



Just Brass is like a family: An investigation of the experience of participation in a brass program run for young people in Geelong by The Salvation Army

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Music is increasingly being used as a tool for promoting the wellbeing of students with Australian students. The potential of music for this function has been endorsed by a range of government documents (Stevens & Stefanakis, 2014), and claims are made about improvements in social, emotional, academic, and creative domains (Parliament of Victoria, 2013). This emphasis exists alongside, and perhaps as a result of, the inequitable provision of music education programs within schools. Whilst independent schools continue to fund and resource high quality music programs, government schools have been increasingly pressured to focus on the core subject of English, Maths and Science (Proctor, Freebody, & Brownlee, 2015). School leaders are then encouraged to stretch their remaining budgets across those topics considered to be elective, such as the arts, languages other than English, and media/technologies.

Within this neo-liberal context, a number of external organisations have begun to provide music programs for Australian school students. The in-school programs do not provide the kind of extended and systematic music opportunities that are associated with skill acquisition (Lowe & Belcher, 2012), as they are usually relatively brief and often focused on more immediate outcomes such as performances and exhibitions. School staff can be enthusiastic about such programs because they expose students to the arts and artists in ways that are impossible within the school curriculum. Indeed, a vast array of Australian programs are described in the literature, with many claiming wellbeing benefits such as increasing student confidence (Haynes & Chalk, 2004), academic outcomes such as NAPLAN scores (Vaughan, Harris, & Caldwell, 2011), as well as general claims towards increased cultural capital (Ewing, 2010). However, staff also experience frustration at the demands externally-provided programs make on the school timetable and the resultant reduction of classroom time in which they are expected to achieve the core learning outcomes. Therefore, even when the financial responsibility of providing arts programs is significantly reduced in this way, tensions continue to exist within schools because of the burden staff perceive in making space in the over-crowded curriculum and the expectation that they will provide support to non-teacher trained professionals.

These barriers have contributed to the need for out-of-school music programs for students, where providers take full responsibility and place no pressure on the school system. The focus of this article is one such program that has been running in the Geelong area since 2010, and is now expanding across Australia and New Zealand through the infrastructure of The Salvation Army¹. The Just Brass program, as the name suggests, focuses on brass ensemble playing and players meet every week to rehearse as a whole band, crossing school boundaries and forming a music-based community. The Salvation Army purposefully focuses on recruiting from less privileged schools and invites primary school students in Grades 3 & 4 to participate, providing them with brass instruments, free individual tuition, and transport.

¹ The Salvation Army (TSA) is a not-for profit Christian social welfare organisation that has been in Australia for over 130 years. Currently there are more than 8,500 active officers and staff delivering in excess of 1000 specifically designed social programs across Australia. (TSA website, 2016).

It can be difficult for stakeholders in schools to discern which music programs are best suited to their needs, and research is currently underway to develop a tool that supports school leaders to do so, funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant². One distinction between programs that seems important is the degree of tailoring that is offered to groups of students in different contexts. At one end of the spectrum, music therapy programs are designed uniquely for every program, based on a process of assessment of needs, design, implementation and evaluation (McFerran, 2012). At the other end are manualised programs such as Just Brass and Drum Beat, which are not modified at all. In between are programs, such as The Song Room, that have recognisable features which are altered in different schools to suit needs and capacities of students and staff.

Given such important differences in approach, it is surprising that anecdotal reports often suggest the outcomes of such programs are similar. It is common for school staff to describe student engagement in a range of music programs as being confidence building, and to see more benefits for students who have greater needs for inclusion within the school community. The first author has observed this phenomenon previously, in a different research partnership with the Salvation Army (McFerran, 2008). In discussion with the Just Brass program leader, John Collinson, we decided to investigate this more closely, in order to gain further understanding of the similarities and differences in outcomes from distinct music programs for students.

Method

Research Design

In order to better understand this phenomenon as the basis for comparison between programs, we chose to gather rich descriptions through first-hand accounts and adopted a descriptive phenomenological lens for this purpose. Linda Finlay (2011) explains Husserl's descriptive approach to phenomenology as aiming to encounter the less tangible meanings and intricacies of our social world by focusing on a person's lived experience. This was appropriate to our task since the social context provided by Just Brass was of interest, as well as the ways that young people would choose to describe the program. Jonathan Smith has described how this creates a double hermeneutic, whereby "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 41). Although Smith is describing a more interpretive form of phenomenology (IPA) than used in this study, Simms & Stawarska (2013) claim that phenomenological methods should always require the researcher to not only describe the data but make careful interpretations, attending to "the unsaid within what is said" (p.13). Our intention was to generate rich descriptions that would provide a foundation for us to compare aspects of the particular experience for these young people with those described in other programs.

² ARC LP#150100697 Building resilient school communities through short-term arts programs. Partnership between the University of Melbourne, Catholic Education Melbourne and The Song Room.

Participants

The Just Brass program has now involved over 1200 people (both participating students and community members) across eleven programs. Since we had no desire to generalise from a representative sample, we sought a contained, purposive sample from whom to gather rich descriptions. In collaboration with the program founder, we identified a leadership group consisting of seven young people who began the program in 2010 and were now in middle high school. This group suited our purposes because they had prolonged engagement with the program and were potentially more able to articulate their experience than younger participants. When invited, the young people were enthusiastic about participation based on the information in the plain language statement and a careful explanation from the second author that emphasised how participation was voluntary. They chose to use names rather than pseudonyms, with parental permission, and details are provided in Table 1³.

Table 1: Participant Details

Name	Age	Year level at secondary school	Instrument	School
Bailey	15	10	Trumpet	Private School
Caitlin	15	9	Trombone	Public School
Ebony	14	9	Euphonium	Public School
Grant	16	11	Tuba, trombone & euphonium	Private School
Hamish	13	8	Percussion	Home-schooled
Hunter	15	9	Tenor horn	Public School
Lachlan	15	9	Trombone	Private School

Data Collection

Data was collected through an initial individual interview with each participant, followed by a focus group meeting to discuss the researcher generated descriptions and themes. The individual interviews were conducted by the second author and based on the research question:

How do a group of young people describe their experiences of participation and leadership in the Just Brass program?

Jessica asked for descriptions of the program, sought clarity about aspects of the description, followed up with more questions related to what had been described, and offered summarised statements to the participant so they could agree or clarify in the focus group. Care was taken to describe the phenomenon in inclusive ways in these statements, acknowledging the broad views of the participants and their own histories (Simms & Stawarska, 2013). Jessica was conscious of the role that both researchers

³ Ethics approval was from the HREC at the University of Melbourne #1646579

and participants play in the co-construction of data, as described by Finlay (2011), and we used supervision to engage reflexively with the reactions and pre-assumptions that were provoked during the interviews. In keeping with phenomenological methods (Finlay, 2009), these were bracketed in the interview and consciously acknowledged as part of the reflexive analysis described below.

Data Analysis

A 7-step process of descriptive phenomenological microanalysis was used (McFerran & Grocke, 2007). To begin, the transcriptions were analysed separately, beginning with the identification of key statements and clearance of material that was not related to the research question (Step 1). The key statements were then categorised into structural meaning units (Step 2), where descriptions of the same aspect of the phenomenon was gathered together from across the parts of the interview. A second round of analysis then re-categorised the data into experienced meaning units that grouped statements that seemed to have the same underlying meanings (Step 3). The iterative analysis involved movement between these layers and both researchers played a key role, discussing multiple interpretations of each grouping. In total, 127 experienced meaning units were created out of the seven interviews and participants' own words were maintained throughout the creation of the meaning units in order to honour the young people's unique voices. A description of the essence of each individual's interview was then created (Step 4) and shared with each participant in order for them to offer feedback and correct any misunderstandings that may have occurred through the analytic process (Step 5). A collective analysis was then undertaken, where the meaning units from the seven participants were gathered together under what eventually became eleven collective themes (Step 6).

In order to illustrate the movement from individual to collective analysis, we have included an example here about the creation of the collective theme of 'social capital'. During the creation of individual meaning units (Steps 2 and 3), a number of individuals seemed to be describing how Just Brass enhanced their status within their communities and schools. Meaning units from five of the participants seemed to contribute to this larger theme, and were drawn together in Step 4. The relevant meaning units (in the original words of the participants) were:

- "I feel proud that everyone knows who I am at Just Brass"
- "Playing an instrument gives me a reputation and other opportunities"
- "It's a good feeling meeting people from all over the world and playing for them"
- "Other people think it's really cool that I do these gigs and do advanced music in school"
- "It feels good that we have something to share and give back to the community when we perform"

- “Working towards performance goals helps keep us driven”

As we worked across the individual meaning units, we saw that a number of the collective themes were similar and we expanded the label of this theme to become: ‘Just Brass provides opportunities to increase social capital’, incorporating a range of ideas that had seemed distinct into this higher-level category. The final collective theme then included the following individual meaning units.

- We get lots of cool opportunities to play at special events and things and it gives us a really good feeling to play and support people
- It’s a good feeling meeting people from all over the world and playing for them
- I have the opportunity to meet other kids from different Salvation Army corps
- We get special opportunities
- Just Brass has given me opportunities to go to places for the first time
- There are lots of travel and performance opportunities around the country, which is really good
- Playing an instrument gives me a reputation and other opportunities
- I’ve met other highly respected musicians by touring and travelling and they kinda get to know you and has gotten me opportunities to play in other bands
- Working towards performance goals helps keep us driven and makes us look good when we play well
- Other people think it’s really cool that I do these gigs and do advanced music in school
- When I grow up I wanna be a concert band conductor and lead others

Once we came to a point of saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in categorising the individual meaning units into collective themes, Jessica returned to the young people for a focus group discussion of our findings. All seven young people, as well as founder John Collinson, attended the meeting and were provided with a copy of the collective themes we had generated. The young people had the opportunity to add further insights – for example, expanding the vocabulary and imagery used previously to describe the program – and critique the analysis. The young people felt strongly that there were too many distinct themes and that many of them were interconnected and inseparable, which led to the creation of two global categories.

The two global categories that were created incorporated both the common and significant themes. These themes were then used to generate a distilled essence of the experience as described by the participants, utilising their words and idiom as much as possible (Step 7). We will begin the results section by presenting the distilled essence and the details of meaning units that comprised them. We will then use the two global categories to present a discussion that contextualises these themes with some relevant ideas about music and leadership from the literature.

Results

Just Brass is different to what we thought it would be before we started. It's been more than having fun and connecting with other people, even though those things have definitely been there. We've had the opportunity to develop into leaders who are respected by younger members of the band as well as by people outside of the Salvos – it's made us look cool. Not only have we been exposed to new music styles and established advanced music skills, we've had opportunities to travel and perform and learn how to deal with performance anxiety. It's not always perfect, and working together in groups means dealing with issues, but we're encouraged to develop as people and give something back, as well as grow as musicians. Just Brass provides the safety and support that is needed for us to express ourselves and build our confidence, and we have a lot of respect for one another and our leaders. Plus, it has introduced us to Christianity and increased our connection to the wider Salvation Army community, as well as to the specific people in the program. Just Brass is more than any one individual; everyone has a part to play and contribute.

(Distilled Essence)

11 collective themes were identified and verified by the young people and are presented with a selection of pertinent statements that succinctly illustrate the theme⁴.

Collective Theme	Illustrative statement
Connection to others	<p>“It feels good knowing that I’ve got somewhere to go each week and that I’ll have friends there”</p> <p>“Being in Just Brass means that we are connected with people from all around Geelong”</p> <p>“We know each other so well that we’re pretty much like a family”</p> <p>“We’re all so close and connected to each other”</p>
Linking to Christianity	<p>“Just Brass has introduced me to Christianity, which has been an important aspect of my life and helped me through things and helped my self-esteem; Christianity has given me confidence that I can always talk to God no matter what”</p> <p>“Just Brass isn’t overtly religious but Christianity is part of the underlying culture of the band”</p>
Developing musicality	<p>“We connect with each other through the music by learning the qualities of each other’s playing and matching our tones”</p> <p>“We go deep into the music experience at Just Brass and because we all play individual parts, we’re really needed and valued musically”</p>
We work hard but have fun	<p>“At Just Brass we are trusted with responsibilities and respected”</p> <p>“We have so many shared memories and in-jokes”</p>
Opportunities to	<p>“Working towards performance goals helps keep us driven and makes us look</p>

⁴ Full data set can be made available on request

increase social capital	good when we play well” “Other people think it’s really cool that I do these gigs and do advanced music in school”
Developing as leaders	“In Just Brass I’ve learnt about friendship and leadership, how to help the younger kids” “I’ve also learnt how to lead myself and be responsible”
A safe and supportive space	“Just Brass is a safe space and somewhere too get away from your troubles” “The support that Just Brass gives me has helped me through really hard times in my life, it means so much to me”
Giving something back	“It feels good that we have something to share and give back to the community when we perform”
Developing maturity and confidence	“It feels good when my other friends and people like John see that I have potential to do something with my life and this has given me confidence and maturity in other areas of my life too” “Just Brass has helped me overcome my nerves and boosted up my confidence; it’s taught me who I am”
Overcoming performance anxiety	“I used to feel nervous and edgy when we performed but everyone is so supportive and I afterwards I always realise that my playing wasn’t actually <i>that</i> bad”
Just Brass is more than that I thought it would be	“I wasn’t expecting Just Brass to be anything more than just a music education program”

Two global themes were created as a way of capturing what seemed to be the central categories in the data.

1. Personal Development for the Young Leaders - developing musicality, developing as leaders, developing maturity and confidence, opportunities to increase social capital, and overcoming performance anxiety.
2. Being Part of a Community - giving something back, connection to others, linking to Christianity, and a safe and supportive space.

Two of the themes are not encompassed by the global themes, namely: Just Brass is more than what I thought it would be, and we work hard but have fun.

Discussion

Global Theme 1: Personal Development for the Young Leaders

The Future Leaders Group has been developed at the South Barwon Corp of the Just Brass program in response to the interests and capacities of the young founding members of the program, as well as newer members who have shown leadership qualities. The seven young people interviewed in this study chose to describe a number of ways they had grown during their involvement in the program.

The young people in Just Brass are given opportunities to further their leadership skills. For example, members of the Future Leaders Group described being invited to

‘hang out with’ a leader of one of the larger Melbourne Salvation Army corps; play at numerous functions in the greater Geelong region; and regularly lead rehearsals at their weekly band practices. As well as these opportunities, the young people felt recognised as leaders within the larger Just Brass program and encouraged to act as mentors to younger musicians in the beginner bands, recognising and appreciating the sense of responsibility that comes with leadership. Many of the participants acknowledged that they enjoyed being looked up to by the younger people in the program.

These descriptions of leadership experiences match well with Gialamas’s (2012) views on innovative leadership as having three dimensions: interpersonal inspiration (motivating all members of the institution); modeling standards of behaviour and ethos; and commitment to serving one’s community. At Just Brass the young people are shown through all three components of innovative leadership how to be innovative leaders. The young Just Brass leaders have learnt to model appropriate behaviour to the younger band members and as Lachlan expressed: “We model the right behavior as well modelling how to play music”. This statement shows great maturity and self-awareness and demonstrates how the program fosters personal development by placing young people in positions of authority, and trusting their capabilities. As Cook & Howitt (2012) posit, the qualities of great leadership mirror those of musicianship: high levels of mastery; being attuned to their context; openness to experiential learning; and an ability to provide sufficient structure to enable others to be their best.

Like many community music programs, Just Brass teaches the fundamentals of music literacy and instrumental technique. However, according to the young people interviewed, this program goes further towards imbuing students with a deeper and more nuanced understanding of why musicians make particular musical decisions. Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2009) describe this process of cultural learning (musicianship) and direct social participation (musicking) as ‘collaborative musicking’ (p. 358). The musical trust and responsibility that the young musicians of Just Brass experience enables the growth of keen and discerning aural skills, as well as the interpersonal skills of matching, mirroring and reflecting back the music of others.

Global Theme 2: Being part of a community

During the focus group interview, Ebony spontaneously formulated a touching analogy for how she sees Just Brass after Jessica had shared the 11 themes.

“I kinda envisioned it like Just Brass is a city, kinda thing, with all these different themes as the mini suburbs. And that's like the umbrella of the things that we do and then like, cos like in all the suburbs there's like different houses but all those houses are connected because they live in the same city.”

This illustration poignantly summarises the collective themes that make up the global heading of Being Part of a Community. Every participant talked about the importance of knowing that they were part of something bigger than just themselves and that they feel truly connected and valued within the program. Whilst a range of community groups can foster similar feelings of

connectedness, McFerran (2010) describes how musical engagement promotes a uniquely deep interpersonal connection, both on a micro and macro scale (p.73). Some evolutionary theorists refer to this unique capacity of music as the reason for its ongoing existence. The musical conditions enhance emotional connectedness on the one hand (Dissanayake, 2009) whilst simultaneously reducing the potential for disagreements based on political, social, or intellectual differences on the other hand by removing the emphasis on verbal interaction (Cross & Morley, 2009).

Perhaps even more profoundly, a number of the young people also spoke about the opportunities they have been given to share their talents with the wider community, resulting in a sense of both self-worth and gratitude. Over the last decade, the positive psychology movement has shown the far-reaching positive health effects of gratitude upon individuals and cultures (Seligman, 2011). These young people readily expressed their appreciation of the opportunities they had, and displayed a number of other characteristics associated with Seligman's flourishing life – such as experiencing pleasure and joy in their experiences; as well as a meaningful life – being emotionally connected and committed to one another and the program.

Finally, all of the young people described how Just Brass feels like a welcoming and safe place, where they could be themselves and bring along other friends. Interestingly, a number of the participants shared that, during hard times in their life, the consistency, support and acceptance of the program gave them a sense of purpose and helped develop resilience in the face of challenges. Broadening Rolvsjord's (2006) concept of music as a resource for psychological wellbeing, engagement with a music *community* may be an even greater resource for young people whose need for peer engagement is primary. Jose and Lim (2014) found through their large sample surveys, that whilst self-reported feelings of social connectedness did not act as a safeguard against depression in young people, identifying as being socially connected did seem to ameliorate some symptoms.

For the young people in the Future Leaders group, Just Brass has turned out to be much more than simply the music education program they were expecting when they began, and they now see it as 'a family'. Just Brass has also become the medium for connection to the wider Salvation Army community. As a Salvation Army program, Just Brass is fully resourced by staff, volunteers, finances and stated philosophy. The Salvation Army volunteers have become mentors to the young people and have been a stepping stone for many becoming part of the church and faith community, beyond simply the music program. However, not all Just Brass program locations have the luxury of being supported by their local church. The differences between program locations and impact this has on outcomes needs to be explored further in future research.

Just Brass not only provides a strong connection to the community of The Salvation Army but also seems to connect young people to the wider musical community of greater Geelong through performances, touring, and other opportunities.

For example, Bailey described how touring has led to further musical experiences:
“Yeah, well I guess, I've obviously met other high respected musicians umm by touring and traveling, which is yeah good because then they kinda get to know you as well. And yeah...Like meeting Ken Waterworth, the conductor of Staff Band, has gotten me an opportunity to play in the Territorial Youth Band, which has been great too.”

Rolvsgjord (2010) persuasively argues that access to musical opportunities and resources helps build individuals' sense of identity and promotes resilience and wellbeing. She claims that engaging and investing time in the pursuit of musicking provides opportunities for the development of character strengths, which leads to energy and enjoyment (p. 123). As Stige and Aarø (2011) describe, music “provides people with various artefacts, such as musical vocabularies and formulas, works, instruments, and techniques. Such artefacts are tools that people can use in processes of cultural learning and identity development” (p. 123). For the young people in this study, their musical experiences in Just Brass have afforded them both individual and collective resources such as these.

As well as developing the young people's sense of self-worth, for a number of the interviewees, Just Brass has “introduced them to God” and brought them into the faith community. Participants spoke about attending church even though there is no expectation that young people will participate beyond the program; as Caitlin described, “Christianity is part of the underlying culture of the band”. Just Brass does not apologise for being a Christianity-based program and provides students with Christian resources and opportunities for Christian mentoring and pastoral care when requested. One of the program's three foci is “to contribute to the personal, social and *spiritual* development of children and young people in the program” (Just Brass online brochure, 2016). However, Just Brass' primary mission is to “transform young lives through music” (Just Brass website, 2016). The young people seemed to feel this musical commitment as more prominent than any secondary evangelistic aims.

Conclusion

The descriptions provided by these seven young leaders within The Salvation Army's Just Brass program are slightly different, but also surprisingly similar to, the kinds of experiences reported by similarly aged participants in other forms of music programs. There is a distinction between the amount of freedom and control experienced in tailored therapy programs for bereaved youth (McFerran, 2011) as compared to the more development focused orientation of these young people who have overcome performance anxiety, developed maturity and confidence and given something back. This may reflect the different needs of the two groups; the first are grappling with existential crises bought on by challenging personal circumstances suiting therapy, as opposed to a need for social capital and access to resources in order to have equitable opportunities for success and achievement. But there are also many similarities. Music affords opportunities for both fun and focus, as seen in this study and in an array of other music programs (MacDonald, 2013). It also promotes bonding and cohesion between young people who participate in making music

together, and develop a sense of connectedness (McFerran & Rickson, 2014). Young people also regularly report appreciating the safety and support provided by a facilitator who is committed to their wellbeing and flourishing (Baker & Jones, 2005).

This suggests that the way in which participation is fostered is a critical mechanism for the success of any music program for young people. Whilst classroom music teachers face the demands of measurable musical achievement in addition to managing ever changing groups of 25 or more students, these program facilitators are afforded the freedom of a different kind of focus and can move beyond curricular demands. The young people in this study were clearly appreciative of the generous leadership and mentoring they had experienced. They knew that their development was being privileged over their skills, but they were also clear that music making was the process by which they would achieve this outcome. Similarly, participants in music therapy groups describe valuing the kindness and understanding of the therapist who uses music to foster personal expression and increased insight into the challenges they are facing in order to help them cope better with their circumstances (McFerran & Teggelove, 2011).

Music therapists are often challenged to provide evidence about the benefits of their services, and to do so using carefully controlled designs that separate the influence of music from the benefits of the therapeutic presence (Abrams, 2010). This study suggests that the two should not be separated, and that it is the combination of the conditions afforded by shared music making, plus the intentions of the music facilitator to foster personal development, that leads to positive outcomes. This partially explains why there is not as much difference in outcomes described from participating in different types of music making experiences (tailored versus prescribed) as would be expected if it was solely the music that made the difference.

More research is needed to better understand what kind of leadership facilitates personal growth from participation in music making programs. Given the reasonable evidence-base for the predominantly humanistic profession of music therapy, it is likely that many of these qualities are to do with the facilitators ability to create mutually empowering conditions with music that convey respect, understanding, and emotional presence. However, further research will allow this to be more carefully examined and more empirically based outcomes to be posed.

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