negative aspect of the judging process. This also influenced the students' perceptions.	Concert band means to play in front of judges that can help. (John Surveys)
UIL was seen as beneficial in the learning process.	1	Students perceived the act of performing as beneficial in the UIL process. Directors perceived the skills and music	K. Okay. Do you have any goals in terms of like the upcoming concert you have UIL? Any. goals you have for that? I. Do my best. Don't give up. Make good choices (Student I Interview)
UIL provides performance opportunities to non-varsity students.	1	Students liked the opportunity to perform in a relatively high-stakes competition.	J. I feel a little nervous, but more excited. (Student J Interview)
UIL was significant to classroom instruction in the non-varsity band setting	1	Music in UIL was significant in the classroom instruction over the past few months.	C. I like this piece K. Yeah, that's a good one. (Student C Interview)
Non-varsity students have a wide variety of perceptions of their group.	2	Students in concert band have a spectrum of feelings about their ensembles, directors, and content.	C. We do good. We have struggles like usual. Everybody struggles. (Student C Interview)
Concert band can be challenging	1	Concert band provides a challenge in terms of musical rigor.	I hope I can get better. (John Surveys)
Non-varsity band does not provide a challenge	1	Non-varsity band music is too easy to provide authentic learning experiences.	BECAUSE THE MUSIC IS REALLY EASY!!! (Eleanor Survey)
Non-Varsity music provides a challenge	1	Content in the non-varsity ensemble provides a suitable challenge for students.	I. That song has some high notes I don't know how to play, but I figured it out. (Student Interview I)
Non-varsity students are able to evaluate aspects of	1	Students in the concert band are able of high-level questions and evaluations of musical terms and	Mr. B, the varsity director interrupted and asked a high-level question about body awareness as it relates to band.

their musicianship.		skills.	Students were receptive to this question. This did take a few minutes to explain. (March 6th Notes)
Non-varsity students have positive perceptions of their directors.	1	Students in the non-varsity ensembles had an overwhelming positive perception of their directors.	I. They are nice. Miss. B she's fun. And Miss. A is really funny. (Student I Interview)
Non-varsity students stake personal enjoyment on group success	1	Non-varsity students want to do well and want to achieve personally on a high level.	C. I feel like Mr. A is a good teacher. He does good everybody does. Still need to learn. (Student C Interview)
Sometimes concert band can be difficult	1	Sometimes concert band can be difficult to focus or succeed in for a variety of reasons besides challenge.	A. Sometimes they can get on my nerves because every time keep playing they keep starting over and over and that makes me mad. I understand why they are doing it just makes me mad. (Student A Interview)
Students perceive the ability level of their ensemble at the non-varsity level.	1	Students understand the skill differences in their musicianship compared to their varsity peers.	K. What do you think of the maturity level of kids in Symphonic Band? Do you think they are more mature or less mature? A. Still less mature? (Student A Interview)
Students perceive they need to work harder to advance	1	Students know the skills and music they need to work on in order to advance into a varsity group.	Z. I didn't work hard enough. (Student Z Interview)
Students in Non-varsity band perceive the benefits of fundamentals.	1	Students at a non-varsity level can comprehend why fundamentals are vital to their future success and progress.	F. Yeah. It helps you warm up. K. What do you got to pick? It would be no daily drill. F. Maybe a couple of Fs. Maybe like the lip slurs? (Student F interview)

Appendix B

Concert Band Survey

1. How excited are you about concert band? **(Circle One)**

Very Excited   Somewhat Excited   Somewhat Not Excited   Not Excited at All

2. How supported do you feel in concert band? **(Circle One)**

Very Supported   Somewhat Supported   Somewhat Not Supported   Not Supported at All

3. How prepared do you feel for your future in band? **(Circle One)**

Very Prepared   Somewhat Prepared   Somewhat Not Prepared   Not Prepared at All

4. How optimistic are you about your future in band? **(Circle One)**

Very Optimistic   Somewhat Optimistic   Somewhat Pessimistic   Very Pessimistic

5. What kind of challenge does this class provide? **(Circle One)**

A Challenge   A little challenge   Not Very Challenging   No Challenge at all

6. Elaborate on why you chose your answer on question 5 regarding challenge. **(Write Response in blank)**

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7. Describe what concert band means to you? **(Write response in blank)**

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Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Director Questions:

1. How do you program for concert bands?

2. How do you pick curriculum for concert band members?

3. Tell me about the biggest challenges in concert band.

4. How do you choose students to be in concert bands?

5. What are some factors that separate a concert band from the symphonic band at this school?

6. Describe a typical student in concert band. What elements make up a student in this ensemble?

7. Describe the goals you want the students to accomplish once they leave concert band?

8. Do you see concert band members going on to succeed in high school band once they leave? Why do you think that is the case?

Student Questions:

1. How do you feel about concert band on a good day? How do you feel about it on a bad day?

2. Do you feel supported musically in concert band? Why do you think that?

3. What goals do you have in concert band?

4. Tell me what it means to be a member in the band?

5. What do you think about your teachers in concert band?

6. In your opinion, what makes up a concert band?

7. What are your favorite parts of concert band? What are your least favorite parts?

8. Does your time in concert band make you feel confident for your future in band? Why do you think that?

Questions may vary and additional questions may be asked depending on the answers of the participants.