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# A University–School Music Partnership for Music Education Majors in a Culturally Distinctive Community

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University–community collaborations are a fairly recent phenomenon, which has often been manifested through the establishment of university partnerships with schools. This research sought to document the process and outcomes of a university–school collaboration called Music Alive! in the Valley (MAV), a yearlong partnership between 33 university music education students and faculty with an elementary school within a rural location of a western state. MAV was intended to serve a Mexican American migrant community whose children frequently spoke only Spanish at home and to provide occasions for university students of music education to engage in positive social contact via music performances, participation, and training experiences. An ethnographic method was employed by which observations, interviews, and examination of material culture were assembled over the course of the school year, and an assessment was offered of the benefits and challenges in the creation of a music education partnership in distinctive (and remote) cultural communities.

**Keywords:** *university–community partnership; teacher education; world music pedagogy; ethnographic research*

University–community collaborations reflect a renewed focus in higher education on institutions' civic responsibility to address current needs in society (Cox, 2000). These collaborations include university partnerships with schools as well as with neighborhood organizations and community organizations that serve children, youth, and families (Dewar & Isaac, 1998). Goodlad (1984) argued for the simultaneous renewal of schools and the education of teachers, which by the 1990s had

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sprung forth into a movement to develop effective university–school partnerships. The belief in these partnerships is that students in teaching certification programs will be informed by on-the-ground experiences in schools as well as enabled to “give back” as they learn something of the rhythm and realities of the teaching profession they have selected as their own.

A strong undercurrent of university partnerships with schools concerns motivation to bridge the gap between privileged university students and underserved school populations, in that disadvantaged youth may be encouraged and motivated to learn by positive role models, many of whom are not many years from their own experience in schools (Walsh, 2006). If there is a university commitment to community service, then the involvement of university faculty and students in school revitalization can be justified. Such commitment can be found on faculties of education, including music education programs, especially those in which social justice and the welfare of urban, rural, at-risk, and culturally diverse school populations are an expressed part of their mission (DeMulder & Eby, 1999).

With the growth of multicultural understanding in and through music, there has emerged not only an expanded view of the repertoire for performance and listening but also an increased sensitivity toward students of differentiated cultures (Drummond, 2005; Saether, 1995; Schippers, 2005). Attention recently has been directed to the cultural values of diverse communities in which students live as well as to the preferred learning styles of students from these communities (Campbell, 2001; Myers, 2003). In selected schools, ensembles have been established so that students might enjoy performance experiences in mariachi and marimba bands, West African drumming ensembles, Latin percussion and jazz groups, and steel drum ensembles (Campbell, Demorest, & Morrison, 2008). The extent to which this multicultural sensitivity can be developed without firsthand interaction with culturally diverse populations, however, is in question and may be unlikely to develop until field experiences of some consequence are initiated. Hence, a partnership that engages prospective music educators in teaching music to, and making music for, multicultural student populations may be fashioned to be responsive to this essential goal.

The aim of this research was to document the process and outcomes of a university–school collaboration called Music Alive! in the Valley (MAV), a year-long partnership devised to provide a civic engagement of university music education students and faculty with children and teachers within a rural location of a western state. MAV was intended to serve a Mexican American community in which migrant workers lived and whose children frequently spoke only Spanish at home as well as a Native American community situated on the edge of the town where rural transitional family lifestyles showed a mix of older and contemporary Indian and non-Indian values. In the end, however, the access to the Mexican American community was the reason for its treatment as the primary site, although as the limited access to the Native American students set the tribal school as an occasional rather than the central feature of the project. We thought that the children and youth

of these communities would be able to benefit from music education experiences, because the schools in which the project was established had limited access to formal music education.

MAV sought to afford opportunities for positive social contact between communities via music performances, participation, and training experiences and to provide for validation of a diversity of music expressions in the Valley. In this manner, the lives of both university and community participants were expected to be enriched through discovery of each other in and through music by virtue of the involvement of 33 undergraduate students (including 31 music education and 2 performance students) in school performances, sharing sessions, and short homestay residencies of 1 day to 1 week. Music, educational, and social exchanges were duly noted, and as changes in skills, knowledge sets, and cultural sensitivity were carefully documented.

## Method

An ethnographic method was employed by which observations, interviews, and the examination of material culture were assembled by a team of three investigators over the course of the school year, from October through May (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Spradley, 1980). The research team included (a) a graduate student coordinator who functioned as music teacher at the main school site to prepare and follow up on the university student teaching and performance experiences, (b) a second graduate student who assisted in field observations, video recordings, and interviews, and (c) a music education methods professor who prepared the university students for the residencies and served also as an on-site fieldworker. This arrangement allowed for the corroboration of evidence in a process of triangulation among the investigators, each of whom had experience as teachers of children in elementary schools (Creswell, 2005).

The partnership activity occurred over the course of 1 academic year for a total of 205 hours, including (a) 20 days of on-site teaching by the graduate student project coordinator; (b) 7 days of residency by the 33 university students in the Valley over a period of 8 months (which was linked to eight music education class sessions of preparation time at the university); (c) two pre-partnership visits to the community and five meetings at the university to discuss aims, directions, and support for the partnership; and (d) approximately 30 hours (much of it relative to the scheduling of site events and the communication to university students of teaching and performance expectations) in the administration of the partnership. Audio and video recordings were made of 32 hours of classroom teaching visits and performance events at the school sites.

Interviews with 12 children, six teachers, eight university students, and three school administrators were also recorded. Although all teachers, university students, and relevant administrators (principal, superintendent, assistant superintendent) were invited to express their perspectives before, during, and following partnership activities, not all could commit the time to sit-down interviews with one or more

members of the research team. One-on-one semistructured interviews, as well as unstructured interviews, were conducted with the teachers and university students (Creswell, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005). One teacher from each grade level (two teachers from the fifth-grade classes) and eight university students were interviewed. Unstructured, open-ended group interviews were conducted with small groups of children as they gathered in the cafeteria and hallways and out on the playground, for as Graue and Walsh (1998) suggested, “Kids are more relaxed when with a friend than [*sic*] alone with an adult. They help each other with their answers. They also keep one another on track and truthful” (p. 114). Interviews with the principal, superintendent, and assistant superintendent were unstructured and open-ended and occurred in the school library during the group lunches, in the school hallways, and in the classrooms (Creswell, 2005).

There were 53 pages of fieldnotes, including jottings, fully developed notes, and transcriptions of relevant video and audio segments (Emerson et al., 1995). These fieldnotes were combined with more than 300 documents of material culture, including all pieces of relevant correspondence between university personnel and students, school site personnel, and individuals at other sites in the community. As well, there were class handouts, songs and song sheets, teaching schedules, and lesson plans. Extractions were pulled from the school’s Web site, the school’s annual calendar, local news coverage on the program, and articles published in the university magazines and faculty/staff weekly. The result of an academic year’s worth of activity, as well as the planning period that preceded the partnership, constituted a bricolage of experiences that could be sorted and classified thematically (Berg, 2001) and was brought into a cohesive description of considerations in the making of a school–university partnership. The three members of the research team met regularly to discuss individual findings and interpretations. They engaged in a member-checking process by which they verified the accuracy of the collected data with university students, teachers, children, and administrators (Creswell, 2005). This process steered the accuracy and representation of the transcriptions and the emergent patterns of meaning and shaped perspectives on the partnership players and events.

## Context

Situated at the edge of an Indian reservation and in the heart of the valley of a major east-west river in the western United States, the region in which the collaboration occurred is known locally as “the Valley.” It comprises small towns historically intended to serve the local farming communities; the nearest city with a population of 125,000 is 20 miles away by highway. There is a tribal school owned and operated by the Indian nation, which features standard academic courses and a cultural heritage class that includes instruction in the indigenous language, morals, and the arts of the local Indian tradition. The Indian nation has permitted the settlement of non-Indians, chief among whom are Mexican and Mexican American migrant worker families and their descendants of one or two generations removed from itinerant farm labor. Within the Valley’s public school district are four elementary

schools, one middle school, and one high school. Of these, the project activity was located principally at Riverview Elementary School (all names used in this report are pseudonyms) but with excursions also to another elementary school, the middle school, and the tribal school in the company of university personnel—the research team and the undergraduate music education students. Riverview Elementary School was indeed the primary site, but other experiences were provided to underscore for the university students the importance of understanding the community context of the teaching and performing they were doing and to recognize the placement of the school within the boundaries of the reservation. The public school district served 3,000 students, 75% of whom were Mexican American, with a population of 18% Native American, and the remainder mostly European American. The school population at Riverview Elementary School was 98% Hispanic, specifically Mexican and Mexican American. The student population at the tribal school included about 80 secondary school students who ranged in age from 13 to 19 years; 97% of those students identified with their Indian heritage. At the middle school, 700 students were enrolled, most of whom were of Hispanic or Indian heritage. A semiretired music teacher was employed part-time at Riverview Elementary School, a traditional arts and culture teacher was responsible for students' music instruction at the tribal school, and a full-time band teacher offered instruction in instrumental music at the middle school. Although time was limited at several of these sites, the intent was to present the university students with an amalgam of the locality—town and region—so that they might grow in an understanding of the role of the community in shaping values and needs of a school's curriculum.

### **University Students of Music Education**

University student participants in the MAV partnership were enrolled in courses, of which the MAV partnership was set as a central piece on the syllabus and in the learning process. There were 2 Asians and 2 Hispanics among the university students involved in the experience; the remaining 27 were European-American. One course was geared toward elementary school music education methods, and the other was developed as a mixed ethnomusicology-and-education course to meet the state-mandated multicultural education requirement. As the partnership was conceived, three single-day residencies were required for the elementary music methods course, and a 1-week residency was arranged for students of the applied ethnomusicology course.

In preparation for their excursions to the Valley, undergraduate music education students spent time within their university courses devoted to learning, designing, preparing, and arranging songs, movements, and gestures to accompany the singing; preparing stories to tell; and arranging “rhythmic” activities using body percussion and “thick sticks” that resembled foot-long claves of about 2 inches in diameter. The university students were organized into small teaching dyads and trios by the professor, based on their personalities and extent of teaching experience. They prepared outside their university class time, as well as within it, for teaching in individual classrooms of

children at Riverside Elementary School and for performances and participatory experiences in music at a second elementary school, a middle school in the district, and the tribal school. As well, the university students arranged themselves on their own into small groups so as to perform standard chamber works, jazz, and selections from opera. Most students were exceptional performers and were committed to their education as teachers but had no previous experience in teaching children; they were aiming for eventual positions as secondary instrumental music teachers. Even though this partnership increased the time commitment for the undergraduate students, several students stated that this was worth the extra work. When one senior student of music education remarked that his participation in MAV had been “without a doubt, one of the most valuable experiences in my music education studies so far,” several other students nodded enthusiastically and clapped to signal their agreement.

### **The Riverview Children**

At Riverview Elementary School, the principal site of the partnership, there was a total of 14 classes, each of which contained an average of 25 children. The population of schoolchildren was divided into 3 classes at Grades 1 through 4 and 2 classes in the fifth grade. The majority of children spoke or could understand Spanish. Students came from low-income and lower-middle-class families, such that all students enrolled at the school were receiving free lunch.

The Riverview children appeared to enjoy the novelty of having youthful student teachers with them in their classrooms and were enthusiastic about having learned songs from selected world cultures that had been introduced by the graduate student coordinator and the university music education students. Based on comments made by the teachers and children in the interviews, it was apparent that the children were recalling the songs from the continent of Africa as well as from Japan, Mexico, and elsewhere in the world. Mrs. Stage, a fifth-grade teacher, expressed that the periodic music experiences had so stimulated her young students that they “can’t stop singing the songs” and that “while we were getting in line, one kid asked if we could sing” on the way to the bus. When asked whether they preferred to learn songs from Mexico, Spanish-language songs, or songs from around the world, a group of third-grade girls all shouted, “From around the world!” Even though they craved exposure to world music, they easily recalled many of the Spanish-language songs that had been introduced by the graduate student coordinator and university’s music education students. The children were particularly attached to songs that included dancing (such as “La Raspa” and “Cheki Morena”) and the use of instruments (hand drums, sticks, maracas) for improvisation and accompanying songs. They also were thrilled to be introduced to instruments they had never previously heard live, including flute, saxophone, trumpet, and viola, and were intrigued with the sounds of operatic voices that needed no amplification. They craved more exposure to musical instruments, with many students wanting future live experiences with different types of drums, the guitar, the double bass, and the tenor saxophone. Maria, a fourth-grade girl,

confided in Lisa, one of the university students who had just closed a lesson with a rousing set of body percussion rhythms, that “I could have music all around me all the time, if only I could.”

### **The Staff at Riverview Elementary School**

Out of 14 classroom teachers at Riverview Elementary School, 4 were Hispanic, 1 was Native American, and 9 were Caucasian and of various European-American backgrounds. There were 12 teachers who described long commutes to the school on the reservation, some living as far as an hour away; they noted that they did not “live on ‘the Rez’” or in the local town. Only 2 teachers knew the local community culture from their experience as cultural insiders who were living locally in the town. Lessons in the foundational subjects of math, reading, and writing were deemed by the Riverview teachers as the critical core of hours of concentrated curricular study, so that children could gain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the state standards. The pressure was on for these teachers as only through attainment of these standards could the school then receive state funding for bilingual education. As a consequence, other subjects, including social studies, science, and the arts, were not priorities and even scheduled times for these subjects could be shifted aside if students were observed to be falling behind in their foundational studies.

Still, the principal gave the nod on the greater presence of music in the school through the university partnership, and the Riverview teachers opened their classroom doors to the visits by the graduate student coordinator and the university students. After several meetings with the principal, the university students gained a sense of the importance placed on the partnership and music for Riverview by the principal. One university student, Jonathan, a 22-year-old trumpet player, observed that “The person who stood out the most to me when it came recognizing the role of music in kids’ lives was the principal. He spoke passionately about what our program meant for his school and told us how much he appreciated our time with his students.” Yet, the responses of the school’s classroom teachers to the music project varied, from the skeptical kindergarten teacher who graded papers when the university contingent arrived at her classroom, to others who joined in the singing and watched, intrigued, as instruments were demonstrated and the children were led in dances and singing games.

Several primary-level teachers expressed an interest in facilitating the learning of math and English-language comprehension through music. They implied that if children could learn basic concepts through music (from alphabet letters to mathematical functions), then they could justify visits by the university music students all the more. Ms. Garcia, a fourth-grade teacher, was convinced of the power of music for motivating children’s learning: “It makes it so much more fun. When we throw in a song they get, that is when I have all their attention and they’re all participating. You know the months, they know them all; there are 12 months and they know them all because they have a song to go with it.” Other teachers commented that although they favored music activities in their classroom, they could never imagine themselves

using music. Several confessed their lack of confidence in singing in front of the children or their worries about “not knowing the notes.” All teachers had access to compact disc players and televisions, on which music often played in their classroom, but few aside from the kindergarten and first-grade teachers admitted to singing aloud or actually teaching music to their children. All teachers were appreciative of the music enrichment offered to their children and even expressed mild frustration when the graduate student coordinator or the university students were unable to fit a visit to their classrooms into the already tight teaching schedule.

## **A Collage of Partnership Components**

The partnership entailed a variety of in-class teaching and music exchanges, as well as opportunities for performance, dialogue, and cultural experiences. In addition to the multiple teaching segments that occurred in each visit, the university students performed for the children in various concerts and learned about the school and community through occasions to discuss school and district goals with teachers, the principal, and even the superintendent and his assistants. The following components compose a collage of experiences that unfolded through the course of the partnership.

### **Behind the Scenes**

Whereas the most visible aspect of the partnership was the presence of university students in the schools, considerable effort was expended in advance of these music residencies to develop the partnership. At the university, the partnership had been conceived of by a member of the music education faculty as a valuable means of addressing the need for prospective teachers to understand the ramifications of socioeconomic and ethnic-cultural characteristics of some of the students with whom they may work one day, who are rural, poor, and from minority families. A campaign ensued to persuade university colleagues to support the project, through memos to the director of the music unit and presentations to the faculty as to the project aims, procedures, and the extent of student off-campus involvement. A proposal was developed and circulated to the Dean of Arts & Sciences, the Office of Minority Affairs, and members of the Community Outreach Office, and meetings were scheduled to discuss shared financial support by these entities. Over a period of 4 months, an active exchange of electronic messages and meetings brought about the assignment of a budget sufficient to support a teaching assistantship for the graduate student coordinator, transportation costs (including rental of a fleet of cars and vans), meals, a per diem bursary to the university students, and teaching materials (including an assortment of nonpitched percussion instruments). The dean’s own diversity initiative, the subject of his annual address to the university faculty, was the reason for his support of MAV, albeit not fully but in coordination with other campus departments.

Three large ensemble directors slowed the course of approval by the music faculty for the partnership project, raising questions as to student commitment to their ensembles as well as their reduced capacity to perform if the residencies interfered with rehearsal time. One director threatened to drop students from his ensemble if they were to participate in the off-campus partnership, sending a communiqué to the faculty suggesting that “partnerships should be run during the summer or at breaks between terms, not in conflict with the academic calendar.” Through a number of individual meetings, the music education professor was successful in convincing the directors to lend their support to the partnership if residencies could be brief enough and scheduled early each term so as to avoid students’ absences in the period of intensive preconcert rehearsals. A consistent flow of communication was deemed necessary to keep music faculty reminded of the partnership events and to seek respectfully their approval for every visit by students to the Valley. Articles in the faculty weekly newspaper and in the high-gloss quarterly university magazine served to celebrate and to validate the partnership.

### **Homestays**

The university students stayed overnight with local families, and accommodations were arranged such that two or three students of the same gender were assigned to a particular family. A family homestay allows students to enter quickly the cultural and linguistic environment of a community and can provide a unique experience where students gain firsthand knowledge of what family life is like in an informal setting, as an extension of knowing the community in which the school is located (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004). Breakfast and lunch were taken as a student group, but dinner was left to share with the host family. Students were given opportunities to learn the histories of long-standing Mexican American families in the Valley, their migrant fieldwork across several generations, and the newly arriving migrants from Mexico—many of them relatives of the settled families. When asked about his homestay experience, Jeff noted, “We had a great time. We talked all night about where the dad came from and got to learn how he creates radio ads for a Mexican radio station.” The university students agreed that the rhythm and pace of the community was felt in more intimate ways through the course of their homestays.

### **The Tribal School**

In shaping an understanding of the unique nature of the community in which Riverview was located, arrangements were made for the university students to visit with students of the tribal school. Riverview Elementary School and the tribal school are located about 3 miles from one another, and yet, the schools are distinguished

from one another in various ways. The tribal school served adolescents from 12 to 19 years old and was intended by the elders to impart wisdom of both American and tribal nations. Studies in math, science, and language arts were complemented by native language and culture classes. In a long-term project of the culture class, male adolescent students across several grade levels had constructed traditional hand drums and were taught social songs to sing while playing these drums. During one visit, in which the university students initiated a performance of several songs on saxophone, guitar, and flute, students of the tribal school followed by singing and drumming. Although these performances began with hesitation and uncertainty, in the belief that one group should not appear dominant over the other, they turned to a communal discourse in which all were made to feel welcome to participate in conversation about music, musical instruments, and song texts. The visit to the tribal school culminated with the university students putting down their instruments, joining hands, and joining the dance of circling around the singing and drumming students of the tribal school. The leave-taking at the close of the gathering was replete with discussion of future music collaborations, handshakes, and smiles all around. A chorally bound university student, Sarah, commented as to the “awesome” vocal talents of the male students of the tribal school and expressed what the others were feeling as they packed up: “We learned a lot, but there’s more, so it’s sad that this is our last visit.”

### **Middle School Visits**

The university contingent twice visited with sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade music students at the middle school. These visits were set up in conjunction with goals of a federal grant program aimed at preparing low-income students for pathways that would lead to their university education beyond secondary school. The university students performed vocally and on orchestral and band instruments and invited middle school students to join on drums and hand-held percussion instruments. A communal session with rhythmic percussion was initiated, too, to provide a friendly full-group participatory experience in music. Discussions of music careers arose at both sessions, with give-and-take dialogue on preparation in high school for college careers in music and across the disciplines. It is important that there was bridge building throughout these visits, so that university and middle school students, faculty, and administrators could develop a dialogue that centered around music, that was deepened through music making, and that allowed each side to know something of the other.

### **Lunchtime Exchanges**

Each day at Riverview Elementary School, the university students would emerge from their first 2 hours of teaching exhausted, inspired, and ready for the local Mexican cuisine in catered meals, for time to deconstruct their teaching experiences,

and for discussion with visitors who were scheduled into this time. Riverview's principal offered information on the school and its curriculum to the university students while they ate in the school library by sharing with them the school's academic goals for the children and his personal intent to build strong connections between school and the children's homes, their teachers, and their families. Tanya, a 23-year-old pianist steering toward certification in instrumental music education, was particularly taken by the realization that "in a school where so many students struggle to meet basic reading, writing and math requirements, the principal sees music as essential and not an 'extra' that can be taken away." The principal discussed the community's use of the school's physical facilities for after-school activities for children and for families, including English-language and citizenship classes. The school district's superintendent and assistant superintendent visited with the university students, too, at the lunch hour, and brought to them a broader sweep of the school district's goals for literacy and numeracy and described the secondary school choral and instrumental programs as highly visible in their contributions to the culture of the community. The district nurse spoke to students about the medical conditions of many of the low-income students, who would arrive to the nurse's office early on Monday mornings with whatever sicknesses they incurred over the weekend but were unable to have tended due to the lack of family health care arrangements. The university's local administrator of programs in the Valley, who aided in creating the collaboration and gathering support, appeared often to show his support for the students and to respond to questions concerning the community in which they were working. The university students were emerging with an understanding of life on "the Rez" in particular among families with children who were facing the hardships of immigration and limited education and training and who had not yet learned English as a second language. Yet, one comment from Jeff, on the commitment of local families to schooling, paved the path to an enthusiastic discussion by the student group: "It is an unfortunate misconception that working-class parents don't have the time or inclination to be involved with their children's education, as this is obviously not the case at this school!" The group settled into a sense that families and school personnel were connecting well in their shared goals to provide children with a wholesome and holistic education.

### **The Winter Concert**

A concert in the school's multipurpose hall was one highlight of the partnership as it played itself out at Riverside Elementary School. Children performed together the songs they learned from the graduate student coordinator, which were reinforced by the undergraduate students in their visits, including a combination of Spanish-language folk songs, an Anglo-American play party song, and a South African freedom song. There were grade-level song performances and an all-school song ("While we're here, we will sing!") that had been selected for its appropriateness in instilling a respect for singing as a socially unifying experience. For many, it was a first experience for them to stand straight and tall in the bleachers and to sing in a semiformal ensemble to a piano's accompaniment. Children then sat to enjoy the

varied repertoire presented to them by the university students, recalling later “The Donkey” and “The Butterfly” songs from Taiwan sung in Chinese and played on the piano as well as a jazz rendition of Santana’s “Oye Como Va.”

### **The Cinco de Mayo Excursion**

A final daylong residency in the Valley was scheduled in early May, so as to allow the university students to enjoy the Cinco de Mayo celebration sponsored by Riverview Elementary School. Following classroom visits for music exchanges with the children, the university students joined in preparations for an immense barbecue of carne asada, rice and beans, and hot dogs and chips. Larry, a trombone player with hopes for a high school teaching career, observed that “It’s weird actually being a minority here,” a situation he had not often experienced prior to his participation in the MAV project. A wide variety of traditional and contemporary Mexican music blared through two huge speakers in the multipurpose room, and a DJ’s station was set up. Food and drink were consumed by more than 900 children and adults, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and all Riverside teachers. Self-selected Riverview students performed folklorico dancing in the traditional style and dress of the province of Jalisco, Mexico. The official music-and-dance program concluded with several awards bestowed by the principal to students, staff, and school volunteers (including the university contingent). For this particular event, all university students were European American, and none had previously experienced a Mexican American celebration firsthand, so they were indeed the minority guests at the event. Between the communal dinner and the start of the dancing in the gym, Daniel, a choral music education major, noted that he had witnessed “a real sense of community” throughout the school day and at the Cinco de Mayo celebration—precisely the aim that the principal had hoped to accomplish.

For the university students, the combined MAV program components comprised much more than a supervised music teaching experience in an elementary school. Interactions with students and teachers at the tribal school, the visit to the reservation’s cultural museum, the performance exchange at the middle school visit, the homestays with families living in the community, the ongoing dialogues with school personnel, and participation in the Cinco de Mayo celebration were gainful events that brought the university students an understanding of the community in which they were teaching and reinforced the importance of connecting to the community in all school music positions in which they eventually may work.

## **Benefits of a Music Education Partnership**

Participants in the partnership benefited in musical and cultural ways. University personnel and community members, children and adults, professional teachers and

preprofessional students found the exchanges gainful, such that the result was an understanding of music, education, and culture as they are enfolded and linked to one another.

### University Students

Students were initially apprehensive about traveling 2½ hours from the university campus to teach at an elementary school in a rural district, and several suggested that a more convenient situation should easily be arranged for the project in a school nearby. These feelings were quickly assuaged, however, when students arrived in the Valley and were fully immersed within the school and community. Jennifer, a 22-year-old violin student, burst into a class discussion about children's responses to lesson segments:

I loved the students who scurried to sit next to us and so desperately wanted to participate. I especially loved the little girl who shouted, "again, again," as she pleaded to sing "Bucket of Water" just one more time. It made me feel like I was doing something right.

The university students were greeted by children eager to learn. One 20-year-old percussion student, Robert, remarked that the children in the Valley seemed to "welcome music into their lives, and us, more readily than children in the schools close to campus." He continued, adding, "They smile, laugh, and engage themselves fully, which speaks volumes about what a joy music is to them."

Mark, a 21-year-old junior in the music education program, remarked that as a result of the project, he realized "the importance of knowing and understanding another culture in order to connect to students" who were removed from his own experience. Jonathan acknowledged the importance of including cultural components in his music lessons and promised that he would "in the future prepare more basic spoken Spanish phrases to use in teaching these children, especially with the kindergarten children who do not speak English." Jessica, a 21-year-old trumpet student who had grown up only 20 minutes away in a White middle-class community, admitted that "I had had no idea of the struggles of Mexican American families in the Valley to school their children" in an all-English-speaking program of study. After the completion of the elementary methods course, Bryan, age 22, candidly remarked, "I learned more from the residency than from all the work we did in class." Christina, a 20-year-old junior, said, "I learned that even though we didn't speak the same primary language, we could both speak the language of music together." Several students were surprised that so distinctive a cultural community (or communities, given the project's placement within both the Mexican American and Native American settings) could exist within the same state, just a few hours' drive from their university campus. Mary, a 22-year-old senior, remarked with surprise, "My perception was that such cultures only existed further south [in California and Texas]."

Most students involved in MAV were instrumental music education majors who had not given consideration to teaching music to elementary school children but who observed that through this experience they had become intrigued with the possibility. Even though many students remarked on the challenges of arranging their class studies and ensemble schedules to fit the visits, they appeared grateful for the experience and enthusiastic with possibilities for returning to the Valley to teach children and for knowing the community in which the school resides.

### **Riverview Children**

Although the children were intrigued with music of the world's cultures, they hungered for songs from Mexico. Marco, a fifth-grade boy, age 11, aptly stated, "It [the music classes taught by the graduate student coordinator and the university students] brings energy that we usually don't get a lot of in the classroom. It makes me feel better after so I can carry on with math!" The Riverview children, cheering the music education majors into their classrooms, welcomed them with open arms for the new music experience the children would have. Maria, a second grader, shouted out as the university students entered the room one afternoon, "Yeah! We are having Music Alive!" The children were balancing their need for familiar music (with a Mexican flavor) with the invitation to discover the diversity of music that was presented by the university students in their school visits. They were attracted to the youth and energy of the university students, and they enjoyed the friendly banter they were permitted to carry on with the university students. Tanya recalled the comment of one third-grade girl who sang every song with a clear and well-tuned voice: "I only wish that we had more music time." These student teachers were never remiss in exuding genuine interest and excitement in their interactions with the children.

### **Riverview Teachers**

Mrs. Martinez, a fifth-grade teacher, noted that the "Spanish songs" were beneficial to her children, along with exposure to different languages and cultures that occurred through the world music excursions that the university students had designed for the children. Another fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Smith, commented that "our kids think everybody's from Mexico" or from the immediate Mexican American community, so that the diversity of songs and rhythms was able to transport the children to places and times beyond their most familiar experiences. Several teachers pointed out that the Riverview children had not had many opportunities to experience live music performances, with skilled musicians singing and playing for them and with them.

Mrs. Flores, a fourth-grade teacher, candidly remarked why she favored the visits of the university students. "We had a music teacher who did the same thing from kindergarten to Grade 5. The same thing every class! This is different music, and varied." Ms. Pena, a first-grade teacher, noted enthusiastically that "the students

loved it [the MAV program]. We have music here at school, but not enough. Our school is very lucky to have this opportunity.” Most teachers were well aware of the positive effect of the university students on the children, in that they served as role models with high energy in their music making, demonstrations, and encouragement of the children’s efforts. One fourth-grade teacher, Mr. Evans, insisted that “the music program is no intrusion. It is necessary. Kids enjoy it. They are singing more because of these visits by the university students.”

### **Challenges of a Partnership**

The idea of this partnership sprang from the desire of university personnel to engage undergraduate students in field experiences that could encompass the performance and teaching of music as well as the experiences of coming to know something of children and youth living in communities far removed from their own. Jassawalla & Sashittal (1998) posited that university–community partnerships require that diverse interests and people come together to achieve “a common purpose via interactions, information sharing, and coordination activities,” and the diversity was immediately evident in the mix of MAV participants—children, university students, and faculty and staff of the school and university. Sargent and Waters (2004) created a framework for academic collaborations comprising four phases: initiation, clarification of aims and procedures, implementation, and completion. These phases unfolded one after another and were key to the success of the MAV project.

The school community welcomed the opportunity they saw for bringing advanced musicians—many of them with professional performance experience—into classrooms with the children. They assumed that regular performances for the children would enrich their lives and the life of the school itself, even as the university’s intention, repeatedly noted, was to facilitate active music making by the children. The principal’s casual remarks, and those of most of the teachers, were an indication that music would be a “very nice” kind of cultural enrichment, and mostly innocuous, so long as it was limited to short classroom visits that did not disrupt the academic studies for standardized tests in language arts and math. At the end of the program, the principal remarked that he had been wary about taking time away from preparing for the standardized state test. He was pleased when the children’s scores on their reading exams significantly improved, and he hinted that music might have enhanced their reading skills in ways that he could not explain.

A university–school alliance requires a continuing commitment by all parties and, even then, is quite naturally beset by challenges specific to the circumstances of the partnership. There were systematic site constraints, in particular determining together how best to work within the mission and personnel schedules of the school and the university. Developing a university–community collaboration takes planning

far in advance of the projected dates of the program. University and school personnel involved in spearheading the partnership project learned to take the lead in developing the initiative, making executive decisions, writing letters to invite participation, crafting proposals to the funding sources, monitoring the budget, coordinating calendars, and making logistical arrangements involving travel, accommodations, meals, in-school teaching, and concert performances.

The implementation of best-intended plans is often risky and can bump along with roadblocks and detours toward their realization. The challenge of the MAV partnership project was in the considerable organization far in advance of the visit by university personnel. Scheduling was complicated, in particular due to numerous schedules with which to contend: university students' course schedules, school curricular events, individual classroom activity set by classroom teachers, and host family arrangements. Clear and constant communication concerning upcoming visits proved essential to short-term residencies. The development of a strong communication network, however, appeared to encourage productive initiatives and to shore up the enthusiasm of participants in the partnership (just as poor communication might have otherwise blighted the image of the project and encouraged the perception that a partnership was more frill than substance). Continuous contact and the development of a working relationship are vital to the success of a university–community partnership (Walsh, 2006). According to Walsh, the main factor in determining successful university–community collaborations is the existence of “supportive, understanding, open-minded, and genuinely interested site people” (p. 47) from both the university site and the community site.

A central tenet of a working partnership is for key players to know the territory of the project in which they will engage (Walsh, 2006). This necessitates careful “homework” in study of the strengths and needs of all involved, including school teachers and their children, university students in music education programs, and other school and university personnel. The principal's secretary was an important ally in the MAV project, a truly key player, in that she was instrumental in distributing information to teachers, determining the schedule of classroom visits and performances, and handling various other on-the-ground logistics during the visits and performances. To be sure, phone and face-to-face conversations were deemed to be more effective than impersonal e-mails in crafting a working partnership.

Following an initial period of stops and starts, the MAV project was running more smoothly, in particular once explicit definitions of participant roles had settled in. During the initial visits by the graduate student coordinator and the university students, classroom teachers were not always clear of project procedures or about their own specific roles. They were uncertain as to whether to leave their classrooms and allow the music student teachers to have free reign with the children or whether they should remain, participate in the music activity, and help manage the children during the music lessons. Following discussion among the principal, teachers, and university personnel, a consensus was reached such that classroom teachers would actively participate during the music lessons and stand by for the delivery of classroom

management advisories. This decision optimized the experience for both the university students and the Riverview children. As players in the partnership became grounded in project goals and familiar with various project expectations and tasks, frustrations were minimized. What Cox (2000) had theorized about partnerships, that “each party to the partnership is an important source for stimulating questions, participating in information gathering, and selecting and applying the solutions” (p. 15), had played out in full in the MAV project.

## Discussion

The distance between the Valley and the university was considerable—literally, with regard to the miles between them and the formidable mountain range that separated the coastal city from the Valley, and figuratively, in the gap between students-becoming-teachers in an urban university and the children, teachers, and families of a culturally distinctive rural community. It was the partnership’s aim that this distance be lessened, as all involved would learn about one another through meaningful experiences in music. The completion of a first year’s partnership led to important insights in music, education, and culture that may well shape the work of the prospective teachers (and the children of the Valley) for generations to come.

Further research on university–school partnerships in music education could benefit from longer periods of residence by prospective teachers in one or more school sites (should university course and ensemble schedules be negotiated to allow increased on-site experiences). It would be insightful for university students, and perhaps school children and teachers as well, to keep journals of their experiences that might later be made available for examination and interpretation. Follow-up study could be useful, too, to determine the strength of the effect of the partnership on the lives of participants. Will children continue to sing the songs given them by the university student teachers? Will classroom teachers rally for the hiring of a full-time music teacher to provide continuous sequential music education and training to the children? Will the university students attend to the social and cultural characteristics of the community in which they will teach? A partnership akin to Music Alive! in the Valley may bring trust and goodwill to its participants and holds the potential to benefit an underserved community while also developing cultural understanding of all who participate.

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