

## ABSTRACT

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A SLICE OF HOME: MUSIC & CULTURE IN  
A US-BASED CARIBBEAN STEELBAND  
COMMUNITY

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The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a specific Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Using an ethnographic case study design, I focused on the youth-serving community steelband, Caribbean Steel Pulse (CSP). Guided by research questions on teaching and learning, cultural identity, and musical experiences within this context, my methodology was enriched by my insider perspective.

I gathered data from observations and in-depth interviews with four participants—a student, two instructors, and two administrative personnel. Through my analysis, I identified four main themes: Family, Service, Cultural Identity and Continuity, and (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation. My findings revealed that teaching and learning in this “informal” Music Education space is a multifaceted process incorporating practical, theoretical, historical, and interpersonal elements. The dichotomy between traditional steelband methods, such as rote learning, and Western music theory in Caribbean Steel Pulse fostered a holistic understanding of music theory and performance while honoring cultural heritage.

Participants' narratives highlighted both national and Afro/Caribbean diasporic identities. The steelband community of CSP provided a space for discovering, expressing and affirming these identities, facilitated by the inclusive and supportive environment of the parent organization, Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA).

This study highlights the importance of accessibility and inclusivity in music education, and the important role of youth-serving community music organizations in identity development, and music education. CCA's model, which minimizes financial and bureaucratic barriers to entry, contrasts with traditional school music programs that often inadvertently exclude economically disadvantaged students.

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by

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## Dedication

For my parents

Winston Joseph Francis  
(April 14, 1944 - March 30, 2024)

*For the man of few words who showed me what it is to love and be loved. It has been two months since you left us, and I know you planned on being here to celebrate with me, but the universe had other plans. I thank you for all those nights you spent in the panyard with me, dozing off in the car and getting eaten by mosquitoes as you waited for me to finish practice. Your hardworking attitude and spirit of entrepreneurship have passed on to me. With your limited resources, you built a career for yourself and created a teaching and learning space in your welding shop where young men learned the trade. Many of those men now provide for their families with the very skills you taught them. I am truly honored to have your DNA running through my veins. I love you. I miss you. I thank you.*

Barbara Andall-Francis

*For showing us unconditional love, for always being there, for being our doctor, teacher, cook, seamstress, and everything in between. Thank you for always showing up for me, for instilling creativity in us, for always making us feel loved and without need, and for baking all those cakes for bake sales at school, even with less than 24 hours' notice.  
I love and appreciate you with every cell of my being.*

## Acknowledgements

To my parents, you have sacrificed a lot over the years to raise us, encouraging us to seize opportunities and fulfill our dreams. Your unwavering support and sacrifices have been the cornerstone of my journey. Thank you for always being there. There are not enough words to express my gratitude.

To my siblings Roger, Shawn, Nicole, La Toya, and Mark: thank you for your support, for making me laugh, making me tough, being my cheerleaders, and looking out for me. Uncle Don and Auntie Sharon, thank you for “adopting” me. You are two of the most incredible human beings I know and your continued support over the years has been truly instrumental in my success.

Auntie Annie, thank you for making that treacherous journey with me from Philadelphia, PA, to Hattiesburg, MS, in a greyhound bus! I must say, I have never ridden on a Greyhound bus since then. To my aunties, cousins, and uncles who met me at the airport on January 2nd 2008, when I first arrived in the US, thank you for ensuring that I knew I had a place to go and family to count on in a new place. To Auntie Yvonne, Betty, and the many others who have generously supported me along the way, thank you!

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smart and dedicated to the field, and for pushing us to strive for nothing short of excellence. I truly admire your work and leadership. Mike, your enthusiasm and dedication are inspiring. Thank you. Siv and Isabella, thank you for your perspective, understanding, and flexibility throughout this process.

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To the participants in this study, thank you for openly sharing your stories and being open to my research. This research journey has been enlightening and truly inspiring and I am honored to illuminate and elevate your voices in my research.

To my students, you are the reason I set forth on this research journey. Thank you for being so bright and for inspiring me throughout the years, encouraging me to be the best that I can be for myself and for all of you.

Together, you have all made me a better teacher, researcher, and student, and moreover, a better person.

Lastly, to my beloved country, the beautiful twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago: thank you for the steelpan. Pan is a powerful force that has given me a voice and continues to take me to places that I could have only ever dreamed of. Thank you, my sweet T&T, for showing me diversity, acceptance, community spirit, and togetherness. The journey continues.

*“There’s no place like home, some people say  
Though some have to leave to make their way  
But in their hearts, I know their destiny  
To come home and big up de country.”  
—David Rudder, Trini to de Bone.*

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                |                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b><i>Dedication .....</i></b>                                                 | <b><i>ii</i></b>   |
| <b><i>Acknowledgements.....</i></b>                                            | <b><i>iii</i></b>  |
| <b><i>List of Tables.....</i></b>                                              | <b><i>viii</i></b> |
| <b><i>List of Figures.....</i></b>                                             | <b><i>ix</i></b>   |
| <b><i>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</i></b>                                     | <b><i>1</i></b>    |
| <b>My Story.....</b>                                                           | <b>1</b>           |
| <b>Community Music.....</b>                                                    | <b>7</b>           |
| Community Music: A New Overview and Categorization .....                       | 9                  |
| Community Music and Identity Formation .....                                   | 12                 |
| Caribbean Community Music.....                                                 | 13                 |
| <b>Need for Study.....</b>                                                     | <b>27</b>          |
| Addressing the Cultural Needs of Caribbean Immigrant Youth in US Schools ..... | 27                 |
| <b>Purpose Statement and Research Questions.....</b>                           | <b>28</b>          |
| <b>Conceptual Framework.....</b>                                               | <b>29</b>          |
| Community Music as Cultural Engagement .....                                   | 29                 |
| Teaching and Learning in Community Music .....                                 | 30                 |
| Cultural Identity through Music .....                                          | 30                 |
| Symbolism and Socio-political Significance.....                                | 31                 |
| Immigrant Experiences and Cultural Continuity .....                            | 31                 |
| <b>Definitions .....</b>                                                       | <b>34</b>          |
| <b>Outline of the Remainder of the Study.....</b>                              | <b>34</b>          |
| <b><i>Chapter 2: Literature Review.....</i></b>                                | <b><i>36</i></b>   |
| <b>Location of Sources for Review .....</b>                                    | <b>36</b>          |
| <b>Community music in the US .....</b>                                         | <b>37</b>          |
| History of Community Music in the US .....                                     | 37                 |
| <b>Defining “community music” .....</b>                                        | <b>38</b>          |
| <b>Youth-serving Community Music Organizations.....</b>                        | <b>41</b>          |
| <b>Summary of Community Music in the US .....</b>                              | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>Education of Youth from Immigrant-headed Families .....</b>                 | <b>42</b>          |
| <b>The Numbers .....</b>                                                       | <b>43</b>          |
| <b>Scholarly Research.....</b>                                                 | <b>44</b>          |
| <b>Cultural Identity Formation.....</b>                                        | <b>46</b>          |
| Peer Relationships and Media Influence.....                                    | 46                 |
| Influence of Environment and Heritage.....                                     | 46                 |
| Music, Education, and Identity.....                                            | 47                 |
| US Classrooms .....                                                            | 49                 |
| Summary of Cultural Identity Formation .....                                   | 49                 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                          |            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Trinbagonian Steelpan Culture in the US.....                                                                                                                                             | 50         |
| Literature Conclusion and Current Study.....                                                                                                                                             | 54         |
| <b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>                                                                                                                                                      | <b>56</b>  |
| Purpose of the Study and Research Questions .....                                                                                                                                        | 56         |
| Ethnographic Case Study.....                                                                                                                                                             | 56         |
| Case Study .....                                                                                                                                                                         | 57         |
| Ethnography .....                                                                                                                                                                        | 58         |
| Ethnographic Case Study Method.....                                                                                                                                                      | 59         |
| Ethnographic Case Study in Music Education: An Overview.....                                                                                                                             | 59         |
| Framing this Study: Defining the Case .....                                                                                                                                              | 61         |
| Data Collection .....                                                                                                                                                                    | 68         |
| Analysis .....                                                                                                                                                                           | 75         |
| Trustworthiness .....                                                                                                                                                                    | 76         |
| <b>Chapter 4: Findings .....</b>                                                                                                                                                         | <b>78</b>  |
| Caribbean Cultural Academy's Story .....                                                                                                                                                 | 78         |
| Community Heroes .....                                                                                                                                                                   | 78         |
| The Facility .....                                                                                                                                                                       | 85         |
| Pan Champs.....                                                                                                                                                                          | 91         |
| The CCA Students .....                                                                                                                                                                   | 95         |
| The CCA Instructors.....                                                                                                                                                                 | 102        |
| Themes: Family, Service, Cultural Identity and Continuity, (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation.....                                                                                                  | 117        |
| Family .....                                                                                                                                                                             | 117        |
| Service .....                                                                                                                                                                            | 119        |
| Cultural Identity and Continuity .....                                                                                                                                                   | 121        |
| (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation .....                                                                                                                                                            | 127        |
| Summary .....                                                                                                                                                                            | 130        |
| Purpose of the Study and Research Questions .....                                                                                                                                        | 130        |
| Research Question 1: What is the nature of teaching and learning in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?.....                          | 130        |
| Research Question 2: How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their cultural identities? ..... | 131        |
| Research Question 3: How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their musical experiences?.....  | 133        |
| <b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>                                                                                                                                                       | <b>136</b> |
| Summary of Findings .....                                                                                                                                                                | 136        |
| Family .....                                                                                                                                                                             | 137        |
| Service .....                                                                                                                                                                            | 137        |
| Cultural Identity and Continuity .....                                                                                                                                                   | 137        |
| (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation .....                                                                                                                                                            | 138        |
| The Present Study in the Context of Prior Literature .....                                                                                                                               | 138        |
| Community Music .....                                                                                                                                                                    | 138        |
| Music and Cultural Identity Formation .....                                                                                                                                              | 144        |
| Connecting the Conceptual Framework .....                                                                                                                                                | 151        |
| Implications for the Profession .....                                                                                                                                                    | 153        |

|                                                                            |                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Teaching Approaches .....              | 153               |
| Broadened Curricula and Teacher Training.....                              | 153               |
| Shifting from the Western European Art Music Focus.....                    | 154               |
| Accessibility and Inclusivity in Music Education.....                      | 155               |
| Systemic Changes and Equitable Practices .....                             | 155               |
| Learning Methods and Community Engagement.....                             | 156               |
| Spatial Marginalization and Integration .....                              | 156               |
| Centering Black Music .....                                                | 157               |
| Conclusion .....                                                           | 158               |
| <b>Implications for Future Research .....</b>                              | <b>158</b>        |
| Insider Knowledge.....                                                     | 158               |
| Future Areas of Research .....                                             | 160               |
| <b>Final Thoughts .....</b>                                                | <b>161</b>        |
| <b><i>Appendix- Johnson Publishing Company License Agreement .....</i></b> | <b><i>163</i></b> |
| <b><i>References .....</i></b>                                             | <b><i>165</i></b> |

## **List of Tables**

|                                                    |    |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1.1: Typologies of Community Music.....      | 9  |
| Table 3.1: Participant Profiles for the Study..... | 68 |

## List of Figures

|                                                                                                                                    |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Figure 1.1 Howard University Steelband feature in Ebony Magazine ("Playing Their Way Through College," 1963 .....                  | 22  |
| Figure 1.2 Howard University Steelband feature in Ebony Magazine ("Playing Their Way Through College," 1963) .....                 | 23  |
| Figure 1.3 Howard University Steelband feature in Ebony Magazine ("Playing Their Way Through College," 1963) .....                 | 24  |
| Figure 2.1 A Conceptual Framework for Caribbean Community Steelband Music Engagement in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area ..... | 33  |
| Figure 3.1 Data Collection design .....                                                                                            | 74  |
| Figure 4.1 Capital Steel Pulse Students with Olympic Torch Runner on June 20 <sup>th</sup> , 1996 .....                            | 78  |
| Figure 4.2 Timeline of Caribbean Cultural Academy and Capital Steel Pulse major events 1996-2024.....                              | 79  |
| Figure 4.3 Sign at Caribbean cultural Academy's Location .....                                                                     | 85  |
| Figure 4.4 Layout of CCA's Facility .....                                                                                          | 86  |
| Figure 4.5 Collage of Wall Hangings at CCA Facility .....                                                                          | 87  |
| Fig. 4.6 Sketch of the Pan Champs Rehearsal: Highlighting CCA Involvement and Familial Ties .....                                  | 93  |
| Figure 4.7 CSP Members, Nathan, and the Carters after the band's 2019 PANfest performance .....                                    | 123 |

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## My Story

*My first hands-on steelpan experience was at age 9, when my parents enrolled my sister and me in a twelve-week beginner course at Merrytones, a community steelband in Diego Martin, our borough in Trinidad. We learned several pieces of music including our National Anthem, Edelweiss, and Amazing Grace. All pieces were taught by rote, consistent with steelband tradition. In most cases, something was played for me, and I was expected to play it back until I had all the correct notes. In other cases, the arranger called out the letter names, and in few cases the letter names were written on a black board.*

*My first panorama<sup>1</sup> experience was as a teenager in 2004 when my father took me to the savannah<sup>2</sup> to witness the steelbands on the drag<sup>3</sup>. I was completely spellbound by the music of one particular steelband, the WITCO Desperadoes, whose tune of choice was “Whop Cocoyea” originally sung by the Mighty Shadow and arranged by Clive Bradley. I was enthralled by the sweetness and intensities of the rhythms, notes, and dynamics, and the whipping of the instruments with the backs of the sticks, as they*

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<sup>1</sup> Panorama is a steelband competition that originated in Trinidad and is often held during the carnival season. While similar panorama competitions have emerged in Caribbean communities worldwide, as other carnivals have grown, the Trinidad panorama remains the largest.

<sup>2</sup> Officially named the Queen’s Park Savannah, the savannah is a large public park and open space in the capital of Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>3</sup> The drag is the pathway where the bands warm up as they make their way towards the entrance of the savannah stage for panorama.

*depicted the story of a man's desperate attempt to win his lover back through the use of Obeah<sup>4</sup>.*

*The following year, I returned to the savannah for panorama. However, this time I returned as a member of the HCL Valley Harps steelband— a steelband located on the other side of the Diego Martin Highway. Members of the band ensured that I learned the music and I also helped teach the music as new players came in. It was all taught by rote—music was taught by sight and sound with indications of changing sections such as introduction, verse, chorus, variation, change key, minor, jam, and ending. Rehearsals often lasted until 1:00 am or 2:00 am and waking up at 6:00 am for school was not always an easy task. One day, I was startled awake by my Economics teacher as he yelled, “Boogsie<sup>5</sup>! Wake up!” While I was embarrassed to be caught sleeping in class, being called by that name filled me with a sense of pride. In the couple of years following my panorama debut, I became a member of PCS Nitrogen Starlift steelband, earned the spot as the tenor section leader and later the band's music director. During that time, I also led my school's steelband to the finals of the junior panorama competition as the band's captain and co-arranger. Since my school did not have adequate instruments or rehearsal space, we used the instruments and panyard<sup>6</sup> facilities of a nearby steelband, Excellent Stores Silver Stars. Later that year, as I grew impatient waiting for Starlift to start preparing for an upcoming competition, I ventured to Silver Stars' panyard to learn their piece. However, not long after I joined them, Starlift commenced their practice, so I decided to play with both bands. On competition day, I was seen running back and forth*

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<sup>4</sup> A system of healing practices developed among enslaved Africans in the West Indies, often associated with mysticism, natural medicine, and rituals.

<sup>5</sup> Len “Boogsie” Sharpe is a legendary Trinidadian steelpan performer, composer, and arranger.

<sup>6</sup> A communal space where steelbands practice, perform, and socialize.

*between bands as they rehearsed on the streets before arriving at the judging point. I was wearing a neutral-coloured tank top and carrying a drawstring bag which held the performance uniforms of both bands.*

*During my adolescent years, Starlift was a central hub, more than a mere collection of musicians. In fact, most of the people at the panyard may not have even considered themselves as musicians, just panmen and panwomen<sup>7</sup> participating in a musical culture that was once associated with gangs and violence. People who, in the past, might have faced arrest or harassment and been labeled as badjohns<sup>8</sup> simply for playing pan. People who, in the present, played an instrument that, although celebrated at cultural events, was still viewed with some disdain by certain segments of their own society. People who came from all walks of life—teachers, housewives, students, laborers, foreigners, retirees, politicians, and the unemployed. People who, at the end of the day, devoted hours until the wee hours of the morning, to learning and playing music together. I was one of those people.*

*While most of my in-school music education focused on Western European music theory, it was outside these confines that I engaged deeply with my Trinbagonian culture, in a space where age was but a number, and everyone shared a common passion. In the panyard, I experienced steelband, calypso, parang<sup>9</sup>, tassa<sup>10</sup>, and chutney<sup>11</sup>.*

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<sup>7</sup> Panman is a grassroots Trinidadian term used to describe the people who play steelpan.

<sup>8</sup> A Trinidadian term used to describe individuals who are tough, aggressive, and often involved in illegal activities.

<sup>9</sup> A type of music sung especially during the Christmas season in Trinidad.

<sup>10</sup> A percussive ensemble of at least four players featuring tassa (a bowl-shaped drum that is hung from the neck and played with two thin and very flexible sticks), dhol (a double-headed bass drum played with one stick and one open hand) and jhal (a pair of thick brass hand cymbals).

<sup>11</sup> A type of music most common among Indo-Trinidadians that fuses Indian Bhojpuri music with calypso, soca, and Bollywood music.

*My parents, despite the instrument's past association with gangs and its tumultuous history, supported my musical endeavors. My mother cooked and sold food at the panyard with my father serving as the cashier. My siblings, although they did not play, occasionally came to the panyard to help my parents or to lime<sup>12</sup>. We were all part of the community.*

*My pursuit of music led me to the University of Southern Mississippi to further my music education. My choice of college was significantly influenced by the presence of an active steelband which was started and run by percussion director Dr. John Wooton. Here, I experienced the warmth and generosity of Uncle Don and Aunt Sharon, members of the University-supported community steelband, who not only gave me shelter as I awaited the opening of the dorms but also became my surrogate family in a foreign land. This relationship, cultivated through our shared love for steelpan, continues to thrive even today, over a decade later. I took pride in my endeavor to pursue the steelpan further with a master's degree in steelpan performance at Northern Illinois University (NIU), under the tutelage of Trinidadian Professor Liam Teague and Dr. Clifford Alexis. At that time NIU was the only place in the world where one could get a master's degree in steelpan studies, and to this day, it continues to stand as one of the foremost tertiary programs for steelpan studies worldwide. Imagine that! In the frozen cornfields of DeKalb, Illinois. Albeit temporary, I became part of a community of other Caribbean pannists<sup>13</sup>, reconnecting with old friends.*

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<sup>12</sup> A Trinidadian term for an informal gathering or the act of hanging out.

<sup>13</sup> A pannist is a contemporary term used to refer to a steelpan musician.

*Following my time in Illinois, I moved to the Washington, DC metropolitan area to serve as the Artistic Coordinator and later Executive Director of the Caribbean Cultural Academy, a nonprofit arts in education organization that uses steelpan as the main draw for youth seeking academic and artistic enrichment. My move to the area was the first time since leaving my home country that I felt a sense of a permanent community that centered around a common Caribbean identity.*

*In my professional journey as a music teacher in the US—both in public schools and community organizations—I have worked predominantly with Black and Brown students, many of whom are immigrants or the children of immigrants from Latin American and Caribbean countries. Many of these students are unable to regularly visit their home country due to safety concerns, access to resources, immigration status, or a feeling of disconnect from home. Some found solace in community music settings to engage in music-making that was their own as school settings often did not facilitate the music-making they identified with as part of their culture. I recall a Guatemalan student who demonstrated remarkable timbales skills in my steelpan club, a Cuban student who could hold down a montuno, and a Trini<sup>14</sup> student who expressed that he knew his steelpan music better than he knew himself.*

*Throughout my academic journey, I consistently engaged with school steelbands, directed community steelbands, and taught lessons and steelband courses in diverse communities. Yet, despite my active engagement with steelbands in the US, there lingered a tabanca<sup>15</sup>. I felt an ineffable yearning and subtle disconnect from the raw, authentic*

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<sup>14</sup> Trini is a colloquial term used to refer to anything related to Trinidad and Tobago, especially its people.

<sup>15</sup> Tabanca is a Trini term used to describe the feeling of sadness, longing, or heartbreak after a break-up; or colloquially the sadness experienced after carnival is over.

*experience back home—a disconnect that was not merely about geographical distance, and a yearning that extended beyond the enjoyment of playing. Embedded within my Caribbean steelband experience were the late-night practices, the smell of diesel as the trucks pulled the racks<sup>16</sup> on Carnival Monday, the near suffocating feeling created by the crowds that surrounded us as we rehearsed on the drag, and the unexpected mud and paint slapped on our legs by revelers as they chipped<sup>17</sup> alongside the band on j'ouvert<sup>18</sup> morning. It was only on my return to Trinidad and Tobago, when immersed once again in the panyard, that I truly appreciated the depth of the steelband experience and the ancestors who resisted colonial powers to create this vibrant expression of our identity. Reinvigorated, I found myself in a Caribbean community steelband in New York, participating in the New York panorama as part of the Caribbean carnival and radiating a fervor that did not go unnoticed by my peers. This experience was more than just a performance; it was a proclamation of my identity and a tribute to my heritage. Playing in a Caribbean community steelband is a source of pride I have not been able to achieve elsewhere, embodying the culmination of my cultural journey and the profound connections to my roots.*

In this dissertation, I draw upon my experiences as a teacher, performer, community leader, and immigrant to explore the experiences of youths that participate in a Caribbean community steelpan music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. My personal journey, marked by early immersion in Trinidad and Tobago's steelband culture and my

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<sup>16</sup> A rack is a metal structure, which may be covered or uncovered and equipped with wheels, designed for mounting steelband instruments for both practice and performance. Racks are typically either manually pushed by supporters or attached to a vehicle and towed, allowing players to perform while on the move.

<sup>17</sup> Chip is a Trinidadian verb describing a relaxed style of walking and dancing along to the music being played.

<sup>18</sup> Derived from the French “jour ouvert” (daybreak), j'ouvert is a festive event occurring in the wee hours of the morning marking the start of carnival. It features music, costumes, dancing, and revelers covered in mud or paint.

continuous involvement in steelpan communities across the US, uniquely positions me to approach this research with an understanding of the participants' experiences. Through the lens of lived experience, I aim to explore the intersections of identity, music experiences, and teaching and learning in this context. Beyond the academic objectives of this dissertation lies my own journey of cultural connection and professional commitment to the art of steelpan performance.

### **Community Music**

Community Music (CM) is a term that can be used to refer to music-making activities that take place outside of strictly “formal” educational and professional settings. While the term is widely used in various texts, there is no universally accepted definition. A frequently cited and widely accepted definition of community music today emphasizes the participatory and collaborative nature of community music:

Community music is an inclusive and participatory approach to active music engagement. ... community music today is a heterogeneous practice with diverse and dynamic practical, social, pedagogic, and aesthetic characteristics (Elliott, Silverman, & Bowman, 2016, p. 1).

Tying into the above definition is Bartleet and Higgins' (2018) definition which provides an encompassing view of community music's varied facets:

Community music projects and initiatives emphasize active participation over passive consumption, focusing on those either excluded from or disenfranchised by traditional music education systems. The emphasis in community music is on the act of music-making and the relationships formed in that act, rather than on the musical outcome (p. 1).

Like Elliot et al. (2016), Bartleet and Higgins' (2018) definition emphasizes participation, diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility.

The varied histories, structures, and motivational purposes of CM across the world are evident in the literature. Some CM scholars try to avoid defining CM because they consider definitions to be inadequate to capture the diversity of community music practices (Kertz-Welzel, 2016). Scholars like Phelan (2008) assert that it is possible to view all music as community music, while Veblen (2008) emphasizes that the ubiquity of CM is a significant problem in defining it. In line with the norms of social inquiry, as several scholars sought patterns in CM that extended beyond the idiosyncrasies of each individual case researched, CM typologies emerged (Hardcastle and Southcott, 2002). Many scholars have developed multiple CM typologies (Bell, 2008; Breen, 1994; Coffman, 2002; Gates, 1991; Hardcastle and Southcott, 2022; Higgins, 2012; Schippers, 2018; Veblen & Olsen, 2002). Gates (1991) developed a typology in which he conceptualized community music as a six-part subset of music in general while Breen (1994) identified seven types of CM formations based on the specific special and personal needs that CM activities intend to meet. Veblen and Olson (2002) offer seven categories of community music groups in the US based on structure. Coffman (2002) categorizes community music by its underlying motivational purposes. Bell (2008), like Gates, proposes classifications based on musical engagement type. Higgins (2012) separated community music into three broad perspectives, while Schippers (2018) described three contexts of community music. In a recent typology, Hardcastle and Southcott (2022) categorize community music according to their social character and music character. See Table 1.1 for a summary of how CM has been typologized by scholars over time.

**Table 1.1**  
*Typologies of Community Music*

| Scholar(s)/year                 | No. of typologies | Basis of classification                 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Gates (1991)                    | 6                 | Six-part continuum of music engagement. |
| Breen (1994)                    | 7                 | Based on targeted needs.                |
| Leglar and Smith (1996)         | 3                 | Types of CM groups found in US.         |
| Veblen and Olsson (2002)        | 7                 | Types of CM groups in the US.           |
| Coffman (2002)                  | 3                 | Underlying motivational purpose.        |
| Bell (2008)                     | 4                 | Ensemble size and constituency.         |
| Veblen (2008)                   | 5                 | Musical and social characteristics.     |
| Leglar and Smith (2010)         | 3                 | Generally based on purpose/objective.   |
| Higgins (2012)                  | 3                 | Broad perspectives                      |
| Schippers (2018)                | 3                 | Based on context of development         |
| Hardcastle and Southcott (2022) | 6                 | Social character and music character.   |

### ***Community Music: A New Overview and Categorization***

In the existing scholarship on Community Music (CM), there is a focus on active participation and collaboration, as highlighted by Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016), and Bartleet and Higgins (2018). These authors emphasize inclusivity, diversity, and engagement, while acknowledging that CM remains hard to define universally due to its diverse forms and motivations. The challenge lies in finding patterns that extend beyond individual cases, leading scholars like Gates (1991), Breen (1994), and others to propose typologies to categorize CM based on structure, purpose, and musical engagement. Building upon the foundation of these scholars, I aim to categorize CM while maintaining the flexible nature emphasized by previous

scholars. My categorization, inspired by the aforementioned scholars' works, acknowledges the complexity and overlaps between categories.

**Approaches of Community Music.** Community music is an ever-evolving area of active music engagement, distinguished from institutionalized, "formal" music education by its emphasis on cultural nuances and the social dynamics that evolve through the act of creating music. Core principles that distinguish community music include access, diversity, identity, inclusion, participation, and personal development. These principles shape the specific intentions and influences of community music, which often overlap and interconnect. The approaches of community music, which are not mutually exclusive, include cultural preservation, social justice, music industry, common interest, education, and access and inclusion.

***Cultural Preservation.*** CM in this approach is dedicated to maintaining and revitalizing music traditions tied to a specific culture that may be at risk of being forgotten or overshadowed by mainstream musical forms. For instance, a community group might focus on teaching traditional indigenous songs to younger generations, preserving the music, the language, and the culture. Because cultural sustenance is at the center of this category, identity development is a core principle in this category.

***Access and Inclusion.*** CM in this approach aims to ensure that music-making and music education are available to all, regardless of age, ability, socio-economic status, cultural background, or any other identity distinction. A community music program in this form might provide adaptive instruments and teaching methods for individuals with disabilities.

***Social Justice.*** CM in this approach seeks to address and combat social inequalities and to empower marginalized groups through music. An example is the El Sistema program, which originated in Venezuela and provides free classical music education to children from

underserved communities, aiming to facilitate social change through the collective practice of music. Inclusion and diversity are important principles in this approach.

***Music Industry.*** CM in this approach acts as a springboard for developing professional skills and networks within the music industry. It encompasses a range of skills and experiences necessary for success in careers in the music industry. This approach can take the form of organized recurring jam sessions aimed at young artists. Because professional skills are the end goals in this approach, personal development is a primary focus.

***Common Interest.*** CM in this approach brings together individuals who share a passion for a particular genre or style of music. Examples include community jazz ensembles, folk music circles, and drum circles. Participation and music involvement with others is a primary focus in this approach.

***Education.*** The education approach in community music focuses on teaching pedagogy and learning experiences. One example is the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids (OrchKids, 2024) program. OrchKids exemplifies this approach by providing comprehensive music education to underserved youth, offering instruction in various instruments, music theory, and performance.

As mentioned above, these approaches to Community Music are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. For instance, a community choir might simultaneously serve educational and cultural preservation purposes. Geographic and cultural contexts further influence categorization, as similar groups may fall into different categories depending on their setting and intended goals. For example, a mariachi band program in a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood in California may focus on cultural preservation and education, while a similar program in a multicultural urban area might emphasize inclusivity and community building, incorporating

elements of mariachi music alongside other cultural. Ultimately, these approaches build upon the scholarship of others while providing a nuanced, flexible approach that reflects the rich diversity of community music practices.

### ***Community Music and Identity Formation***

Cultural identity is the sense of belonging to a group, influenced by the interplay of individual experiences within various social, educational, and media contexts (Arnett, 2002, Erikson, 1968; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It represents the thread that connects an individual's self-perception with the broader cultural, ethnic, and community narratives (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Phinney, 1990). This formation is particularly evident during adolescence, a period that Erikson (1968) characterized by the psychosocial crisis of Identity vs. Role Confusion, where youth (12-18 years) are intensely engaged in the search for personal identity.

Community music environments offer fertile ground for identity development, serving as cultural spaces where adolescents can explore, affirm, and express their burgeoning self-concepts (DeNora, 2000). In these spaces, music acts as both a mirror and a canvas: reflecting cultural practices and providing a medium through which individuals can shape their evolving identities (Frith, 1996; Jung, 2014; Kyker, 2013; Stokes, 2004).

The intersection of community music and cultural identity formation is especially relevant in educational settings. Schools are critical for cultural dialogue and identity evolution, with the music classroom being a key arena where cultural values are transmitted and potentially redefined (Abril, 2013; Hess, 2015). A culturally responsive pedagogy in music education affirms diverse cultural identities and promotes a broader understanding of inclusivity (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002). Such an approach supports Berry's model of acculturation strategies, offering pathways for identity formation (Berry, 1980; Schwartz et al., 2010).

In the US, music education has traditionally been anchored heavily in Western Art Music (Hess, 2013), frequently leading to the underrepresentation of many other musical traditions such as indigenous music, hip hop, folk music from various cultures, and contemporary popular music. Music of the Caribbean, steeped in histories of resistance, colonialism, and cultural fusion, offers invaluable insights into the broader spectrum of global music expressions (Ramos, 2005). The study of community music involvement among youth within Caribbean communities in the US is crucial. It provides valuable insights into the identity formation processes among immigrant youth and youth from immigrant-led households, aligning with the educational goal of nurturing well-rounded individuals who are confident in their cultural heritage (Bradley, 2007; Campbell & Lum, 2008; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). By examining community music involvement among youth within these communities, we can better understand, acknowledge, and embrace how the act of making and engaging with music is a vital element in cultural identity construction.

### ***Caribbean Community Music***

The significance of studying community music in Caribbean communities within the US is threefold. First, it enables me to recognize the music's origins and historical context. Second, I shed light on the historical context of immigration, which has seen diverse groups from the Caribbean settle in the US throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These groups sought refuge from political and economic turbulence, contributing to the economic growth of the nation (Pérez, 1990; Foner, 2001). Thirdly, through my examination of the role of community music in these diasporic communities, we can understand how cultural identity is both preserved and transformed. The act of music-making within these communities becomes a dynamic tool for

negotiating and asserting cultural heritage, enabling young people to navigate the complexities of their bi+cultural (of two or more cultures) experience (Boer et al., 2011).

The varied cultures of the Caribbean reflect a rich array of traditions across the different nations, marked by distinct languages, foods, religious practices, governance, and musical styles. This diversity is often rooted in a shared history of colonialism and the resulting syncretism between Indigenous traditions, African diasporic elements, Asian traditions, and colonial influences. In this study, I concentrate on my current geographical location—the Washington, DC metropolitan area—which is home to a substantial population of immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. The region is abundant with the diverse musical practices of these regions, including but not limited to Salvadoran banda, Brazilian samba, Puerto Rican bomba, Trinidadian steelband, and Cuban salsa. These musical styles serve as vital channels for cultural expression and community engagement for people who identify with these communities or countries. In this dissertation, I focus specifically on one example of a Caribbean community musical expression: a youth-serving Caribbean community steelpan music program.

**Steelpan history.** Prior to 1498, Trinidad was inhabited by Amerindian tribes, primarily the Arawaks and Caribs. The arrival of the Spanish in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century brought disease, warfare, and enslavement, which led to a sharp decline in the indigenous populations. Subsequently, the Europeans forcibly brought Africans to Trinidad as part of the transatlantic slave trade, starting in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and increasing significantly when the British captured Trinidad in 1797. These enslaved Africans brought with them various cultural practices, including religious and musical traditions. Following the abolition of slavery in 1834 and the end of the apprenticeship in 1838, African descendants in Trinidad sought means of cultural expression, particularly during carnival, playing on skinned drums (drums made with animal

skins) which accompanied dancing, chanting, and stickfighting<sup>19</sup>. Fearing that these practices could incite riotous behavior (Stuempfle, 1995), the British colonials passed a Peace Preservation Ordinance in 1884 which prohibited torch processions, drumming, dances, and assemblies of ten or more persons with sticks (Peace Preservation Ordinance, 1884). The ban also indirectly supported the Roman Catholic church's efforts to convert the populace to Christianity as drums were used in African religious practices including the worship of deities such as Shango, Yemoja, and Ogun (Gormandy, 2013). In response to the ban, Afro-Trinidadians formed "tamboo bamboo" bands. These ensembles consisted of bamboo cut to different lengths, struck with sticks, or hit on the ground, producing a range of treble and bass pitches performed in interlocking rhythms. This practice too was eventually banned in 1934 (Stuempfle, 1995). These percussive prohibitions led Afro-Trinidadians to resort to using discarded metallic containers, trash cans, etc., and eventually empty oil drums, leading to the birth of the steelpan in the mid-1940s.

While it became a form of musical expression and a vehicle through which the marginalized could assert their identity and challenge the status quo (Dudley, 2008), steelpan's early years were marred with class tensions and violence, and players were often subject to harassment and arrest by the police. The instrument embodies a unique syncretism merging African and Afro-Trinidadian percussive practices with Western classical harmony and tonality. This fusion has allowed the steelpan to navigate the dual roles of defiance and acceptance within colonial influence, evolving from an outcast instrument to an emblem of national identity within the framework of Trinidad and Tobago's cultural and political structures.

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<sup>19</sup> Evolved from the kalinda dance, stickfighting involves men who strike at each other with hardwood sticks. It has been described as a game in which manhood, status, identity within the group and on rare occasions life itself were at stake (Rohlehr, 1990).

Calypso, another musical artform created by Afro-Trinidadians and a close relation to steelband is often used to tell a story, or highlight cultural practices with a rhythmic and engaging narrative. Throughout this document, I have inserted the lyrics for a few calypsos to emphasize or clarify certain points. The first example, Mighty Sparrow's "Outcast" (1963), is provided below to illustrate the outcast perception of the steelpan during the mid-1960s. Song lyrics are presented in the left column, with my own explanation in the right.

*[Verse 1]*

*Society in Trinidad for a steel band man  
Was just as hard or even harder than that for any  
calypsonian  
Don't care how you talented, you must go outside  
And no appreciation, here society have too much  
false pride*

*[Chorus]*

*Calypsonians really catch hell for a long time  
To associate yourself with them was a big crime  
If your sister talk to a steel band man  
Your family want to break she hand  
Put she out, lick out every teeth in she mouth  
Pass you outcast!*

*[Verse 2]*

*The reason why I said "false pride" it is simply  
this:  
They enjoy your song, they enjoy your music  
But still they're so damn prejudiced  
They bracket you in a category so low and mean  
Man they leave the impression that the  
Caribbean's unclean*

*[Chorus]*

In this calypso, Sparrow highlights the struggles faced by panmen in Trinidad and Tobago, suggesting that their challenges were even greater than those of the calypsonians. Sparrow hints at the implicit class hierarchy in Trinidad at the time where panmen were bracketed “so low and mean” and even associating with them was akin to criminal activity. The song also touches on how women were mistreated for being romantically involved with panmen. The calypso lands on a theme of "false pride," a duality illustrating how panmen were treated unfairly while people still seemed to welcome and enjoy their music.

***Steelpan legitimacy and national identity.*** As the instrument gained legitimacy and moved out of its outcast status, corporate sponsorship became common. A full list of registered steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago shows that most have a corporate sponsor, which is often

reflected in the band's name. For instance, the Desperadoes steelband is sponsored by WITCO (West Indian Tobacco Company), making them the WITCO Desperadoes. Sponsors provide financial and other support to their bands both during and outside the panorama season. Today, the steelpan remains a symbol of national identity in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to steelpan music playing a central role in Carnival, images of steelpans can be seen displayed at major city entry points on the island, including the airport, and on the country's twenty-dollar bill. On July 4, 2024, the National Musical Instrument Bill was passed, to officially declare the steelpan as the national musical instrument of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. At the time of this publication, the Bill awaited proclamation by the President of Trinidad and Tobago, which will then make it a law.

**Globalization.** Transitioning to a global acknowledgement of its cultural significance, the United Nations recently acknowledged August 11<sup>th</sup> as World Steelpan Day. In the declaration, the UN acknowledged that the steelpan promotes inclusive societies, sustainable communities and the creative economy and can have a positive impact on mental health and well-being, gender equality and youth empowerment (United Nations, 2023).

Today, steelpan samples and imitations of its sounds can be heard throughout pop culture. Songs like 50 Cent's "P.I.M.P.," Soulja Boy's "Soulja Boy," Grover Washington Jr.'s "Just the Two of Us," and Selena Gomez's "Me & The Rhythm" all incorporate steelpan elements. Additionally, *Sesame Street*, a program watched by millions of children and adults worldwide, has featured steelpan. In its 32nd episode in 1969, a percussionist playing the steelpan walks along a beach with two children before heading into the city, nature, and various construction sites to match the rhythms they hear. Although the 1969 episode did not provide historical context, a recent 93-second segment posted on the Sesame Street Facebook page

(Sesame Street, 2024) involved well-loved muppet, Grover, engaging with Elijah, the parent of a second-generation Trinidadian. Elijah was practicing steelpan and expressed that his son, Wes, faced ridicule at school for the sound of his instrument. Elijah reminded his son that he plays steelpan because it connects him to his ancestors. This simple vignette intended for a preschool audience is an illustration of how steelpan's cultural relevance continues to educate new generations, bridging cultural gaps and fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Caribbean heritage on a global scale.

***Panorama.*** In Trinidad, the annual panorama competition, presented by Pan Trinbago<sup>20</sup>, draws thousands of supporters. Steelbands compete in four categories based on size. The smallest category, known as single pan steelbands, allows 25-35 players per band. The largest category, large conventional steelbands, permits bands to have 100-125 players (Pan Trinbago, 2023). A 2024 Pan Trinbago press release revealed that the 2024 competition saw over 8,000 steelpan players and 119 steelbands (Pan Trinbago, 2024).

**Steelband in Schools.** The steelpan has emerged as an instrument of academic study at institutions around the globe. In Trinidad, students can pursue an undergraduate degree in music with a focus on steelpan at both the University of the West Indies (UWI) St. Augustine and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). As of March 2024, Haskett's US/Canadian steel band directory has cataloged general information for 955 k-12 and collegiate steelbands across various educational levels, including elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, academies, and universities. Among these, Northern Illinois University (NIU) stands out for being the first worldwide to offer a steelband class for credit in 1981 (Martin, Funk, and Remy; 2017). NIU

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<sup>20</sup> Pan Trinbago is recognized as the parent body for steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago, and all parts of the world where such bands may exist.

also led the way in introducing an undergraduate degree program in steelpan studies in 1986 and, later, a master's degree with an emphasis on steelpan in 1989 (Martin, Funk, and Remy; 2017). In 1997, UWI St. Augustine was the first tertiary institution in the Caribbean to develop an undergraduate music program with steelpan as the principal instrument in 1997 (Martin, Funk, and Remy; 2017).

While the inclusion of steelbands in US academic settings may enrich the diversity of music programs offerings, integrating steelpan in academic settings, particularly outside of the Caribbean, can come with challenges. One challenge is the scarcity of specialized instructors who are proficient in steelpan and its pedagogy (Haskett, 2014). Additionally, sourcing repertoire for steelpan ensembles is often difficult, and the instruments themselves can be prohibitively expensive, as noted by Svaline (1995). Furthermore, there is often a struggle for recognition of steelpan programs alongside more traditional Western classical and jazz programs.

**Steelpan in Washington, DC: Immigration, Education, and Howard University.** The history of large Caribbean population and vibrant steelband scene in the Washington, DC metropolitan area can be traced back to a piece of legislation from the mid-1960s. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, was a landmark legislation signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Prior to this act, the US immigration had operated under a quota system, since 1924, that heavily favored immigrants from northern Europe while imposing strict limits on immigrants from other regions. The 1965 Act abolished this quota system and established a new immigration policy based on reuniting immigrant families and attracting skilled labor to the US, thereby opening the door to immigrants from southern Europe, Asia, and Africa (Zolberg, 2006). By removing the discriminatory quotas that

had severely restricted their entry, the act allowed for a significant increase in the number of immigrants to the US.

This Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 catalyzed an increase in educational exchanges between the Caribbean and the US, leading to an influx of Caribbean students seeking educational opportunities at US Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the US, notably Howard University in Washington, DC. Even prior to the immigration act, Howard University fostered connections between the African American community and what was referred to as the “Black Third World” in a 1981 Washington Post article (Barry, 1981). The notable influence of Howard University in these associated regions is illustrated by prominent alumni including Dr. Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago; Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria’s first president; Trinidadian George Padmore, who co-founded of the Pan-African Federation and counseled Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah and Kenyan Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta; Trinidad-born American political activist Stokely Carmichael; Sir Arleigh Winston Scott, the first native Governor General of Barbados; and Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the fourth president and “father of” Guyana (Barry, 1981) .

Over the years, Howard University became a beacon for Caribbean students seeking an educational environment that honored and nurtured their racial and cultural identities (Rogers, 2006). Some of these students brought with them their own cultural practices, including the introduction of steelpan to both Howard University and Washington, DC at large. Howard University had one of the first college steelbands in the US, “The Trinidad Steelband”, founded in 1959 by George Lawrence, a Trinidadian engineering student (Tiffe, 2015). The Trinidad Steelband, although not officially supported by the university, consisted entirely of Caribbean Howard University students who performed to earn money for tuition (Johnson, 1963). In 1963,

the Texaco Oil Company provided scholarships to band members after an executive's wife heard them perform at an embassy event. This corporate support, similar to sponsorships for Trinidad's steelbands, enabled the band to continue performing at various social events and official functions, including the 1969 inaugural parade for President Richard Nixon (Tiffe, 2015). Among the early members of the Howard University Trinidad Steelband was Keith St. Clair Preddie, HU graduate of 1966, who remains an active participant in the area's steelpan scene. Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 show the Howard University Steelband featured in Ebony magazine's December 1963 issue. Ebony magazine, a prominent publication known for showcasing African American culture and achievements, highlighted the band's innovative way of paying their tuition fees while continuing a young 20-year-old artform that originated in the West Indies ("Playing Their Way Through College," 1963).

**Figure 1.1**

*Howard University Steelband feature in Ebony Magazine ("Playing Their Way Through College," 1963)*



Note. This image shows members of the Howard University steelband carrying instruments to be loaded into a vehicle for a performance.

From "Playing Their Way Through College," by Johnson Publishing Company, 1963, *Ebony Magazine*, pages 113-117. Copyright [1963] by Johnson Publishing Company Archive. Courtesy of J. Paul Getty Trust and Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and

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**Figure 1.2**

*Howard University Steelband feature in Ebony Magazine ("Playing Their Way Through College," 1963)*



Note. This image shows members of the Howard University steelband performing at events.

From "Playing Their Way Through College," by Johnson Publishing Company, 1963, *Ebony Magazine*, pages 113-117. Copyright [1963] by Johnson Publishing Company Archive. Courtesy of J. Paul Getty Trust and Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Made possible by the Ford Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Smithsonian Institution. Reprinted with permission. The license agreement is in the Appendix.

**Figure 1.3**

*Howard University Steelband feature in Ebony Magazine ("Playing Their Way Through College," 1963)*



Note. This image shows members of the Howard University steelband performing and engaging with politicians and ambassadors including Sir Ellis Clarke.

From "Playing Their Way Through College," by Johnson Publishing Company, 1963, *Ebony Magazine*, pages 113-117. Copyright [1963] by Johnson Publishing Company Archive. Courtesy of J. Paul Getty Trust and Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Made possible by the Ford Foundation, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and Smithsonian Institution. Reprinted with permission. The license agreement is in the Appendix.

**Steelband in the Washington, DC metropolitan area: Present day.** Even prior to the Immigration Act, Howard University fostered connections between the African American community and other nations (Barry, 1981). Many members of the Howard University band settled in Washington, DC after college, contributing to the local music scene. The pipeline of Caribbean immigrants, spurred on by the Hart-Cellar Act, boosted the population of pan players in the DC area and led to the birth of several steelbands throughout the region.

Today, the Washington, DC metropolitan area boasts a vibrant steelband and Caribbean cultural scene, with multiple community bands and some surviving steelbands that have been active for up to 39 years. Although not held since the onset of COVID-19, an annual steelband jamboree traditionally brings together steelbands from the area and invites guest performers. The Baltimore Washington One Carnival, celebrating its 44th year in 2024, is organized by the Caribbean American Carnival Association of Baltimore in conjunction with the DC Caribbean Carnival Committee. This event is a significant cultural highlight, emphasizing Caribbean culture in the region. Caribbean embassies in Washington, DC, including the Trinidad and Tobago embassy, play a crucial role in showcasing steelbands and other Caribbean organizations. Each year, the Embassy of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Washington, DC, participates in initiatives such as Passport DC and the Adopt-an-Embassy program. The former is an open-house event and features youth steelband Capital Steel Pulse. The former is a partnership with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) whereby DCPS students engage with embassy officials to learn about Trinidad and Tobago culture. In 2022, the University of Maryland's marching band performed a "Caribbean Takeover" halftime show

which included the marching band performing alongside a small steelband, a Caribbean DJ, flags of Caribbean nations, and a vibrant costume display; even ending with a lavway<sup>21</sup>.

The number of school-based steelbands in the region continues to grow, with programs often bringing in Caribbean steelpan guest artists each year. Steelpan soloists and steelband's perform at venues such as the Kennedy Center, Strathmore Music Center, Blues Alley, the Library of Congress and other performance venues, adding to the variety of ways people can engage with the culture in the area. Church steelbands and summer camps also provide additional avenues for children and adults to engage with steelpan music, alongside after-school and temporary school programs that offer further opportunities for the instrument to thrive.

**Historical Foundations and Growth of Steelband in Washington, DC.** Steelband is deeply rooted in the historical context of resistance to colonial oppression. This instrument was born in response to the prohibition of previous instruments, with Afro-Trinidadians creating a new sound from the ingenuity of using oil drums as musical resources (Stuempfle, 1995). This transformation offered a powerful means for communities to carve out a sense of identity and agency by creatively repurposing the very tools and influences imposed upon them by their former colonizers (Guilbault, 1993; Turino, 2003). From its origins as a symbol of lower socioeconomic status, steelband music has evolved to become a symbol of national identity and a central feature of Trinidad and Tobago's carnival. The educational migration of Trinbagonians to the US, particularly to the Washington, DC metropolitan area, brought with it aspects of Trinbagonian culture, including the steelpan and carnival.

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<sup>21</sup> A call and response originally led by a chantwell (lead singer) and responding chorus or stickfighters/ supporters.

## **Need for Study**

Community music programs are pivotal pathways for social cohesion, cultural preservation, and individual well-being, standing as a testament to the power of music engagement in unifying and defining communities (Higgins, 2012; Veblen et al., 2013). If we investigate the role of community music in shaping the identities and experiences of youth and educators, particularly within immigrant communities, we may gain insight into its potential for promoting social cohesion, cultural preservation, and individual well-being. Despite community music's significance, research on community-based music, particularly among youth within Caribbean communities in the United States, remains scarce. This gap is especially notable given the increasing diversity within educational settings due to the continuous influx of youth within the US population from varied cultural backgrounds (Banks & Banks, 2010).

### ***Addressing the Cultural Needs of Caribbean Immigrant Youth in US Schools***

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) provides analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at local, national, and international levels. MPI's data for US immigration trends by Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana (the three most populous English-speaking Caribbean nations) shows an increase of 141%, 104%, and 138%, respectively between 1990 and 2022 (Migration Policy Institute, 2024). This growing presence of Caribbean youth in the US and subsequently U.S. schools, including and especially in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, calls for curricula, content, and pedagogies that align with the many assets Caribbean youth value and develop through their cultural heritage. The predominance of Western European music, prevalence of limited ensemble offerings (namely, wind band, string orchestra, and choir), and conductor-centered pedagogies within educational programs often overlooks the rich musical traditions immigrant youth bring with them, risking cultural

disconnection and erasure (Wright, 2010). Limited school music offerings—both content and approach—not only represent a form of cultural marginalization but also a missed opportunity for fostering a more inclusive and representative educational landscape (Bradley, 2007).

Understanding how diasporic communities utilize music to affirm their identities and navigate new social realities is particularly urgent considering ongoing global migration patterns (Stokes, 2004; Turino, 2003). Such engagement offers immigrant youth a sense of belonging and assists their integration into their new society, all while maintaining the vibrancy of their cultural expressions. Gaining insights into the music experiences of youth from diverse backgrounds is vital for formulating educational practices that reflect and honor a diversity of lived experiences (Heath & Roach, 1999).

Given this context, the present study aims to fill a void in the existing literature by investigating the experiences of youth engaged in Caribbean community music within the Washington, DC metropolitan area. This research addresses the nature of teaching and learning in a community music setting, examine how youth articulate and perceive their cultural identities, and explore how they describe their experiences with music. By focusing on these areas, the study provides valuable insights into the role of community music in shaping youth identity, potentially steering educational practices to become more culturally relevant and enriching.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The research was guided by the following questions:

1) What is the nature of teaching and learning in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

2) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their cultural identities?

3) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their musical experiences?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study comprises five components drawn from the work of prior scholars: (1) Community music as cultural engagement (Higgins, 2012), (2) Teaching and learning in community music (Allsup and Benedict, 2008), (3) Cultural identity through music (Stokes, 2004), (4) Symbolism and socio-political significance (Turino, 2003), and (5) Immigrant experience and cultural continuity (Hall, 1990). These components create a comprehensive approach to understanding the role of community music in the lives of participants in Caribbean community steelpan music in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

### ***Community Music as Cultural Engagement***

Community music functions as a dynamic form of cultural engagement that prioritizes active participation and the process of music-making over the final musical product. This perspective is consistent with Higgins (2012), who stresses the inclusive and barrier-transcending nature of community music. As a social process, community music forges connections and contributes to the cultural vitality of society (Higgins, 2012). In this context, community music operates as a vibrant medium for cultural expression and preservation. These musical practices become a means through which communities can maintain and celebrate their heritage, thus playing a crucial role in the transmission and adaptation of cultural values and norms.

Additionally, by viewing community music as cultural engagement, this framework recognizes the potential of music to act as a dialogue between generations, allowing for a renegotiation and reaffirmation of cultural identities within the diaspora.

### ***Teaching and Learning in Community Music***

The framework places emphasis on the nature of teaching and learning within community music contexts, particularly those stemming from the Caribbean community steelband music traditions. Community music environments, as described by Allsup and Benedict (2008), often foster informal, participatory learning experiences that are distinct from formal education systems. These informal environments provide avenues for musical and personal development, which are explored in this study to understand how they influence the music learning experiences of youth. This informal learning often leads to an embodiment of knowledge that contrasts with the theoretical and structured learning of formal education, allowing for a more personal and culturally situated understanding of music. My investigation into these educational practices in community music is crucial to identifying the unique pedagogical strategies and their potential impacts on youths' engagement and identity formation.

### ***Cultural Identity through Music***

The role of music in the construction and expression of cultural identity is central to this study's framework. This concept draws upon the theoretical work of Stokes (2004), who emphasizes how music acts as a vehicle for cultural expression and identity construction. In this study, I probe into the ways community music settings enable youth participants in a Caribbean community steelband to articulate and explore their cultural identities within the larger mosaic of their experiences in the United States. The act of engaging in music reflective of one's cultural heritage facilitates a deeper connection to one's roots and can offer a space for the expression of

complex identity narratives. Furthermore, community music is posited as a forum where youth can navigate multiple identities, thus allowing for a fluid and dynamic expression of self that is continuously shaped by the interplay of music, culture, and social experiences.

### ***Symbolism and Socio-political Significance***

Recognizing the symbolism and socio-political significance inherent in different forms of music is an integral part of this framework. Drawing on the insights of Turino (2003), who discusses the performance of national culture through music, in this study I examine how music serves not only as entertainment but also as an agent of nation-building and cultural affirmation. By investigating steelband, I pay close attention to its roles within society and the meanings ascribed to it by those who participate in and observe it. The socio-political contexts from which steelband arose reveal a depth of meaning that transcends its aesthetic value, highlighting the historical and contemporary struggles and triumphs of Trinbagonian and Caribbean communities.

### ***Immigrant Experiences and Cultural Continuity***

This framework is sensitive to the experiences of immigrants and the importance of cultural continuity, reflecting the research that suggests community music plays a significant role in maintaining cultural identity for immigrants (Hall, 1990). My background as a Caribbean immigrant in the US informs an exploration of community music as a continuum of cultural practices from the Caribbean to diasporic communities in the US. For immigrants, maintaining a connection to our cultural heritage is often a key aspect of identity preservation and resilience in new environments. Community music, as Hall (1990) suggests, serves as an essential medium for this purpose, enabling us to retain tangible connections to our cultural roots and providing a space for the intergenerational transfer of values, customs, and traditions. Engaging in music

practices from our respective homelands helps us immigrants navigate the complexities of integrating into a new society while holding on to important aspects of our original cultural identity.

### ***Integration of Scholarly Perspectives***

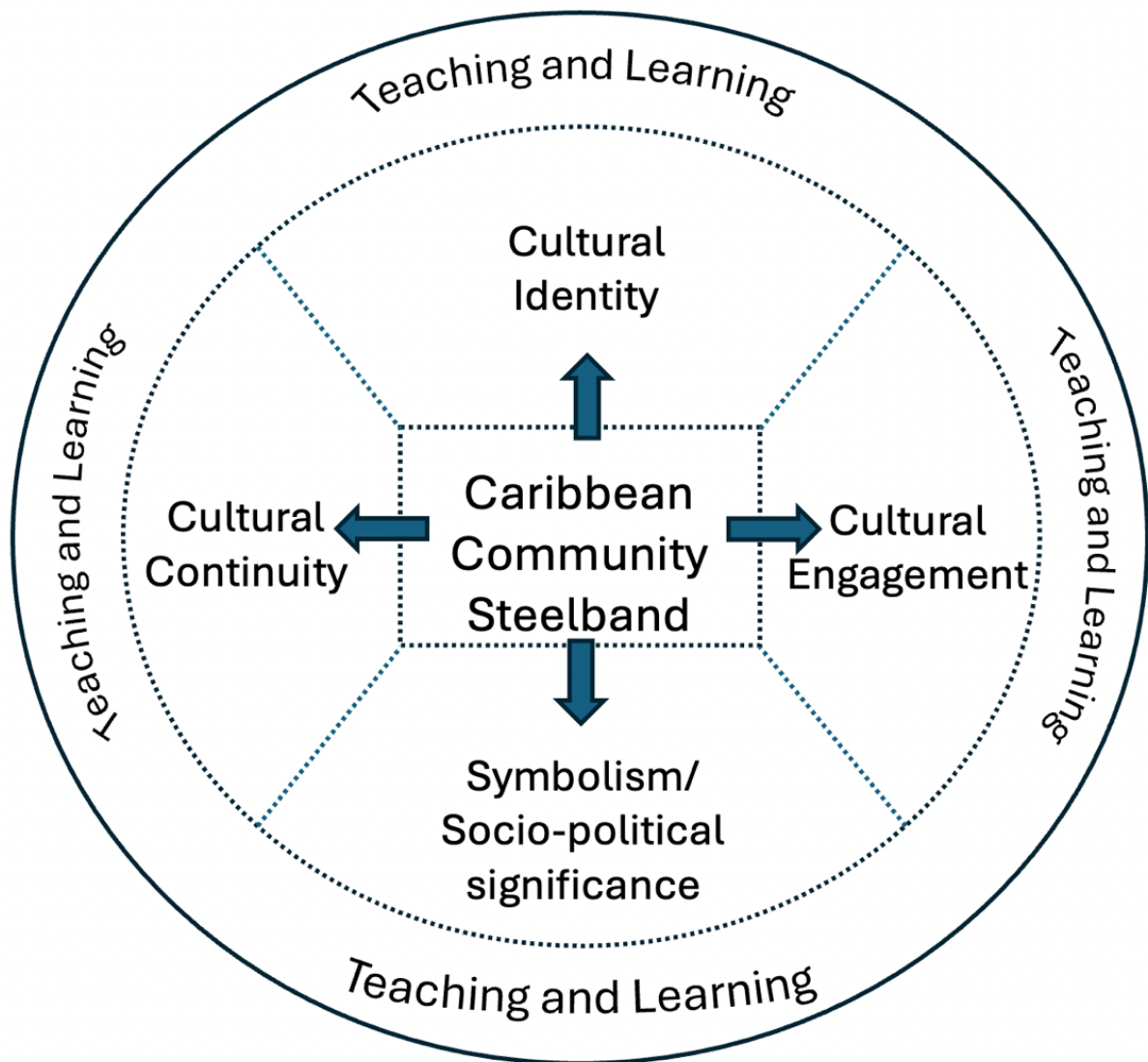
My interpretive process is informed by Yosso's (2005) discussion of cultural wealth and the diverse forms of capital that minority youth contribute to educational environments. This framework provides a lens through which to examine and understand the cultural, educational, and identity-related intersections within the context of the participants' music-making and migration experiences, thus aiming to illuminate the role music plays in cultural expression, education, and identity development.

The conceptual framework presented integrates various scholarly perspectives and experiential insights to establish a thorough understanding of the role that community music plays in cultural engagement, education, identity formation, and the immigrant experiences. It brings to the fore the social, pedagogical, and cultural dimensions of community music as a space for participation, learning, and expression among youth participants in a Caribbean community steelband in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. By focusing on how music intersects with cultural identity and serves as a symbol of socio-political narratives, the study offers a nuanced analysis of youth experiences in Caribbean community music within the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Figure 2.1 represents this conceptual framework. The illustrated conceptual framework is designed to resemble the layout of tenor bass pans. The dotted lines represent the holes in a bore pan, which enhance the acoustic effect by producing clearer and more resonant notes. Similar to how each note on a steelpan produces sympathetic resonance when struck, the framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of its elements,

illustrating how each component, while independently important, influences and resonates with the others.

**Figure 2.1**

*A Conceptual Framework for Caribbean Community Steelband Music Engagement in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area*



## **Definitions**

For this study, I use the following terms as defined here:

- 1) “Diaspora” is a term used to describe the process of people who have originated from a common land but spread to various locations (Cohen, 1997). Throughout this document, “diaspora” is often used to refer to the Caribbean diaspora and African diaspora.
- 2) “Caribbean” in this study refers to the islands of the Caribbean Sea, including Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the two English-speaking countries of Central and South America, Belize and Guyana.
- 3) “Rote” learning connotes acquiring knowledge through repetition with little to no critical thinking or reflexivity, often in a mechanical way. In the steelband community and throughout this dissertation, "rote" is used to describe a process of learning that involves repetition along with oral transmission and kinesthetic learning.

## **Outline of the Remainder of the Study**

Following this introductory chapter, chapter 2 serves as an exploration and synthesis of pertinent literature that establishes a foundational context for the investigation. In the literature review, I delve into four primary domains including community music in the US, the education of immigrant youth in the US, cultural identity formation, and lastly, the manifestations of Caribbean steelpan music culture within the US.

In chapter 3, I present an overview and explanation of the research method I utilized in this study. After revisiting the purpose and guiding research questions, I describe the methodology I employed, explain my rationale for selecting it, and then offer a concise overview

of its use in music education research. Subsequently, I detail the process and criteria for case selection. This section is followed by an in-depth explanation of the design. I conclude with a description of my data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter 4 is a presentation of the research findings. In this section, I systematically outline the results derived from the data, and organized into four main themes which include Family, Service, Cultural Identity and Continuity, and (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation.

Lastly, chapter 5 is a discussion of my findings that juxtaposes the results with the literature and prior studies. In this concluding chapter, I not only highlight the study's significant findings but also elaborate on the implications of practical applications in music education within different structures, particularly in diverse and multicultural settings.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a specific Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. This literature review chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the existing scholarly work closely aligned with the focal areas of my investigation. The review is organized into four distinct sections, each dedicated to casting light on a specific facet central to my study: 1) community music, 2) immigrant youth, 3) cultural identity formation, and 4) Caribbean music culture in the US.

### **Location of Sources for Review**

One of the foundational sources accessed was the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database, an invaluable resource for pinpointing research closely aligned with my study. In parallel, Google Scholar served as a broad net, capturing relevant scholarly articles, publications, and peer reviewed studies that provided insight. Books specific to music education as well as dedicated book chapters, offered deeper dives into areas of interest including theories, practices, and case studies. The Library of Congress website presented a collection of sources that added historical and cultural context to the study. Furthermore, I frequently referenced publications from the International Journal of community music. Lastly, to ensure a well-rounded understanding, I also consulted government published data reports, offering quantitative insights that complemented the qualitative narratives.

## **Community music in the US**

### ***History of Community Music in the US***

Leglar and Smith (2010) state that community music in the US began with the pockets of immigrants who settled in various parts of the United States, tracing its US origins back to pre-colonial times when groups of people we now call Native Americans or American Indians crossed the Bering Straits from Asia. Religion is also discussed as being influential on Community Music. Leglar and Smith conclude that community music in the US appears to fall into three general categories: that which exists to carry out specific educational objectives; that which has performance as its chief objective, but also has an educational component; and that which is carried on solely for cultural transmission and/or for social and entertainment purposes.

By the 1980s, scholars began to emphasize the educational significance of community music, viewing it as a tool for both musical and personal development outside of formal education settings (Veblen, 2008). In the 1990s scholars viewed community music as an inclusive practice, aiming to bridge gaps across age, race, socio-economic status, and ability. It was seen as a democratic approach to music-making where all voices were equally valued (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018). In the 2000s, the socio-cultural dimension of community music became increasingly pronounced. The focus shifted towards understanding how community music can aid in the preservation of cultural heritage and foster community cohesion (Higgins & Willingham, 2017). In more recent years, community music has been conceptualized as a dynamic practice that exists at the intersection of music education, performance, and social justice. It encompasses a vast array of practices, from grassroots community engagements to global initiatives, and emphasizes active participation, inclusion, and the transformative power of music (Kenny, 2017).

## **Defining “community music”**

The term “community music” has been debated among scholars and practitioners for years. These debates tend to center around the complexities and varied interpretations of the term. Higgins (2006), for instance, has discussed how community music resists the definition because of its inclusivity, participatory nature, and fluid boundaries. He has noted that attempts to concretely define community music can limit its expansive nature and prevent understanding the depth of the practices that fall under its umbrella. Similarly, Veblen (2008) has acknowledged the complexities in pinning down a single definition of community music, suggesting that it is an evolving and flexible term. In another perspective, Bartleet and Higgins (2018) present an international view of community music, emphasizing the differences and practices across the globe, thus indicating the challenges in creating a one-size-fits-all definition for community music given its cultural and contextual variations. Although these scholars have recognized the limitations of defining community music, numerous others—including those previously mentioned—have made attempts to define and categorize the term.

One of the most frequently cited and widely accepted definitions of community music comes from Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016) who emphasized the participatory and collaborative nature of community music: "Community music is an inclusive and participatory approach to active music engagement... community music today is a heterogeneous practice with diverse and dynamic practical, social, pedagogic, and aesthetic characteristics" (p. 1).

Higgins (2012) separated community music into three categories: (1) music of a community, (2) communal music making, and (3) music as an intervention. Schippers (2018) described three contexts of community music: (1) an ‘organic’ phenomenon, (2) an intervention,

and (3) institutionalized community music. Bartleet and Higgins (2018) provide an encompassing view of community music's varied facets:

Community music projects and initiatives emphasize active participation over passive consumption, focusing on those either excluded from or disenfranchised by traditional music education systems. The emphasis in community music is on the act of music-making and the relationships formed in that act, rather than on the musical outcome" (p. 1).

Gates (1991) developed a typology which presents community music as a subset of music in general. He identified six categories including professionals, apprentices, amateurs, hobbyists, recreationists, and dabblers. Breen (1994) identified three operational levels for community music. That is, community music can exist for its own sake as an artform, exist as an expression of community development, and exist as an avenue to "feed into and develop the music industry" (Breen, 1994). Breen identified seven types of community music: utilitarian, industrial, oppositional, pluralist, normative, consensus and welfare. Veblen and Olsson (2002) offer seven categories of community music groups in the US: (1) community music schools, (2) community performance organizations, (3) ethnic/preservation groups, (4) religious [groups], (5) associative organizations with schools, (6) outreach initiatives of universities and colleges, and (7) informal, affinity groups (Veblen and Olsson, 2002). Coffman (2002) categorizes community music by their underlying motivational purposes, presenting three categories including personal motivations, musical motivations, and social motivations. Bell (2008), like Gates, proposes classifications based on musical engagement type. She presents four descriptive categories based on ensemble size and constituency including small ensembles or very skilled performers, choruses of various sizes including anyone post-high school graduation, large institutionally

sponsored or supported choirs, and small non-auditioned groups which meet more or less regularly and perform as the need arises.

The most recently published typology comes from Hardcastle and Southcott (2022) who categorize community music according to their social character and music character, presenting the following 6 types: Type 1: Socio-culturally oriented, music-focused and proficiency-based recruitment; Type 2: Socio-culturally oriented, music-focused and open recruitment; Type 3: Socio-culturally oriented, music-incidental and open recruitment; Type 4: Socio-culturally undefined, music-focused and proficiency-based recruitment; Type 5: Type 2: Socio-culturally undefined, music-focused and open recruitment; and Type 6: Socio-culturally undefined, music-incidental and open recruitment.

Defining community music remains a complex and multifaceted endeavor, reflecting its inclusive and participatory nature. Scholars such as Higgins and Veblen highlight the fluidity and evolving nature of the term, cautioning against rigid definitions that might constrain its expansive practices. The international perspectives provided by Bartleet and Higgins highlight the cultural and contextual variations that further complicate a one-size-fits-all definition. Notwithstanding these challenges, various typologies and definitions have been proposed to capture the diverse dimensions of community music. From Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman's emphasis on its heterogeneous and dynamic characteristics to Higgins' categorization of community music into three distinct forms, and Hardcastle and Southcott's recent typology based on social and musical character, these frameworks offer valuable insights into the varied manifestations of community music. Ultimately, while community music resists a singular definition, these scholarly efforts collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of its nature.

## **Youth-serving Community Music Organizations**

In the US, community music, particularly youth-serving programs, has historically been dominated by ensembles that primarily emphasize Western classical art music, such as wind bands, choirs, and string orchestras. These ensemble types, often seen in formal music education structures, have also been widely adopted in community settings, often as extensions or complements to school-based programs.

Wind bands have roots in American music education and community settings, stemming from military bands and town bands of the 19th century (Reimer, 2007). Reimer (2007) discusses how these bands have evolved over time to become a staple in both educational and community contexts, offering not only musical opportunities but also fostering social relationships and community integration. Gould (2008) further emphasizes the role of wind bands in community cohesion, noting that participation in such ensembles can enhance social bonds among participants and between the ensemble and the wider community.

Choral music holds similar historical significance in American community music. Community choirs often operate outside of the institutional boundaries of schools, churches, or professional organizations, offering opportunities for individuals of all ages and backgrounds to come together in shared musical experiences. According to Bell (2008), the accessibility and prevalence of choral programs make them a ubiquitous feature of the American musical landscape, providing a platform for community engagement and personal expression. Durrant (2005) highlights the importance of choirs in fostering a sense of belonging and cultural identity among participants.

String orchestras, while perhaps less widespread than wind bands and choirs, have experienced growth in community settings in recent years, particularly in programs aimed at

social change. Inspired by the El Sistema movement in Venezuela, programs such as Youth Orchestra Los Angeles and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids have used string orchestras to provide music education in underserved communities. Booth and Tunstall (2014) highlight how these programs use Western classical music as a tool for social development and community building, emphasizing the transformative impact of music education on youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In examining these studies, community music ensembles, whether wind bands, choirs, or string orchestras, play an important role in American society. They not only preserve and promote Western classical music traditions but also serve as vital platforms for social integration, community engagement, and personal development.

### **Summary of Community Music in the US**

Community music in the US is deeply embedded in the history of immigration, with diverse cultural practices being introduced and integrated over time. The definition of community music continues to be debated in academic circles, acknowledging that no single definition can fully capture the global and cultural nuances inherent in the practice. Despite these ongoing debates, what remains consistent across definitions is the emphasis on participation and purpose. The involvement and influence of ensemble types such as wind bands, choirs, and string orchestras in youth-centered community contexts aim to address broader societal challenges.

### **Education of Youth from Immigrant-headed Families**

Considering Leglar and Smith's perspective on community music in the US, emphasizing its roots in immigration, it is important to consult academic research focused on the education of youth from immigrant-headed households in the US. "Youth from immigrant-headed families"

describes individuals (ages 4-26) who reside in a household headed by an immigrant. This term includes those who are first, second, or third generation immigrants in the US.

### **The Numbers**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that from the fall of 2010 to the fall of 2021, there was a decline in public school enrollment for White students, dropping from 25.9 million to 22.4 million. Enrollment also fell for Black students, from 7.9 million to 7.4 million, as well as for American Indian/Alaska Native students, from 0.6 million to 0.5 million.

Conversely, during the same period, there was an increase in enrollment for Hispanic students, rising from 11.4 million to 14.1 million; Asian students, going from 2.3 million to 2.7 million; and students identifying as Two or more races, from 1.2 million to 2.3 million.

A 2023 report from the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) mapping the impact of immigration on public schools offers a detailed visual illustration of how immigration, both authorized and unauthorized, has influenced public schools in the United States. Utilizing data from 2,351 Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) as designated by the Census Bureau for the 2021 academic year, the study revealed that approximately 23% of all public school students came from households headed by immigrants, both documented and undocumented. This percentage equates to 11 million students. Furthermore, the data revealed a ratio of 55 public school students per 100 immigrant households, contrasted with 33 students per 100 households with US-born heads. According to CIS report, the average student from an immigrant household attends a school where 39% of their peers also come from immigrant households. Moreover, one-third of these students reside in areas where more than half of the student population is from immigrant households. The report identifies specific regions, such as Prince George's County, College Park City, and Langley Park, Maryland, where students from immigrant households

comprise as much as 82% of the school population. It also points out 13 of the nation's largest metropolitan regions where students from immigrant households constitute a significant portion of public-school enrollees, including 39% in the Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-Virginia-Maryland-West Virginia area. States like Maryland and Virginia (along with 11 others) have experienced the largest increases in the share of public school students from immigrant households, rising from 9% to 29% (Maryland) and 6% to 23% (Virginia) between 1990 and 2021 (Camarota, Griffith, Zeigler; 2023).

### **Scholarly Research**

Numerous scholars have conducted research on the education of immigrant youth and youth from immigrant-headed families in the US, delving into various dimensions including but not limited to academic achievement, sociocultural adjustment and adaptation, language acquisition, identity development, teacher preparedness, family engagement, and culturally relevant pedagogy. In their comprehensive meta-analysis, Duong et al. (2016) examined generational differences in academic achievement among immigrant youth in the United States. Their study synthesized findings from multiple studies to provide a nuanced understanding of how immigrant status influences educational outcomes across different ethnic groups and generations. The meta-analysis included data from numerous studies, although the exact number was not specified in the summary provided.

Duong et al. employed rigorous statistical methods to aggregate and analyze data, focusing on various indicators of academic achievement such as school grades and standardized test scores. Their findings revealed several key insights into the academic performance of immigrant students:

1. Immigrant Advantage Among Asian Youths: The study found that the immigrant advantage was most pronounced among Asian immigrants. Specifically, second-generation Asian immigrants outperformed third-or-later-generation Asian peers academically. This pattern of immigrant advantage, however, was not observed among Black, Hispanic, or White students.
2. Language Barriers for First-Generation Students: First-generation immigrant students generally performed less well on English assessments compared to second-generation youths. This discrepancy is attributed to the incomplete mastery of the English language among many first-generation students.
3. Generational Differences and Achievement Indicators: The meta-analysis highlighted that generational differences in academic performance varied significantly depending on the indicator of achievement.

Overall, Duong et al.'s (2016) meta-analysis provides a detailed examination of how generational status impacts academic performance among immigrant students, highlighting the significant role of ethnic background and language proficiency in shaping educational outcomes.

The education of youth from immigrant headed families in the US offers a detailed insight into the interplay between immigration trends and the educational landscape. Recent statistical data from the NCES and the CIS highlight significant shifts in student demographics over the past decade, notably with a rise in enrollment of Hispanic, Asian, and mixed-race students. The data also emphasize that a considerable portion of public-school student population comes from immigrant headed households. While these numbers provide a foundation, understanding the educational experience of these youths emerges through scholarly research.

Prior studies have elucidated the varied academic performances of immigrant youth drawing attention to achievement differences by nationality and generation.

### **Cultural Identity Formation**

Cultural identity formation in youth is influenced by factors that interweave individual experiences with broader social, media, and educational contexts.

### ***Peer Relationships and Media Influence***

Erikson's (1968) fifth stage of identity development, titled Identity vs. Role Confusion (adolescence, 12 to 18 years), underscores the quest for identity and one's position in society. At this stage, individuals are particularly susceptible to the effects of their environment, notably from peers and media. Successfully managing this phase yields a distinct self-awareness, whereas inadequacies or lack of guidance can result in role confusion, as described by Erikson (1968). Scholars, including Arnett (2002), emphasized the significant influence of media on shaping cultural identity, particularly its impact on youth in forming a bicultural identity.

### ***Influence of Environment and Heritage***

In their seminal work on social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner's (1986) posit that people categorize themselves into groups based on common attributes or cultural backgrounds, resulting in an in-group preference where members esteem and take pride in their affiliated group. Such categorizations start early in life, and for many young people, cultural and ethnic backgrounds play an important role in this categorization process (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This point has been further emphasized by Phinney (1990) in her work on the topic of ethnic identity formation. Phinney underscores that ethnic identity is a crucial aspect of self-concept that evolves as part of the developmental process, noting that adolescence is a particularly important period for ethnic identity formation, in line with Erikson's theory of development. Drawing on

Erikson's development theory and Cross's Nigrescence model (Cross, 1971), Phinney proposes a three-stage model for ethnic identity development: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search/moratorium, and ethnic identity achievement. Phinney outlines factors that influence ethnic identity formation, including family, peers, larger societal factors, and specific experiences that prompt exploration (e.g., experiencing discrimination).

### ***Music, Education, and Identity***

Music is a potent force, deeply embedded within cultural expressions, shaping and reflecting individual and collective identities (Frith, 1996). Many scholars have addressed the role of music in cultural identity formation (Ong, 1999; Rice, 2007, 2013). Scholars have asserted that music not only functions to express and maintain preexisting identities, but it also provides resources for contesting and negotiating identities and constructing new ones (Jung, 2014; Kyker, 2013; Stokes, 2004).

For youth, navigating the intricate terrains of identity formation, music offers a unique avenue for exploration, affirmation, and representation of their evolving sense of self (Campbell, 2008). DeNora (2000) asserts that music provides materials for the "self's" ongoing construction, particularly in the context of daily life. She emphasizes that individuals use music to craft their identities, and this is especially pertinent during adolescence, a period of intense identity search. This aligns with findings from studies emphasizing music's role in strengthening cultural and group identity (Boer et al., 2011).

Educational settings serve as vital backdrops for young individuals as they traverse complex social landscapes, significantly influencing the formation and reinforcement of their cultural identity (Banks, 1993). Schools transcend their conventional roles as academic centers and emerge as sites of daily cultural dialogues (Gay, 2002). Central to this discourse is the

rapport between educators and students, a relationship that Cummins (2001) accentuates as pivotal for cultural identity evolution. When students' cultural backgrounds are recognized and valued, positive identity formation is enhanced. Conversely, educational experiences that neglect or marginalize students' cultural backgrounds can hinder identity development or lead to internalized negative perceptions. Banks (1993) critiques that educational institutions sometimes inadvertently bolster dominant cultural ideologies, sidelining minority cultural expressions. Following these views of educational settings and identity, Abril (2013) asserts that music classrooms and curricula, by choosing which musical traditions to prioritize, inherently communicate cultural values (Abril, 2013). In her 2015 article on decolonizing music education, Hess (2019) discusses the predominance of Western classical music in many school curricula, which might inadvertently sideline other musical traditions and consequently impact the cultural identity formation of students from non-Western backgrounds. Hess discusses hierarchy and tokenism that make their way into music classrooms with the superficial engagement of other cultures. Hess suggests a non-hierarchical, inclusive, dialogical curriculum to foster student engagement with music and with issues of power related to music and also to capital. She concludes that this results in students seeing themselves represented in their classroom programs and learning to think critically and reveal interrelationships and connections between musics, amongst themselves, and between themselves and the musics.

Berry's (2017) model of acculturation stresses the challenges faced by immigrant and minority youth in forming a cultural identity. Berry proposed that when individuals from one cultural group come into continuous contact with another cultural group, they have various potential strategies or attitudes for how they might navigate this experience including assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization. Later works, such as that by Schwartz et

al. (2010), have built upon this framework to understand the complex interplay of factors influencing these strategies. Bradley (2007) indicates that when music education integrates diverse cultural repertoires, students experience heightened cultural validation. Further, Campbell and Lum (2008) highlight that authentic engagement with music from various cultures promotes cross-cultural understanding, enriching students' sense of both individual and collective identity.

### ***US Classrooms***

Research has consistently emphasized the powerful role of teachers in affirming or negating students' cultural identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). According to Gay (2002), educators who adopt a culturally responsive pedagogy may not only enhance academic achievement but also positively influence students' self-perception and cultural affiliation. However, when schools adopt multicultural educational practices, they can nurture the cultural identity of all students, promoting understanding and appreciation (Gay, 2002).

### ***Summary of Cultural Identity Formation***

Cultural identity formation in youth is a complex mix of various influencing factors, encompassing personal experiences, peer interactions, media exposure, heritage, music, and educational contexts. Erikson's and Tajfel and Turner's theories emphasize the significance of adolescence in identity formation and the role of group affiliations. Furthermore, the use of music as a cultural expression offers youths a channel to explore, affirm, and represent their evolving selves. The educational milieu, marked by practices, curricula, and teacher-student relationships, stands as a space for identity exploration. When educational settings acknowledge and embrace diverse cultural backgrounds, they can profoundly influence positive identity formation. Conversely, neglecting or marginalizing students' cultural backgrounds can have

adverse implications. Thus, the journey of cultural identity formation and youth is a dynamic process, significantly shaped by the interactions of individual experiences within broader societal and educational structures.

### **Trinbagonian Steelpan Culture in the US**

The steelpan, often referred to as the "pan" or "steeldrum," originated in Trinidad and Tobago in the early 20th century. Rooted in the socio-cultural landscape of the islands, it emerged from the marginalized Afro-Trinidadian communities as both a musical innovation and a form of resistance against colonial repression (Stuempfle, 1995). The evolution of steelpan has been documented by several scholars (Dudley, 2008; Stuempfle, 1995).

With the wave of Caribbean migration to the US in the 20th century, steelband music began making its mark, especially in urban areas like New York City. Festivals, parades, and competitions soon incorporated the unique sound of steelbands, with the Labor Day Carnival in Brooklyn becoming a significant annual event showcasing this art form (Allen, 1999). Other Caribbean carnivals have emerged throughout the US, incorporating steelbands on parade and in competitions. Washington DC/Baltimore, Miami, Atlanta, and Los Angeles all have active steelband and carnival cultures.

Caribbean music culture has deeply permeated the US musical landscape, influenced largely by migration patterns over the years. The steelpan from Trinidad and Tobago, brought by Caribbean immigrants, has enriched the US festival scene, most prominently in urban centers. These instances highlight the continuous exchange, adaptation, and growth of Latin American and Caribbean music cultures in the US, showcasing the role of music in connecting diasporas and its role in cultural preservation and exchange.

In 1995, Marc Svaline published an article in the *Music Educators Journal* entitled “Why not start a steel band?” According to Svaline, at the time the article was published, there were approximately 300 steelbands in the US, both scholastic and community-based. An organization by the name of North American Steel Band Association (NASBA) existed that offered assistance to educators interested in starting a steelband. Svaline (1995) described the steelband as one of the most “innovative and exciting” (p. 22) percussion ensembles to reach music education at the time. In this article, Svaline (1995) gave an overview of the range and function of eight different types of steelpans, offering suggestions on which instruments to start with, budget considerations, professional development, maintenance, and repertoire. While he stated that sourcing repertoire was difficult, he outlined that SATB arrangements work for the band and encouraged educators to create their own arrangements and transcriptions.

The number of collegiate and K-12 steelbands in the US has grown notably since Svaline’s article. As of 2004, steelband was the third most common non-Western European-derived performing ensemble in American universities, with over 100 universities nationwide including steelbands (Solís, 2004). In a 2008 article by Kenyon Williams, “Steel Bands in American Schools: What They Are, What They Do, and Why They’re Growing!”, Williams (2008) documents his own experience incorporating steelpan into his marching band and using xylophone mallets. Even though he admitted to having no idea what he was doing at the time, the crowd “went crazy” (p. 53), and as such, he figured that there was something there. Williams gave a brief overview of the origins of the steelband and its emergence in public schools, describing steelband as a viable form of hands-on multicultural music instruction, while outlining fundraising, advocacy, budgeting, and recruitment. In this article, Williams also listed

resources for starting a steel band, including professional development opportunities, and sources for music, instruments, and tuners.

Since the mid-2000s, the number of academic steelbands in the US has rapidly expanded as colleges and universities across the US embrace the multicultural and musical versatility of the steelband (Haskett, 2013). In 2014, Haskett published a survey study that included 440 U.S. K-12 steelband programs, with 216 steelband directors as participants. Haskett's study focused on collegiate and K-12 steel band directors' backgrounds and attitudes toward steel band curricula and pedagogy. Haskett's findings included that 86.57% (n=187) of the 216 steelband directors were members of their school's music faculty, and 29.63% (n=64) of participants indicated that they had no previous experience playing steelpan. A similar descriptive survey study was conducted by Grisé in 2016, reporting a comprehensive profile of steelband directors using a data set of 217 steelband directors and 7,788 students from 138 K-12 schools, 71 Colleges and Universities, and 10 Community Programs. Grisé's (2016) study revealed a steady climb in steelband program establishment between 1970 and 2013 with spikes in the mid-2000s and 2013. Grisé's findings showed that a majority of steelband directors in the US were White (87%) and male (75%), with an average age of 43 years old and a post-secondary background in percussion (55%). The study also revealed that 41% of K-12 steelband directors had no previous steelband experience, compared to approximately 30% in Haskett's 2014 study.

Haskett currently maintains an active list of US and Canadian school steelbands. Current counts from this list show 971 school steelbands, including K-12, community college, and 4-year college programs. This total is almost three times the total number of US steelbands (academic and community-based) reported by Svaline in 1995.

The incorporation of steelpan into American schools has led to a "whitening" of the steelband culture. Introduced in the US in the 1940s–1950s, there are now over 750 known school steelbands in the US. Many of these school ensembles have unintentionally distanced themselves from West Indian community ensembles and Afro-Trinidadian traditions (Espie, 2022). This shift has been examined through ethnographic research, highlighting differences in pedagogy, membership, and performance practices between community-based ensembles and school steelbands. Community-based ensembles often emphasize oral traditions and cultural expressions that are less prevalent in the more formalized, notation-based pedagogy of school steelbands.

In American educational settings, the adaptation of steelpan often involves a Western classical approach, utilizing notation and structured performance practices that differ from the improvisational and communal aspects of traditional Afro-Trinidadian steelpan culture. This has led to critiques of the "whitening" process, where the cultural and racial roots of the instrument are overshadowed by a more sanitized, academic presentation. Addressing these issues requires a critical approach to race in steelpan pedagogy, emphasizing cultural understanding, inclusivity, and the preservation of the instrument's rich heritage (Espie, 2022).

The historical context of steelpan includes its development during British colonial rule, where early pannists innovated with street items like brake hubs and biscuit drums in response to restrictions on traditional percussive instruments. This ingenuity continued to evolve, and the steelpan became the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago post-independence in 1962. The annual Panorama competition, established in 1963, remains a crucial cultural event, showcasing the national pride and musical prowess associated with the steelpan (Espie, 2022).

## **Literature Conclusion and Current Study**

In this literature review, I highlight the relationships between community music, immigrant youth, cultural identity formation, and Caribbean music culture within the US. Community music, with its rich history and impact, is inherently connected to the nation's diverse immigrant populations, fostering participation and addressing societal challenges. The shifting demographics in US education, as shown by the rise in enrollment of students from immigrant-headed families, brings attention to the educational experiences and performance of these youths. Cultural identity, a significant component in the adolescent phase, is shaped by many influences, including music, educational environments, and personal experiences. Caribbean music culture further exemplifies the influence of migratory patterns on the US music scene, offering avenues for both cultural affirmation and shared experiences. Collectively, these insights pave the way for understanding the experiences of youth participating in Caribbean community music in the US, illustrating the confluence of culture, education, and identity in shaping their journeys.

Building upon this literature, it becomes evident that while there is a wealth of information on the individual topics, there exists a gap in understanding how these domains converge, particularly in the context of youth experiences. While we have discerned the potential of community music and the pivotal role of cultural identity in adolescence, the intricacies of how these elements come together for youth immersed in Caribbean music in the US remain less explored. Additionally, given the changing demographics and evolving sociocultural landscape of the US, it is imperative to continually refresh our insights, ensuring that they remain relevant.

The introduction of the steelpan into American schools has led to significant transformations, often resulting in a "whitening" of steelband culture. Many school ensembles have distanced themselves from West Indian community ensembles and Afro-Trinidadian traditions, adopting Western classical approaches and structured performance practices. Addressing these issues requires a critical approach to race in steelpan pedagogy, emphasizing cultural understanding, inclusivity, and heritage preservation (Espie, 2022).

In this study, I aim to bridge this gap by exploring the experiences of participants in Caribbean community steelband music in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. This exploration builds on the foundational work of scholars like Stuempfle (1995), Dudley (2008), Svaline (1995), Williams (2008), Haskett (2013), and Grisé (2016), and seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the interplay between music, identity, and the immigrant experience, adding a fresh dimension to the existing body of literature.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this chapter, I present an overview and explanation of the research methods employed in this study. After revisiting the purpose and guiding research questions, I describe ethnographic case study as a method and explain my rationale for selecting it. I then offer a concise overview of ethnographic case study as a research method in music education. Subsequently, I detail the process and criteria for case selection, followed by an in-depth explanation of the design. I conclude with a description of my data collection and analysis procedures.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a specific Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The research was guided by the following questions:

- 1) What is the nature of teaching and learning in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?
- 2) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their cultural identities?
- 3) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their musical experiences?

### **Ethnographic Case Study**

To explore this topic thoroughly and with appropriate attention to the contextual, cultural details within the case, I selected an ethnographic case study design (Fusch and Ness, 2017). In the following sections I outline the relevant features of case study and ethnography separately before clarifying my use of ethnographic case study in this research.

## *Case Study*

Case study has long been used in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and has its roots in anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Case study researchers often collect and analyze data from a combination of primary and secondary sources in order to provide in-depth and specific information regarding the case under study. The researcher's choice of data sources is determined by the specific research purpose, questions, and the context and limitations of the case. Primary data collection sources often include observations, interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and the collection of artifacts and other visual data; while secondary sources may include archival research, literature review, meta-synthesis, and data mining. The process of employing multiple sources of data collection aid in triangulation and validity (Fielding and Fielding, 1986).

Stake (1995) defines case as “a specific, a complex, functioning thing,” more specifically “an integrated system” which “has boundary and working parts” and is purposive (in social sciences and human services) (p. 2). Stake's work on case study methodology leans heavily on constructivism and non-determinism, acknowledging that reality, experience, and meaning making are complex processes that can encompass multiple truths.

The case study method, with its emphasis on depth and contextual analysis, offered a uniquely fitting lens to explore the nuanced experiences of youth participating in community music. For Stake, the essence of case study research lies in the in-depth exploration and understanding of the case in its natural context. He stresses the significance of getting a detailed and comprehensive picture of the case, emphasizing its complexity (Stake, 1995). Given the focus on capturing the experiences of youth in Caribbean community music in the US, Stake's

understanding on the holistic understanding of cases in their natural contexts was particularly suitable for this study.

### ***Ethnography***

Ethnography is “a systematic approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions, and other settings” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 1). Ethnography is a qualitative research method rooted in anthropology and characterized by its focus on the detailed and immersive study of culture-sharing groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethnographers seek to understand the lived experiences, behaviors, and beliefs of individuals within specific cultural or social groups. They achieve this goal primarily through prolonged engagement, wherein they embed themselves in the setting or community of interest. Unlike the case study method, ethnography does not need to be conducted with specific, bounded groups.

Historically, anthropologists, sociologists, and other social science researchers have advocated for the participant-observer method within ethnography, wherein researchers immerse themselves in the lives of the people they are studying, observing and often partaking in everyday activities to gain insider perspective (Geertz, 1973; Goffman 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Geertz (1973) emphasized the importance of producing thick descriptions—detailed accounts that not only outline behaviors but also interpret their context and underlying meanings.

In this ethnographic case study, I utilized ethnographic techniques such as thick descriptions and participant-observer methods. Incorporation of ethnographic techniques within a case study design allowed for a profound understanding of the social, cultural, and pedagogical dynamics in the bounded community spaces. Thus, by my method being ethnographically informed, I gained the depth of immersion that ethnography typically offers, which enabled me

to get a deeper understanding of the societal norms, values, and cultural practices from the perspective of the members of the Caribbean community music group.

### ***Ethnographic Case Study Method***

Ethnographic case studies “employ ethnographic methods and focus on building arguments about cultural, group, or community formation or examining other sociocultural phenomena” (Schwandt & Gates, 2018, p. 344). By combining facets of ethnography and case study, ethnographic case study research offers the nuanced perspectives of case study while delving into the cultural richness of ethnography, facilitating a comprehensive, culturally immersive examination of a specific phenomenon within its naturally occurring setting. Music practices and pedagogies are deeply embedded in cultural, societal, and individual contexts (Nettl, 2005).

My choice of ethnographic case study method in the present study was grounded in the distinct strengths that both ethnography and case study methods offered in addressing my research questions. Ethnography provided deep, contextual, understanding of cultural contexts. Meanwhile, Stake’s perspective on case study elucidated it as “not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied,” offering a window through which to better understand “real people” and “real situations” (Stake, 2005, p. 438).

### ***Ethnographic Case Study in Music Education: An Overview***

In music education, ethnographic case study has served as a cornerstone method for researchers aiming to explore the nuanced cultural and sociocultural processes involved in music teaching and learning within specific contexts. As evidenced by several scholars, the ethnographic case study method highlights the lived experiences of individuals and groups in

specific music environments, both within and outside of formal P-12 structures (Abramo, 2013; Bannerman, 2016; Campbell, 1998; Green, 2002).

Campbell's (1998) seminal work using ethnographic case study method delves deeply into the musical worlds of children from various cultural backgrounds, exploring how they experience and make sense of music in their daily lives. In this context, Campbell's use of ethnographic case study research showcases the method's capacity to capture depth and nuance in children's music experiences. Similarly, Abramo (2013) used an ethnographic case study design to answer questions about teaching, learning, and student perspectives among visually impaired students at a specific school. In both cases, the achieved depth of understanding highlights the strength of ethnographic case study as a method in music education research. Green's (2002) study on learning practices in informal music settings offers another example of the strength of ethnographic case study method in music education. By adopting this method, Green was able to access and articulate the nuances of peer-led learning, improvisation, and the role of popular music in identity formation (Green, 2002).

With music being such an inherently personal experience, ethnographic case study equips music education researchers with the tools to access the emic perspective, thereby highlighting internal viewpoints, values, and meanings as ascribed by the participants themselves. This access allows the researcher to develop a more comprehensive understanding of music teaching, learning, and engagement. As Bresler (1995) highlighted, ethnographic methods allow the researcher to *be there and see* the context, thereby capturing the thickness of lived musical experiences.

Merriam (2002) asserts that ethnographic case studies are most valuable when studying complex sociocultural phenomena. Caribbean community music embodies colonial histories,

historical migrations, sociocultural interactions, and collective narratives—as discussed at length below. Considering a backdrop of such depth, the guiding research questions, and the previously emphasized significance and application of ethnographic case study in music education, the ethnographic case study method was fitting for this research. It provided a methodological framework that prioritized the voices, experiences, and insights of the community itself, ensuring that the research captured the heart and soul of the community represented while addressing how music is taught, learned, and experienced in this community.

### ***Framing this Study: Defining the Case***

Because this study was an ethnographic case study it is necessary to clearly articulate what constituted as the case. Stake (1995) suggests that case studies can provide a comprehensive view of a bounded system, capturing complexity in specific contexts. In this instance, the bounded system can be defined as the group that facilitated the Caribbean community music, acknowledging that these structures sometimes encompass both musical elements and other related components. These other components may include activity related to the cultural experience of those who identify as part of the community including, but not limited to, daycare, language proficiency classes, academic enrichment, and immigration services.

**Sampling.** Purposive sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling technique wherein researchers rely on their judgment to select specific subjects (persons, organizations, etc.) representative of the population they are studying (Bryman and Cramer, 2012). This technique is particularly useful when the researcher aims to understand specific characteristics, issues, or phenomena and when specific criteria need to be met (Palinkas et al., 2013). In this study, my purpose was to explore the experiences of participants in a specific Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. To capture the relevant

information, I established specific inclusion criteria for the selection of the group that facilitated the community music:

- *Group Origin:* The community music group must identify with Caribbean heritage or focus primarily on Caribbean musical forms.
- *Location:* The community music group must be based in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.
- *Duration of Existence:* The community music group must have been in existence for at least ten years prior to the start of data collection, ensuring some stability and history of engagement with the community.
- *Age Range of Participants:* The community music group must cater to youth between the ages of 12 and 18 years old.
- *Openness to Research:* It was important for group administrators and instructors to be supportive of the research and grant access for data collection.

Based on the criteria, I identified five community groups within the designated region.

Through this endeavor, I drew upon an array of resources and strategies to ensure comprehensive coverage and identification of relevant entities. Tapping into my existing network of personal contacts, I sought recommendations and introductions to potential groups that fit the criteria.

These contacts, many of whom have roots in these communities, often lead to connections that might have otherwise been overlooked. The internet also served as an indispensable tool as I explored websites, forums, and social media platforms where such groups might have a presence or connection. Searching for hashtags and tags, my objective was to unearth any digital footprint or reference to organizations that fit the criteria. Further aiding the search were specialized databases including arts councils, Sandy Spring Museum folklife center, and the Nuestras Raíces

database. Nuestras Raíces Inc. is a Hispanic/Latino 501(c)(3) nonprofit community-based organization that works to promote the diversity of the Latine community while reconnecting US-born children and parents to their Latin American roots and heritage (Nuestras Raices Inc, 2021). While gathering preliminary information was an important step in the sampling process and defining the case, it also played an essential part in providing relevant background information prior to my on-site data collection discussed later in this chapter.

My final selection of a group was based on their match with the criteria and the geographical representation they contributed to the study. Specifically, the chosen group represented a specific type of music-making from Trinidad and Tobago. While I explored other options, the choice of the Caribbean Cultural Academy led to the richest possible account of a culturally situated youth-serving community music organization. This decision was further influenced by my long history with the artform and this specific organization, having previously served as the Artistic Director (2014-2020) and Executive Director (2020-2022).

**Bracketing.** Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of preconceptions that maintained the research process (Tufford and Newman, 2010). Given my prior roles and familiarity with the Caribbean Cultural Academy, there was a possibility that my experiences would affect the data collection and analysis. I reject the notion that completely bracketing off preconceptions is humanly possible. Therefore, I leveraged my background knowledge and preconceptions as a potential source of insight and to facilitate access, while implementing bracketing strategies to mitigate potential biases and ensure objectivity.

To systematically implement bracketing, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process. In this journal, I documented my reflections, potential biases, and the evolution

of my thoughts as I interacted with the research site and participants. To further support this process, I recorded voice notes detailing my thoughts and feelings both shortly before arriving at the site and immediately after leaving. This practice aligns with the recommendations of Creswell (2013), who emphasizes the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research. Reflexivity involves a continuous process of self-examination and critique concerning one's influence on the research because of one's background, biases, and preconceptions (Creswell, 2013). My efforts to bracket my assumptions were also supported by engaging in regular discussions with a neutral peer debriefer who was not involved in the research setting. This peer provided an external perspective on the research process and helped bring into awareness any preconceptions and biases (Rolls and Relf, 2006).

By integrating these methods—journaling, peer debriefing, and rigorous reflexivity—I aimed to minimize the influence of personal biases and enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. These steps underscored the importance of handling researcher subjectivity carefully to preserve the authentic voices and experiences of the participants, thereby enriching the overall depth and quality of the research.

**Setting.** I conducted this ethnographic case study within a distinct Caribbean community music setting representing unique musical and cultural practices from the Caribbean that was in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. In terms of musical focus, the participant group represented steelband. Originating in Trinidad and Tobago, steelband is an ensemble primarily featuring the steelpan, a fully chromatic pitched percussion instrument historically made from 55-gallon oil drums (Stuempfle, 1995).

The participants represented a diverse range of roles and experiences within these community music settings. Initially, I aimed to classify participants based on three specific roles they held within the group. These roles comprised:

- *Learner (youth and adult participant)*: A learner is an active member of their community music group, who brought to the fore their lived experiences in learning, practicing, and performing.
- *Instructor*: An instructor is an individual entrusted with the task of tutelage, both musical and non-musical. Their methods, insights, and narratives provided invaluable perspective on pedagogy and transmission (Jaffurs, 2004).
- *Administrator*: An administrator is an individual in the facilitating organization who primarily serves in a managerial role, making organizational, structural, and financial decisions. Some administrators also wore the hat of instructor, reflecting the close knit and versatile nature of these community music settings (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018).

While I initially classified participants by these three distinct roles, over the course of the study it became clear that some individuals had converging roles. For this study, all related groups, organizations, and participants were anonymized and assigned pseudonyms.

**Case: Capital Steel Pulse.** Capital Steel Pulse is a steelband predominantly composed of middle and high schoolers (with a solitary elementary student) The ensemble rehearses thrice weekly on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evenings at the site of its parent organization Caribbean Culture Academy (CCA). Now in its 27<sup>th</sup> year of operation, Caribbean Cultural Academy is a non-profit organization encompassing a broad educational spectrum including

visual arts, performing arts, health and wellness, and academic support provided on weekday afternoons and Saturdays.

Established in 1996 by Trinidad and Tobago native Cecilia Carter with seed funding from the Kaiser Permanente Building Hope Foundation, Caribbean Cultural Academy began as a purely musical venture in Mrs. Carter's basement in a suburban Maryland neighborhood. After outgrowing the basement, CCA moved to the lower level of a church near Washington, DC. Here, it operated as a Saturday Academy, broadening its offerings to encompass academic enrichment, facilitated by volunteers and a handful of part-time staff. Later, CCA secured its "own" space in what used to be the community center of a low-income apartment complex a stone's throw from its earlier church venue and just a few blocks away from Northeast Washington, DC.

Beyond registering for the Caribbean Cultural Academy, members of Capital Steel Pulse must uphold a specific code of conduct and meet the high performance standards of the ensemble, as shown by the numerous awards on display at the site. CSP performs at community events, various local Caribbean events, and occasionally Latin American events as well. These include festivals, fundraisers, and events planned under the auspices of the Trinidad and Tobago embassy, as well as other CCA communal gatherings. CSP also regularly competes at an annual international steelpan festival.

CSP is led by a trio of Caribbean steelpan experts hailing from Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and St. Thomas. Over the course of its history, CSP has been under the directorship of many known steelpan educators and experts from the Caribbean and the US, including a multi-time Panorama champion arranger Leon "Smooth" Edwards.

Interestingly, there is a historic parallel in directorship between Capital Steel Pulse (CSP) and another local community music entity, Pan Champs. Over the years, several CSP directors, including the current music director, have served in directorship roles at both steelbands simultaneously. Also, CSP serves as a vital feeder for Pan Champs as CSP students tend to “graduate” into Pan Champs after graduating from CSP. Because of the overlap and unofficial partnership between these two organizations, Pan Champs was included in this study as part of the CSP setting.

Established in 1985, Pan Champs is a community steelband. Its members have ties to the Caribbean, encompassing primarily of CSP alumni, their guardians, founding band members—many of whom are Howard University alumni—and other steelpan players and supporters in the community. This intergenerational ensemble spans an age range of six decades. The location for my investigation at Pan Champs was at its panyard, the lower level of a Washington, DC church. Notably, before the pandemic-induced financial constraints, Pan Champs rented its own rehearsal space in another Maryland neighborhood, situated next to a tire shop and train tracks, and just an eight-minute drive from both the current and former CSP rehearsal spaces.

**Participants.** Primary participants for this case included 14-year-old learner Debbie; 26-year-old instructor Nathan Samuel; 35-year-old instructor and music director Elena Marshall, who also serves as a member of Pan Champs; 76-year-old Cecilia Carter, founder and CEO of the Caribbean Cultural Academy; and her husband, 73-year-old Michael Carter, who serves in both administrative and instructor roles.

**Table 3.1***Participant Profiles for the Study*

| <b>Name*</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Role</b>                  | <b>Years at CCA in current role</b> |
|--------------|------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Cecilia      | 76         | Administrator                | 28                                  |
| Michael      | 73         | Administrator/<br>Instructor | 28                                  |
| Elena        | 35         | Instructor                   | 2                                   |
| Nathan       | 26         | Instructor                   | 5                                   |
| Debbie       | 14         | Learner                      | 10                                  |

*\*Participant names have been altered for anonymity*

***Data Collection***

All research methods and designs were reviewed and approved by the University of Maryland's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to initiating data collection for this study. Following IRB approval, I reached out to liaisons at the Caribbean Cultural Academy and Pan Champs to inform them of IRB approval as well as to review the research parameters and ethical considerations in place. All adult participants were presented with consent forms outlining the objective of the study, their rights, and ethical protocols in place. For participants under the age of 18, parental consent and participant assent were obtained. Participants voluntarily engaged in the study and were at liberty to withdraw at any point.

For this study, I spent a total of 12 weeks in the field. On site, I incorporated multiple data sources to comprehensively capture the complexity and entirety of the case, undertaking a multi-phase approach that began with observational fieldwork, transitioning through the roles of observer and participant-observer. I also included a video recording of an entire rehearsal. Subsequently, I engaged participants in in-depth interviews. Throughout the data collection

process, I collected artifacts and regularly performed triangulation and member checking to ensure the validity and reliability of the data.

While gathering preliminary information was an important step in the sampling process and defining the case, it also played an essential part in providing relevant background information prior to my on-site data collection. Merriam (2002) emphasizes the significance of understanding the background and context of a study, noting that such knowledge can illuminate certain behaviors, decisions, and events that might otherwise remain unclear or ambiguous. Further, Creswell (2013) asserts that a researcher's prior understanding of the setting can enhance credibility and depth. Thus, the initial groundwork was crucial and ensured that the subsequent data collected was contextually grounded. For the case of Caribbean Steel Pulse, my preliminary information gathering was influenced significantly by my prior knowledge and background with the organization. I began by jotting down my own experiences and what I already knew about the organization. Additionally, I searched my own records for past programs and brochures, filling in the gaps later with data gathered from interviews and artifacts collected.

**Exploratory and Focused Observations.** Observations are especially important in ethnographic studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). In week one of data collection, I engaged in a peripheral membership role where I interacted closely with members without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership (Adler & Adler, 2003). This exploratory observation provided a broad understanding of the context, helping me determine the areas that warranted further examination (Creswell, 2013). During this exploratory, I positioned myself in an area in the CSP rehearsal space that was not directly obstructive to the activities. The instructors helped me determine where that place was—on a chair in front of the storage closet, just at the entrance of the room (see Fig. 4.2).

Following the recommendations of Merriam & Tisdell (2017), I observed the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors, and my own behavior. I took jottings during these observations, which I later expanded into more detailed field notes (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). All on-site jottings were done by hand then later typed into more detailed field notes. Exploratory observations were important for getting acquainted with the setting, participants, and the general dynamics of the environment, laying the groundwork for the subsequent focused observations.

Week two of data collection included a focused observation of a CSP rehearsal. At this focused observation, I observed specific behaviors, actions, and practices, aiming to deeply understand the natural settings and behaviors of the participants in their environment. I also included a video recording of the entire rehearsal in this focused observation, during which I captured footage from 15 minutes before to 15 minutes after the session. I limited my recording to a single rehearsal *after* having already visited for the exploratory observation. Being present in the space as an observer prior to being invited as a participating observer was pivotal in my research for

- **familiarization and textual understanding:** initially observing allowed me to familiarize myself with the environment before being an active part of it, which was important to build a solid foundation for understanding the context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).
- **minimizing disruption and reducing the “observer’s paradox”:** the phenomenon where observers alter participant behavior due to their being observed (Briggs, 1986).

- **building trust:** Merriam (2009) asserts that trust is fundamental to gaining deeper access and understanding, and for participants to feel comfortable sharing authentic experiences (Merriam, 2009).
- **objectivity and reflexivity:** starting as an observer provided me an opportunity to maintain a level objectivity early on. Maxwell (2012) asserts that reflexivity can be better employed once researchers have had the chance to first observe (Maxwell, 2012).
- **strategic engagement:** by observing first, I was able to identify key participants, moments, and practices to engage more deeply with, making my participatory activities more strategic and informed (Creswell, 2013).

**Transition to Participant Observation.** By week three, what was intended as another focused observation organically transitioned to participant observation as I was invited by one of the ensemble's directors to keep time on the cowbell, immersing me deeper into the context. Schensul and LeCompte (2013) describe participant as observer as a data collection technique that requires the researcher to be present at, involved in, and recording the routine daily activities with people in the field setting while maintaining an active participant role. My transition to this role facilitated a richer understanding of the interactions and dynamics of the setting. My role as participant observer also included me playing rhythms to assist players as needed, and sometimes repeatedly hitting the cowbell to call the players to attention. I documented my observations with jottings on a notepad I had positioned on the windowsill next to a trophy. I later expanded my jottings into comprehensive field notes, including transcriptions of some conversations. This dual role of being a participant and observer provided insights that might have been overlooked from a purely observational approach.

**In-depth Interviews.** Subsequently, in weeks four and five, I conducted in-depth interviews with participants from Caribbean Steel Pulse and the parent organization Caribbean Cultural Academy. These participants included Debbie, a 14-year-old learner; Nathan Samuel, a 26-year-old instructor; Elena Marshall, a 35-year-old music director and instructor who also serves as a member of Pan Champs; Cecilia Carter, the 76-year-old founder and CEO of the Caribbean Cultural Academy; and her husband, Michael Carter, 73, who serves in both administrative and instructor roles. Drawing on methodologies from qualitative researchers such as Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2002), I categorized participants based on their principal roles within the group: learner, instructor, and administrator. While the interviews, in-person and semi-structured, typically spanned 45 to 60 minutes, the venue varied according to mutual convenience. The Carters' joint interview, Nathan's interview, and Debbie's interview, all took place at their respective homes, while Elena's interview took place in my sunroom as she traveled between her home and work.

To ensure accuracy of record, I employed dual recording methods: video recording for visual nuances and a separate audio device for clarity (Maxwell, 2012). Recognizing the value of written transcripts in qualitative research, I utilized *Temi* transcription software. At the onset of each interview, I employed icebreaker questions, a method recognized in educational research for its efficacy in fostering rapport and setting a comfortable tone for the forthcoming dialogue (Seidman, 2019). As advised by Maxwell (2012), while I had an interview protocol form for guidance, I maintained flexibility, introducing probing questions when necessary.

The order in which the interviews were held was important, starting with learner before transitioning to instructors and concluding with administrators. I chose this order based on the rationale that insights from learners would provide a foundational context that could be further

expanded upon in subsequent interactions with instructors and administrators. I meticulously designed the learner interview to unearth their historical association with the group, as well as their perceptions on their music engagement and cultural identity. Instructor interviews primarily zeroed in on the pedagogical intricacies of steelband and its dissemination within the community. Administrator interactions, on the other hand, pivoted towards gleaning a macroscopic understanding of the group's ethos, its significance, and strategies deployed for member recruitment and retention.

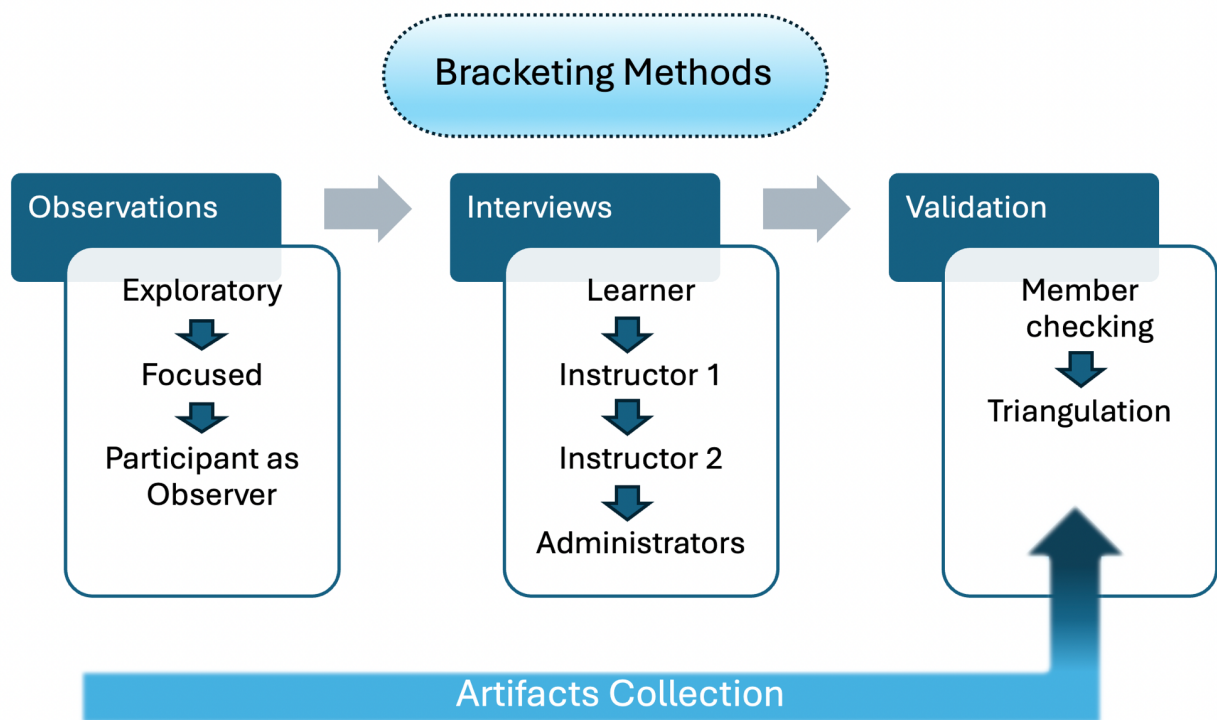
After the interviews, I verified the accuracy of these transcriptions against the original recordings. Notably, because *Temí* is an American-based AI transcription software package and three of the five participants were of Caribbean origin, I corrected numerous errors in the transcription where Temi was unable to accurately transcribe participants' respective Caribbean accents. Additionally, Michael Carter's rapid speech occasionally led to transcription mistakes, which I also corrected. My familiarity with Caribbean accents and Michael's specific manner of speaking enabled me to efficiently make these corrections. Because Debbie's speech was characterized by an American accent specific to Southern Maryland, which occasionally incorporated Caribbean steelband and teenager lingo, the transcription of her interviews was the most accurate.

**Artifacts Collection.** Throughout the observational data process, I accumulated and analyzed various artifacts. Consistent with Merriam's (2002) assertion on the value of documents in qualitative research, this component spanned the entirety of the data collection period, amassing an assortment of materials. Artifacts included photographs, public videos, brochures, newspaper clippings, brochures, programs of events held over the years, accessible financial records, and photographs of wall hangings and room setups. Such artifacts not only broadened

the data pool, but also shed light on the public image and internal dynamics of Caribbean Steel Pulse and their parent organization Caribbean Cultural Academy. Moreover, I attended two performances as an observer, while also collecting additional artifacts like concert programs and flyers. All artifacts were digitally archived. Figure 3.1 illustrates the data collection process employed, as well as the implementation of bracketing strategies prior to and throughout the data collection process.

**Figure 3.1**

*Data Collection Design*



Note. The figure shows three stages of data collection, with bracketing methods and the collection of artifacts throughout the process. Copyright attribution is not required. Own work.

***Analysis***

As Creswell (2014) emphasizes, qualitative data analysis is characterized by the iterative process of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. For this study, I printed and organized jottings and field notes chronologically into a binder. Using *Quirkos*, a software package designed for qualitative text data analysis, I reviewed the data and assigned thematic codes. I also printed and organized interview fragments by theme and interviewee, placing them into the binder.

## ***Trustworthiness***

Stake (1995) notes the importance of triangulation in validating case study findings. Specific approaches include data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. In discussing strategies to maximize reliability and validity in qualitative research, Merriam (2002) also recommends triangulation as an important strategy. Merriam further recommends use of thick description of cases, sites, and participants, as well as the importance of multi-site designs (2002). Finally, Merriam states that researchers clearly articulate their positionality regarding the study.

In establishing trustworthiness within the present study, I relied primarily on data source triangulation, gathering information from participants occupying various roles within the community and from different forms of data such as interviews, observations, and artifact reviews. Engaging with multiple sources provided a more comprehensive understanding and enabled cross validation of findings. Furthermore, I sought to enrich the trustworthiness of my interpretations by employing bracketing methods and investigator triangulation, discussing my emerging findings with peer researchers to challenge and refine my interpretations. This multifaceted approach to analysis and interpretation provided a check against biases, enhanced the depth of my understanding, and fostered a more nuanced interpretation of the data. In addition to triangulation, I utilized thick description to give readers a vivid picture of the contexts, settings, and individuals involved. By openly addressing my positionality and acknowledging potential biases, I emphasize the reflexive essence of the research, ensuring clarity, authenticity, and transparency (Maxwell, 2005).

To further enhance the study's trustworthiness, I employed member checking as a key technique. Member checking involves presenting the data, interpretations, and conclusions back

to the study participants to verify accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Guba and Lincoln, 2003). This process validated the findings and empowered participants by including their voices in the interpretation of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) in a study. Throughout the data analysis process, participants were asked to review their interview transcripts and my preliminary analysis to ensure that their perspectives were accurately captured and represented. When participants indicated that my representation of their feelings or experiences was inaccurate, I engaged them further for clarification and made the necessary changes. This iterative process of feedback and revision helped to correct any misunderstandings or inaccuracies and reinforced the validity of the research outcomes.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

In this chapter, I begin with a presentation of individual stories constructed through interviews with students, instructors, and administrative personnel, as well as field notes and artifacts. Next, I present four main themes that I identified as patterns across multiple participants' experiences throughout the analysis. I conclude the chapter with a succinct summary of findings by research question.

### **Caribbean Cultural Academy's Story**

#### ***Community Heroes***

It was 1996, the year of the 26<sup>th</sup> quadrennial Summer Olympics, hosted in Atlanta, Georgia. As per tradition, the Olympic torch relay was in full swing, and out of the 10,000 torchbearers, 5,500 were recognized as community heroes. On June 20th, along Maryland Highway 214 in southern Maryland, a community hero carried the torch. He was greeted by a performance from a group of 15 youth. They played steelband renditions of the Star-Spangled Banner and excerpts from Joe Garland's "In the Mood." These young performers, led by renowned Trinidadian steelband arranger Leon "Smooth" Edwards, were members of the newly established Capital Steel Pulse (CSP), a steelband formed under the larger organization Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA). Unbeknownst to the audience, the instruments had only arrived in the US less than a month earlier, on May 30th, and the performers had less than two weeks to learn the music. Of the members, three students had prior steelpan experience, having attended a summer camp in Trinidad and Tobago and performed with another youth steelband in the area. It was CSP's first public performance, and the national anthem was the only complete tune in their repertoire. After the performance, members of the steelband could be seen posing for a picture with the torchbearer (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1**

*Capital Steel Pulse Students with Olympic Torch Runner on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1996.*



Note: Faces have been blurred for anonymity.

Throughout its 28-year history, Capital Steel Pulse (CSP) has performed and engaged with presidents, first ladies, senators, and international icons including activist and politician Winnie Mandela. The band has also performed internationally as far as Trinidad and Tobago and Senegal. Figure 4.1 shows a timeline of major events throughout CSP's and Caribbean Cultural Academy's history.

**Figure 4.2**

*Timeline of Caribbean Cultural Academy and Capital Steel Pulse major events 1996-2024*

| Year | Major Activity                                                                                                     |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1996 | Inception; Olympic torch runner performance of Star-Spangled Banner                                                |
| 1997 | Move to new location                                                                                               |
| 1998 | NFL game performance of Star-Spangled Banner                                                                       |
| 1999 | Performance for Winnie Mandela                                                                                     |
| 2000 | Performances in Massachusetts and New York                                                                         |
| 2001 | Performance in Ohio; Started ABRSM Music Theory annual exam                                                        |
| 2002 | Senegal tour                                                                                                       |
| 2003 | Started University of West Indies practical pan exams                                                              |
| 2004 | Attended Northern Illinois University workshop in Illinois                                                         |
| 2005 | Performance for Oprah Winfrey                                                                                      |
| 2006 | PANfest debut performance and victory; Performance in Florida                                                      |
| 2007 | PANfest victory; Performance in Florida; Performance for first Lady Laura Bush                                     |
| 2008 | Performance for First Lady Michelle Obama                                                                          |
| 2009 | Mainstage performance at large-scale folk festival; Performance on the eve of President Obama's inauguration       |
| 2010 | Performances: Toronto, Canada; University of Delaware steelpan festival                                            |
| 2011 | Performances: Kennedy Center; Collaboration with Georgetown Chorale; Concert featuring original works for steelpan |
| 2012 | Collaborative performance with Georgetown Chorale                                                                  |
| 2013 | World premiere collaboration with well-known Caribbean jazz trumpeter                                              |
| 2014 | Moved to apartment complex community center; New Artistic Director appointed; Hosted youth steelband from Trinidad |
| 2015 | Trinidad & Tobago tour                                                                                             |
| 2016 | Hosted youth steelband from Trinidad                                                                               |
| 2017 | Trinidad & Tobago tour; Hosted Youth Steelband Jamboree                                                            |
| 2018 | PANfest victory; Performance at National Museum of African American History and Culture                            |
| 2019 | Hosted youth steelband from Trinidad                                                                               |
| 2020 |                                                                                                                    |
| 2021 |                                                                                                                    |
| 2022 | New music director                                                                                                 |
| 2023 | Trinidad & Tobago tour                                                                                             |

I interviewed Caribbean Cultural Academy's founder Cecilia Carter (76) and her husband Michael (Mike) Carter (76) on a cold winter afternoon at their home. Their home, located in a suburban upper-class majority African American unincorporated area in Prince George's County, Maryland, is about a thirty-minute drive from the current CCA program site. The interview took

place in their spacious living room—a space familiar to me from many holidays and long work evenings spent grant writing and planning during my tenure at the organization. The living room was adorned with tropical plants and art of Afro-diasporic origin. As we talked, I also spotted some CCA student artwork on the wall. Cecilia was wrapped in a blanket and drinking coconut water, recovering from the aftereffects of a COVID-19 booster shot received the day before. Her husband, Mike, sat beside her. I was offered a bowl of homemade cowheel soup, which I enjoyed at the Carters' kitchen table at the conclusion of the interview.

**Cecilia.** Born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago, Cecilia currently self-identifies as a Trinidadian of African heritage. In 1969, Cecilia moved from Trinidad to the Bronx, New York where she worked at Chase Manhattan Bank and pursued business administration at Pace College, funded by her employer. After marrying Mike in 1978, the couple moved to the Washington, DC metropolitan area where Cecilia continued to work in business administration. One summer, they sent their daughter Kalifia, along with 3 other youth from the neighborhood, to Trinidad to spend time with her maternal grandmother and participate in a steelpan summer program. Kalifia returned to the US with a new set of double second steelpans, gifted to her by her grandmother, and a newfound love for the instrument. She went on to study music business in college, and even earned a master's degree in steelpan performance at Northern Illinois University. Earning a prestigious Fulbright grant following her graduation and years of work in the steelpan community in the Washington, DC and Chicago metropolitan areas, scholar Kalifia also pursued research in steelpan pedagogy. Kalifia has served as CSP's music director and an instructor on several occasions over the years. Today, she serves as the instructor of CCA's adult steelpan classes. After seeing her own daughter “come alive” when playing the steelpan, Cecilia transitioned from business administration to non-profit management as she felt a burning desire

to help young children. Cecilia reminisced about the motivation behind this transition in the interview:

In 1996, I founded the Caribbean Cultural Academy. After working several positions, I realized what my true calling was... I studied business admin, never really liked it. And, until I, by happenstance, I got into the steelpan movement, education and teaching children—which I was never exposed to in Trinidad 'cause it was something that in my day that you could not do [and] was not accepted—I found what my true calling was. I just wanted to help kids. I don't work the frontline, but based on my experience, I knew what kids needed and the steelpan provided that for the kids. And that was, that's my motivation. Kept me going all those years. I was blessed to have a lot of people around me who believed in the mission because I could not do it by myself. (Cecilia Carter, interview, December 30, 2023)

**Mike.** Cecilia's husband, Mike, has been actively involved in CCA since its inception in 1996. Born and raised in New York City with parents from South Carolina, Mike pursued his education in the city, obtaining a bachelor's degree from City College and a master's from New York University, both in political science and history. While he identifies as an African American, Mike's emphasizes that his identity is influenced by the diverse cultural exposure he experienced growing up in New York City.

...African American, of course that's the racial heritage. But what that also means for me is that, especially growing up in New York, you're exposed to all kinds of cultures. Not just African American, but Latin American, African, Asian, and so forth. So, [I've] always been around different types of cultures in terms language and speech, and cuisine, and of course, how people work. I just knew all kinds of friends. But especially getting

into the Caribbean culture, and especially turning to Jamaica, I realized the whole African aspect of my culture expands beyond African American, but also goes to like the diaspora in general, right? And so, I've always identified more so as from a global standpoint of all things African, which means all things Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino as well, you know, and that also expands to the Latin American culture in general... So, I more identify myself as very interested and very proud of all aspects of the African diaspora, not just African American.

Alongside Mike's career in information technology, he was actively involved in tutoring and mentorship programs in New York, focusing on academics rather than arts. When CCA was established, Mike's involvement was more on the academic side. Mike said:

[CCA] initially started an arts and education program, the key thing for me was the education part 'cause you wanted to make sure that the kids used arts to kind of foster their education. So, I would help out on the academic side. And of course, being around pan all those years I have fallen in love with pan. So, I'm also very much interested in the evolution of that art form... I'm really interested in how it's evolving here in the states: in the DMV and throughout America. (Michael Carter, interview, December 30, 2023)

**CCA in the neighborhood.** In the beginning, CCA started as a community program where students learned to play steelpan in the Carters' basement. Students would transition from house to house in the neighborhood to learn steelpan, music theory, dance, business and finance, history, art, and math, taught by various members of the community. A year later, as the program grew, it expanded to the basement of a Methodist church much closer to the northeast border of Washington, DC. This move benefited CCA as it gave them a large central location to carry out all of their classes. Mike described that the church also benefited from the move.

They [the church administration members] were looking for a more robust after school and Saturday program. They wanted to—they were an outreach church—to bring more kids from the community in. So, we looked, and they did have a really talented music director... so I think we could bring this to her as part of the music program. And so, they fell in love with it, and we wound up being there for a long time. (Michael Carter, interview, December 30, 2023)

After 16 years at the church, CCA relocated to a former community center in a low-income apartment building, situated just 7 minutes away from the church and closer to the Washington, DC border. This move allowed the organization to expand its program offerings to include an after-school component. Additionally, this move provided the organization with its own dedicated space, offering greater flexibility and eliminating the need to coordinate around the limitations and schedule of the church. CCA still operates from this location today, functioning as both a Saturday academy and an after-school academy, offering programs for youth, adults, and families. CCA's afterschool academy is geared towards youth ages 6-14 and includes homework assistance, math and language arts tutoring, computer science, music, art, chess, and robotics. Adult English classes for non-native English-speakers also take place on some evenings, taught by Nathaniel Samuel, the father of one of the music instructors. The Saturday academy has a broader reach to include high school students as well. During the Saturday academy, I observed students receiving homework assistance, SAT tutoring, music theory, steelband, culinary arts, health and wellness classes, sewing, dance, and visual art. The vast majority of CCA tutors and instructors are volunteers. Cecilia stated, "We can't pay everybody. And we struggling because we wanna pay people what they're worth. That's my mission." A review of artifacts gathered show that some of CCA's volunteers have been with the organization

for over 10 years, some even for as long as the organization has been in existence. End of year programs with staff rosters, sponsors' logos, and collaborations, also reveal a relationship with student-run organizations at the nearby colleges Howard University and the University of Maryland. Such groups include Caribbean Student Associations and sororities, as well as academic departments including Mechanical Engineering, English, and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. There also appears to be a relationship with regional Caribbean diasporic organizations including embassies and other country-specific groups. Throughout CCA's 28-year history, it has graduated 126 students, and had a maximum enrollment of 85 (2001). Currently, the organization has 40 students enrolled.

### ***The Facility***

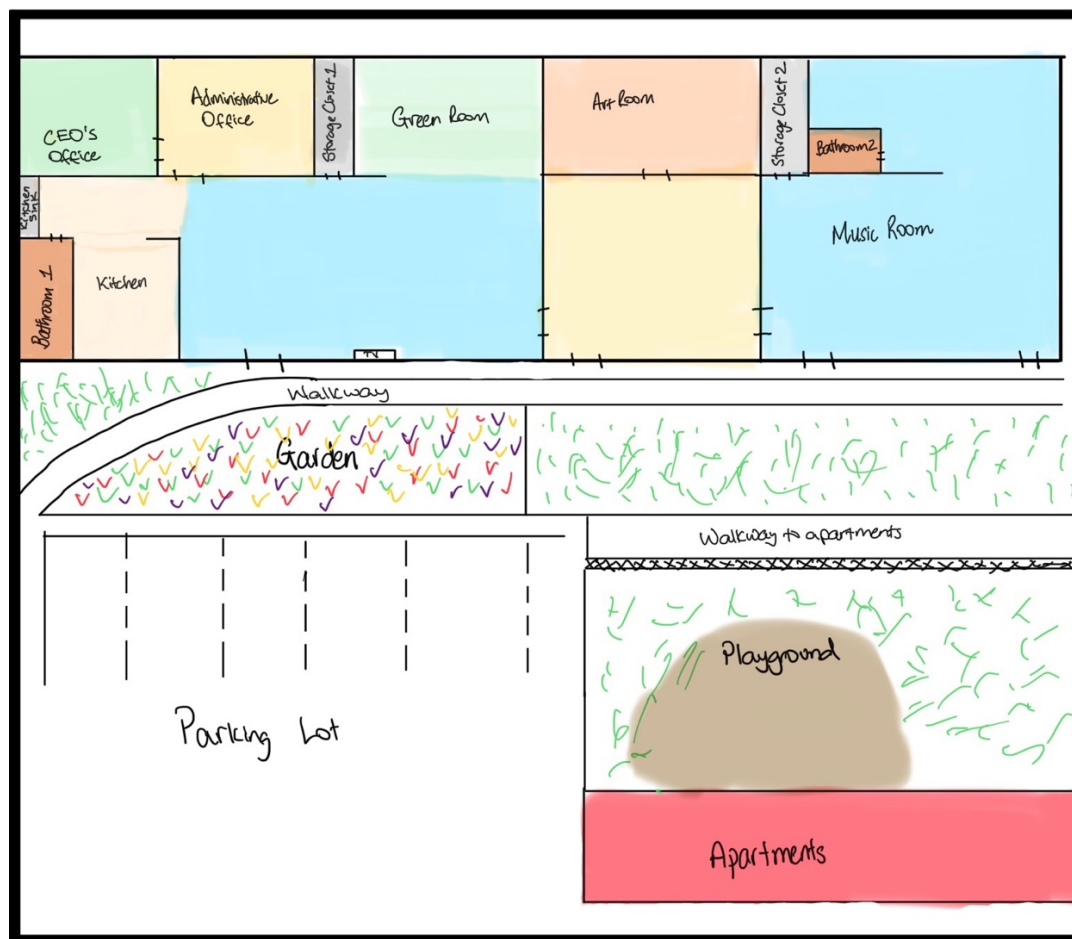
CCA is located in a large low-income apartment complex, just a quarter mile from the Northeast DC border. At one of the intersections within the complex, a small white sign with blue letters spelling out CCA's name and an arrow points to a parking lot. From this parking lot, CCA's entrance is marked by a boldly painted red door. To the left of this door, there is a white door leading to the control room of the fire sprinkler system. To the right of CCA's main entry, there are three other doors along the walkway, painted orange and blue. Adjacent to the right of the building, there is a playground, and directly in front of the red door lies a small vegetable garden. See Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.3**  
*Sign at Caribbean Cultural Academy's Location*



The facility is a multifunctional space that includes a versatile area known as the "green room," named for its vibrant green walls. The layout also encompasses an administrative office area, two wheelchair accessible bathrooms, an art room, a music room, two storage closets, and a designated craft area (refer to Figure 4.3). CCA's facility is located below street level, with the back wall running parallel to a major four-lane road leading into Washington, DC. Within the space, there are two sump pumps: one in the green room and the other in the office area. Additionally, there is a floor drain in the center of the music room. Apartments are situated both above and opposite the CCA facility.

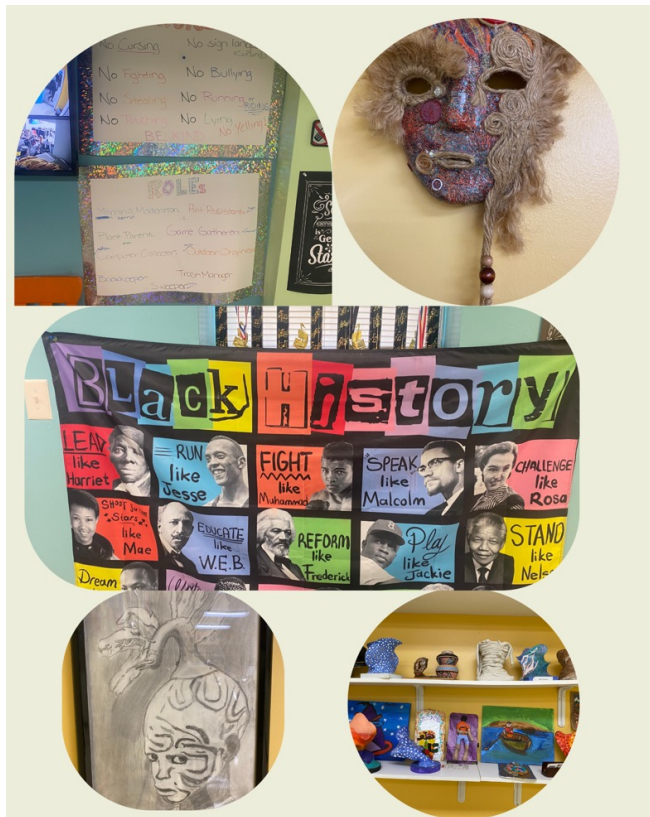
**Figure 4.4**  
*Layout of CCA's Facility*



Throughout the facility, walls and windowsills are decorated with an array of awards and trophies accrued by the organization and its leaders, including those from the Virginia Beach International PANfest, where CSP and other CCA steelbands consistently perform well. The walls are further adorned with Latin American, Caribbean, and African art and depictions of heroes from these regions (see Fig. 4.4). All spaces, for the exception of the music room and CEO's office, double as tutoring rooms during the afterschool and Saturday academies. In addition to music and art, there was evidence of other activity including dance, yoga, cooking, sewing, chess, and physical education.

**Fig. 4.5**

*Collage of wall hangings at CCA facility*



*Top left: posters of rules and roles; top right: student mask craft; middle: poster of some heroes in Black history; bottom left: framed student work of replicating a small image to a larger scale (grid lines visible on artwork but not visible in image); bottom right: students' clay work on display in the art room.*

The art room, painted in bright orange, is filled with an assortment of students' art and crafts. In contrast, the music room, crammed with steelpans and offering little space to maneuver, is minimally decorated, featuring only a few trophies on the windowsills and signs detailing COVID-19 protocols. The larger section of the music room appears rehearsal-ready, with instruments set up on stands alongside music stands, and some pan sticks placed in the instruments. The smaller section of the music room houses an overflow of instrument cases,

wooden boxes (used for shorter students to stand on), boxes of music books, piles of sheet music, unmatched pansticks, small percussion instruments, additional steelpans, and some trash. The second bathroom is located in this smaller section.

CCA's facility is neither owned nor leased by the organization; instead, they operate under an agreement with the owner of the complex. This agreement, established 11 years ago, allows CCA to use the space while offering programming to residents at subsidized rates—20% of the cost that non-residents pay. Additionally, families enrolling multiple children who are siblings receive a further discount, applicable to both residents and non-residents. In addition to youth programming, CCA hosts open houses and performs at resident appreciation events for the apartment community. Programs have also been piloted at other sites owned by the same company, and CSP performs at community-focused events within these locations.

**Caribbean Steel Pulse Rehearsals.** On a chilly Saturday afternoon in early December, I navigated through the familiar streets of a Maryland neighborhood toward the rehearsal site of Caribbean Steel Pulse (CSP). The crisp winter air brought a scattering of leaves to the ground, while a mix of Christmas and Halloween decorations decorated the houses on either side of the street. The community was a blend of tradition and change, with people working in their yards, houses undergoing renovation, and homes listed for sale. As I turned into the parking lot of the community center where Caribbean Steel Pulse (CSP) practiced, my attention was immediately drawn to the shouts and laughter of six boys playing on the nearby playground. This moment brought back memories of past summers when warm days and insufficient air conditioning forced rehearsals outdoors. Yet, it wasn't always the heat that led to this arrangement. In the lead-up to significant performances, the band would often practice outside because of space and residents would open their windows to listen, sometimes calling out to their children who

participated in the rehearsals. Additionally, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, rehearsing outside was safer. Occasionally, the Caribbean Cultural Academy hosts open houses with CSP setting up in the parking lot to perform while the residents either barbecued outside or browsed student work indoors.

Before I could ring the doorbell, I was greeted by CSP music director, Elena Marshall, who had just pulled into the parking lot. The receptionist let us in. A Christmas tree stood in the corner of the main room, adorned with handmade ornaments. In the music room nearby, the unmistakable sound of beginning steelpan students could be heard. Elena winced occasionally at the sounds of some loud notes. As the sounds of steelpan diminished, young children started to trickle out of the room. Behind them, was Nathan Samuel, a steelpan instructor at CCA. As the young students exited the music room, CSP members ranging from ages 11 to 17 began filing in. Each one paused momentarily upon seeing me, recognizing me from my previous time with the organization, then greeted me warmly with a hug before settling into the routine of preparing for practice.

In the rehearsal room, they discussed their recent focus on "Christmas Canon," as well as plans for solos, duets, and poems for the upcoming holiday concert. One student who had not yet chosen a solo was encouraged to participate due to his known proficiency in other instruments. Despite some confusion about the ensemble's repertoire, the students swiftly organized themselves, set up music stands, and began to rehearse.

With Elena guiding the ensemble by keeping time on a jam block and Nathan offering musical cues from behind a guitar steelpan, the group worked through their parts. The room echoed with the familiar melodies of Pachelbel's Canon in D, split into various sections. Elena kept the beat, moving around the room to offer guidance and emphasizing rhythms by pointing

directly at sheet music. I observed some students playing confidently from memory, while others followed along on their stands. Debbie, a 14-year-old member, played bass while reading the sheet music for “Christmas Canon”. When the ensemble switched tunes to a popular soca piece, Debbie hustled over to a double second steelpan where she confidently and rhythmically strummed the accompaniment.

The rehearsal featured moments of focus and chatter, as instructors patiently addressed students’ individual and group challenges with rhythm and dynamics. Elena and Nathan used reminders like "Don't rush" and counted aloud to ensure a steady tempo. They both relied heavily on jam blocks and pansticks tapped on the rims of pans to capture the students’ attention, bringing them together with cues like "After 1...1, 2, 3, 4, 1." The students, many still wearing their winter jackets, also leaned on each other for guidance, occasionally looking at each other while playing and gesturing or shadowing<sup>22</sup> parts.

Rehearsal wrapped up 30 minutes early for carpooling to a concert in Washington, DC that featured Trinidad steelband BP Renegades. Nathan stayed behind to work one-on-one with a double tenor student. As the students prepared to leave, they returned sporadically to the music room, where they played a few notes, checked their instruments, and showed their peers some of their solo work. Later that evening at the concert, the students could be seen in front of the stage, singing along and dancing to the music with joy. Although the 4,200-seat venue was only half-full, it was buzzing with energy as the audience, including the students, celebrated the blend of calypso, R&B, and pop music being played. The atmosphere was lively, and even as the evening drew to a close, the audience lingered, forcing event staff to get stern.

### ***Pan Champs***

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<sup>22</sup> The act of doing all the movements but not sounding the notes.

It was a cold 42 degrees on a rainy Friday night in Washington, DC when I visited the Pan Champs panyard. It was late, 10:00 PM, and the dark, unpaved parking lot was packed, hinting at the vibrant activity inside despite the unassuming exterior of a church building. Following signs that directed me through the back, I entered through a glass door into a corridor echoing with the sounds of steelpan. The melody that filled the air was "DNA" by Mical Teja, a tune freshly crowned as the Road March winner at the 2024 Trinidad Carnival. This jubilant anthem guided me to a large, open room where the scene unfolded into a dynamic rehearsal space. On the back wall of the room hung a large banner, featuring the Trinidad and Tobago flag on the left and the U.S. flag on the right. At the center, joining the two flags, was an image of a steelpan. There were also brightly colored banners hanging on the walls depicting the band's annual themes from long-past DC Carnivals. The air was thick with the scent of frying oil, fish, and pastries drifting from a kitchen to the right, where supporters of the band cooked and shared food amidst laughter and camaraderie. I could not tell if the food was for sale or offered freely, but I was delighted to accept a piece of cake from one of the community members.

Inside the main room, the atmosphere was a blend of intense focus and familial warmth. Younger members could be heard referring to older members as "Aunty" and "Uncle", as opposed to "Ms." and "Mr." The arranger, drumstick in hand, led the ensemble with directness, teaching by rote and emphasizing each note and rhythm with strikes on the pan skirts. This technique, though jarring to me as the owner of a pan, was a familiar tool within the Caribbean steelband community, mirroring the teaching and learning practices typical in Trinidadian panyards.

The pannists, a diverse group spanning generations from their early 20s to early/mid 80s, were engaged in learning their parts. I observed 17 playing participants present at the rehearsal.

The only person sitting, apart from the drummer, was elder Mr. Bedford who sat on a chair near the back of the ensemble, playing a scratcher<sup>23</sup> as part of the engine room<sup>24</sup>. Many of the faces looked familiar from my familiarity with the group and review of CCA artifacts over the years. Among these pannists, 9 were current or former CCA instructors/tutors/administrative personnel, 6 were CCA graduates, and 4 were current or former CCA parents. There was also one non-playing member who was both a former CCA parent and a current CCA instructor, whose role at Pan Champs that night involved cooking and serving food. The group included two related family units: one family of four, consisting of 2 CCA graduates and their parents, one of whom participated in playing; and one pair of siblings who both graduated from CCA. Of the 6 CCA graduates present, 2 had non-playing spouses present and 3 had previously served as CCA instructors. See Figure 4.5 below for a visual representation.

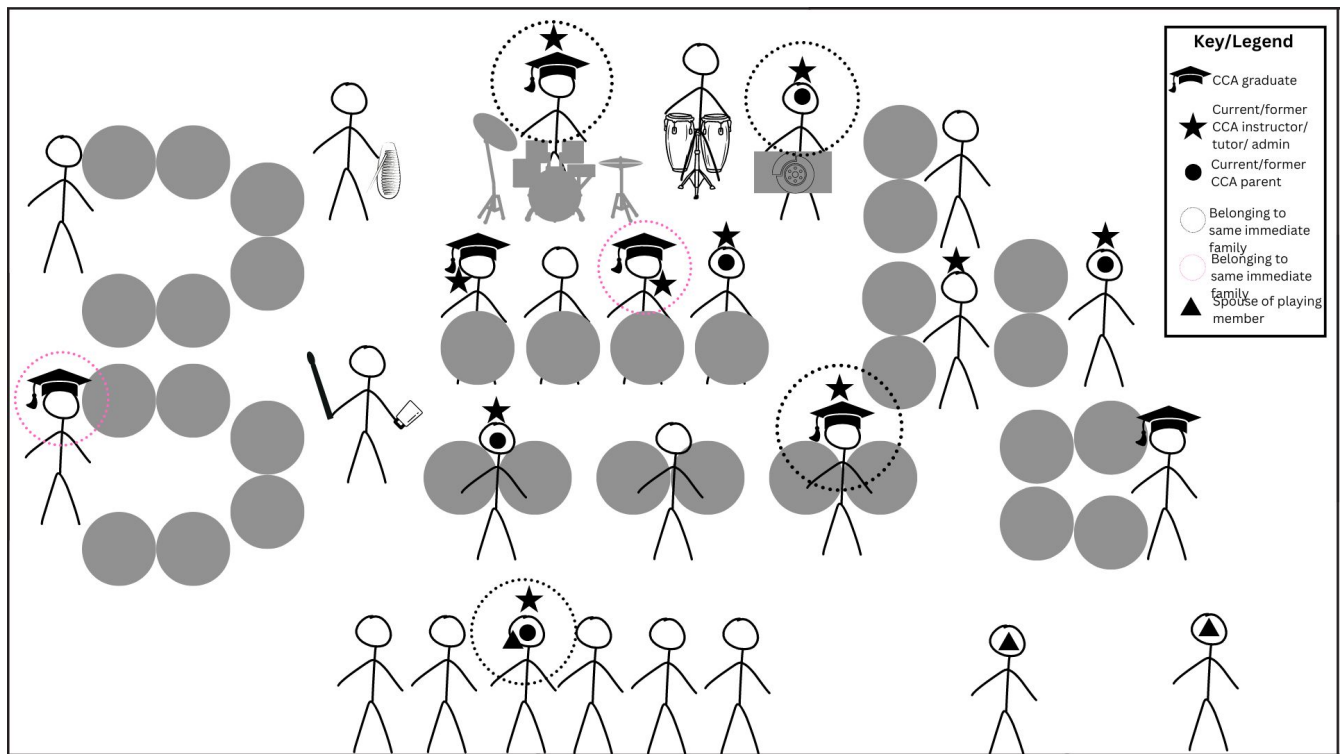
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<sup>23</sup> Scratcher is the Trinidadian term for the percussion instrument guira

<sup>24</sup> Engine room refers to the non-steelpan percussion instruments of a steelband, often including drum set, congas, scratcher, cowbell, and iron (brake drum)

**Fig. 4.6**

*Sketch of the Pan Champs Rehearsal: Highlighting CCA Involvement and Familial Ties*



Rote learning dominated the session as members taught one another, corrected mistakes, and confirmed parts through mutual nods and brief exchanges. The youngest participants joyously absorbed the music, embodying the sheer joy of the cultural and musical heritage they were part of. They could be seen smiling, dancing, jumping, and singing aloud. Questions like “Is that a change part or a new part?” or “Is this the jam<sup>25</sup>?” punctuated the air, highlighting not just their enthusiasm, but their understanding of form.

Elena, clearly a respected figure within the group, moved seamlessly throughout the space, offering guidance and correcting harmonies. At one point, she said to the arranger, “I want

<sup>25</sup> A formal component of steelband arrangements that occurs after the verse and chorus have been stated at least a couple times (original and perhaps a variation). It is often characterized by a repeated 4-bar chord progression, fragments of the melody or theme, and more pronounced involvement from the engine room.

you to hear this clashing with their part.” Her intervention was decisive yet respectful, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and musical integrity among the ensemble. At one point, members were coasting<sup>26</sup> and frustration was palpable in her voice as she called for focus to allow the arranger to introduce new music for the jam section.

Despite the cold, with everyone layered in hoodies and winter jackets, the warmth of the music and the community spirit filled the room. Near the end of the session, a tall, elderly man in a long waistcoat entered. His aura filled the room, commanding attention and emanating an unmistakable vibe of power and respect. This was Keith St. Clair Preddie, one of the forefathers of the DC steelband scene and a former member of the storied Howard University steelband. He stood with a pleasant smile, greeting others as he watched on. His presence amplified the evening's sense of community and unity in shared cultural practice.

The session extended beyond midnight, with the arranger and the musicians reluctant to end, their enthusiasm undimmed by the hour. "Allyuh sounding like ah big band!" the arranger praised. Even after the official practice concluded, some members stayed behind, fine-tuning their parts, ensuring the music lived up to their high standards and the cultural legacy they cherished.

### ***The CCA Students***

According to Cecilia & Mike, throughout CCA’s history, the majority of students have been of Caribbean, African American, or Central American heritage, with the latter group becoming more prominent since CCA’s move to the community center.

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<sup>26</sup> In steelband culture, coasting refers to players casually playing or “noodling around” during moments when they are expected to be silent.

**Cultural exchange.** Throughout the organization's history, CSP students have engaged in multiple cultural exchanges including international trips to Canada, Senegal, and Trinidad and Tobago; and hosting international youth groups from Belize and Trinidad and Tobago. Mike and Cecilia discussed the benefits of cultural exchanges for children, particularly highlighting the importance of exposing American children to diverse aspects of the African diaspora. Mike emphasized the educational value in experiencing different cultural elements such as cuisine and unique art forms like moko jumbie<sup>27</sup>, which are not common in the US. He believes these experiences help children understand how others live, eat, and engage in daily life, enriching their worldview. Mike added the following about cultural exchange:

What I think is really good about those exchanges, especially when the kid going to Trinidad...I'm always really big on exposing kids to how other people in the diaspora, how they're doing it in terms of food, you know, the thing with moko jumbies which is an art form that we don't have here in the States, you know? But they see it as an art form that people have there... I think it's really good for the kids to just be in that environment. I mean the pan is a big part, but not only pan, but just how people just live. How they live, how they eat, how they move, how to just be and be able to be in that environment and take it all in. You know, kids, they never tell you how they feel, but just that time we went to Senegal, even to this day, kids [now adults] are still talking about that trip. 'cause once again, it's that immersion into people that look like you, but they're doing it differently...I think the kids get a lot from that. That's important. They get a lot from that exchange. (Michael Carter, interview, December 30, 2023)

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<sup>27</sup> A traditional carnival character in the Caribbean, characterized by stilt walking.

According to the Carters, the trips also provide parents with the opportunity to experience and appreciate the cultures their children are learning about, further deepening the family's engagement with the program. For instance, Cecilia recalled a parent who expressed interest in learning more about Trinbagonian culture after serving as a chaperone during one of the ensemble's trips there.

Both Mike and Cecilia shared their thoughts on why children choose to remain involved in programs despite varying levels of parental support. Mike mentioned that often, while some parents may not favor the program, the students themselves are eager to continue participating. He reflected on his observations that in Trinidad, bands often evolve into community organizations. These bands, often comprising family members, transform into tight-knit, family-like organizations that persist for many years. Cecilia echoed this sentiment, noting that as CCA approaches its third decade, it has fostered a similar environment. Both observed that children's CCA engagement includes traveling and participating in competitions, which, win or lose, build camaraderie among the participants. Both attest that this has led to a strong sense of belonging and safety among the children, creating a family-like atmosphere that encourages them to remain involved for extended periods. Both emphasized that while the children might not be fully aware of the positive impacts, the parents recognize and appreciate the benefits, leading to a strong, lasting bond within the community.

**Chase.** In their interview, Cecilia and Mike shared a disheartening experience involving Chase, the only White student at the time, and one of only a few White students who have ever enrolled at CCA. Mike expressed that Chase's father was unlike any of the other parents:

...most parents would just leave the children. He would come and he would stay at CCA.

Which is fine. You know, I guess maybe [he] was a little nervous. I don't know what his

background was. But he (Chase) was the only White child and everybody else was Black. So maybe he (father) was worried about if there was any conflict with the kids. He (Chase) was really sweet, and the kids bonded with him. Actually, he was having a great time! Father took him out anyway. So yeah. Whatever. (Michael Carter, interview, December 30, 2023)

Chase's father removed him from CCA, articulating in an email that he could not understand why his son was so "addicted" to the program, and further suggested that the organization resembled a cult. Cecilia reflected on the incident stating, "It hurt. But again, it made me see things the way people perceive us... He said it's not normal that children would feel so. I don't know. Maybe he thought it was some voodoo or something."

Mike further expressed that some people outside of the [steelband] culture find it odd that the students are able to focus so much on the pan.

I've heard that from other people. Not of the culture. [other people] have said that when they see how the kids, when they get focused on the pan, focused on the scores, focused on arrangements. They're focused. And they'll stay with it for hours. A lot of people outside of the culture look at it and say that's really strange. (Michael Carter, interview, December 30, 2023)

**Debbie.** It was a crisp winter evening, four days shy of Christmas, when I met 14-year-old Debbie Richardson for an interview. Debbie greeted me at the door with a welcoming hug and ushered me into what appeared to be a dining room. She was wearing a green long-sleeved shirt, her braided hair elegantly pulled back into a ponytail, embodying a quiet grace. As we settled down at the dining table, she offered me water, her soft-spoken demeanor setting a comfortable tone for our conversation. Shortly into our discussion, a series of loud knocks briefly

startled me. Debbie, noticing my concern, chuckled nervously and calmly explained that it was just her father hanging Christmas decorations.

Debbie has been attending CCA events since her early childhood. In my review of artifacts collected at the Carters', I found a picture of Debbie sitting in her mother's lap at a CCA event. She was about a year old. Debbie follows in the footsteps of her older siblings, both of whom previously performed as CSP members and graduated from CCA within the past 6 years. Debbie and her siblings are second-generation Trinidadians. Their father, Mr. Richardson, is a native of Trinidad and Tobago and immigrated to the US over 25 years ago. Mr. Richardson recently served in a leadership role within the CCA organization. Mrs. Richardson, their mother, is a US native and has served as the CCA parent coordinator for many years. During the holiday open house event, Mrs. Richardson was observed serving food to attendees and leading the cleanup efforts after the event. When asked about her mother, Debbie said, "Yeah, that's what she does. She's like an octopus. She has eight arms. She likes to give, nourish, and all that...she has a lot on her plate, but she still like, comes and helps out..." During my site visits, Debbie's brother was also spotted transporting CSP members and supervising them while they awaited the arrival of their music instructor(s).

While Debbie currently prides herself as a pan player, her first involvement with CCA and CSP was not on a musical instrument. She recalls being the flag girl for CSP at age four during the Virginia Beach [PANfest], an annual international steelband festival and competition. In traditional Caribbean steelbands, the flag woman or flag man is positioned to the front of and beside the band as they perform on stage or in the streets during parades, energetically dancing and waving a large flag displaying the steelband's name and logo. The role of a flag woman/man

is best described in the late Lord Kitchener's 1976 calypso *Flag Woman*. Lyrics are below in the left column with my own explanation on the right.

*(Verse 1)*

*You have no band without a beautiful flag woman*

*You have no band without an experienced flag woman*

*The band will have no control, the music will have no soul*

*The revelers wouldn't play their usual mas on carnival day*

*(Chorus)*

*A woman really have the touches to send you bumping*

*Sure to make the rhythm touch you when she start waving*

*When yuh see she get that fever is plenty trouble*

*Whether yuh sink or swim, you bound to waiver*

*Aiyiyiyiyiyiyiyi*

*Wave it baby, get them moving*

*Yes honey, do your duty*

*Wave it sexy, send them crazy*

*Woman, woman move yuh hand*

*(Verse 2)*

*I always know from my experiences long ago*

*A flagless mas is like a ship without a compass*

*When you playing without a flag, the whole rhythm seems to drag*

*It is only a flag woman could put some pepper inside the band*

In this 1976 calypso, Lord Kitchener celebrates the role of the flag woman in Trinidad's Carnival, portraying her as the heart of the steelband's spirit and a key figure in energizing and directing both the band and the crowd through her flag-waving. The flag woman also plays an important role in leading the band through the streets during parades, waving the flag energetically all the while making sure it never touches the ground. She physically navigates the procession by using her flag to clear a path through the crowd with varying degrees of assertiveness. During Panorama, flag women can be seen leading steelbands on and off stage, continuously waving the flag during the performance, and sometimes guiding the band from the panyard to the Savannah and back.

Now at age 14, Debbie self-identifies as American, Black, Trinidadian and Christian. She is one of the newest members of CSP, having joined the ensemble a year ago after playing in the beginning and intermediate ensembles for eight years. In CSP rehearsals, Debbie was seen moving between the double second and bass steelpan as the ensemble rehearsed different

pieces. Her approach to learning music is influenced by the teaching methods of her instructors Nathan Samuel and Elena Marshall, involving both sheet music and rote learning. She describes a systematic approach to learning new pieces by sheet music, starting with the fundamental elements and building complexity gradually.

I would usually look at like the first five notes and also the staff and the key we're in and the tone and stuff like that. And I would go from there. So, I would learn line to line because I don't want to go straight into it... Or like Ms. Elena taught me something where you have to start like it's like a treasure hunt... it's hard to memorize *and* do sheet music.

I don't know why it's so hard to do that...it's weird (Debbie Richardson, interview, December 21, 2023)

While Debbie finds that memorizing from sheet music is difficult, memorizing by the rote method seems more natural to her, saying, "...sometimes the music, it's like so much like, it's literally in your blood. You just remember everything."

Beyond the cultural ties, CCA has played an important role for Debbie's personality development, building friendships, and coming out of her shell.

...it was hard at first. It was really hard. But then, you know, I was talking to other people and, you know, my first friend was like, Louis. Louis was my first ever friend at CCA. So, he's pretty much been there since we were little kids. Right. Then came Amy, then who else was it? Who else was my friend? I don't, I can't remember that, that long. But then sooner or later came James. James is my best friend. (Debbie Richardson, interview, December 21, 2023)

Apart from steelpan, Debbie mentioned a brief encounter with flute. She said, "I wasn't good at that. You weren't my teacher. They weren't teaching us like that. I don't know, it was just not

me. Like, I just couldn't do it. And we didn't even learn any songs. I wanted it to go away.” (Debbie Richardson, interview, December 21, 2023) I could sense the emotion and tension in Debbie’s voice as she recalled her experience with the flute. Then, as if someone flipped a switch, she suddenly changed gears and moved on to a different topic.

For Debbie, faith, education, family, and friendship hold significant importance. She grouped prayer with other important family traditions like gatherings and birthdays, and even mentioned praying about friendships during her early CCA days. She said,

So, everybody knows I've been shy. I don't know, it's just been like that. But I've been like working on trying to get out of my shell because, you know, if you don't get outta your shell, then life is not gonna be as enjoyable as you want it to be... I had to pray on it. I was like, listen, I'm trying to get some friends, please help me <laugh>... But then, you know, I was talking to other people and, my first friend was like, Louis. Louis was my first ever friend at CCA.

Outside of her involvement with CCA, Debbie enjoys integrating music into her study sessions and participates in dancing, cheerleading, and visual arts.

### ***The CCA Instructors***

Throughout the organization’s history, Caribbean Steel Pulse has been directed by pannists of high caliber hailing from the Caribbean as well as the US. At the time of the study, CSP was led by two Caribbean pannists: Elena Marshall, and Nathan Samuel.

**Elena.** Elena, a 35-year-old Black Caribbean woman from Trinidad and Tobago, currently serves as the Music Director for the Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA). Elena's identity, rooted in Black Caribbean womanhood, encompasses her roles as a musician, educator, arts administrator, and cultural ambassador. Her professional expertise is particularly centered

around the steelpan, where she excels in performance, composition, and arrangement. In the male-dominated field of steelpan performance, Elena stands out as one of only two female pannists in the area who regularly perform as soloists and bandleaders. Following in the footsteps of a lineage of respected music directors at CCA—most of whom have been musicians of Caribbean descent—Elena assumed her role after the departure of the previous director, continuing the academy's tradition of leadership by Black Caribbean women. This section focuses on Elena's journey.

Born in Trinidad and Tobago and raised by a single mother, Elena's journey into the world of music began when she was barely three. Eager to cultivate her burgeoning interest in music, her family approached a local piano teacher to start lessons. However, the teacher expressed that Elena was too young to begin formal training, and other affordable options were beyond her family's reach. Unfazed, her family gifted her a keyboard, setting the stage for her to explore and experiment with melodies on her own terms.

Music was very present in Elena's family life—her lineage brimmed with talented pannists: from her mother to her uncles and even her father. Her maternal great-grandfather, a professional bassist, had once graced stages with the Mighty Sparrow, a famous calypsonian. Though her mother eventually hung up her pan sticks, the melodic echoes from the local panyard were a constant backdrop to Elena's childhood because she “knew the people.” However, it was not until a summer trip to Baltimore at the age of seven that Elena began to play pan. Visiting her aunt and uncle, both founders of a local community steelband, she discovered the steelpan. Each summer thereafter, Elena looked forward to joining her aunt and uncle's band, playing both pan and percussion. For Elena, playing pan then was not so much about national heritage. She expressed,

So, I was really like, curious about it. They would take me in the panyard and stuff. And because they saw me kind of just trying to fiddle on it, they were like, okay, let's show it to her. And it was never like something where it was forced or anything at that point in time. It wasn't even anything about heritage or anything like that. It was just like, my family does this and there's something to do for the summer. And I had a knack for it, so they just kept me busy. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Naturally, upon relocating to the U.S. with her mother at age 11, Elena was eager to join a band at her new middle school. However, the opportunity to play in a band was contingent on one's ability to procure an instrument—a financial barrier that Elena and her family could not overcome. It was during this time that young Elena came to understand the critical issues of access and inclusion within music education. Reflecting on her experiences, she remembered, ...if I were to pick an instrument, I had to be able to afford it. And my family couldn't afford to get me an instrument. And I was already playing with my family band. I was playing pan. I gig in with them... the instrument is provided for me, and I'm still getting this performance opportunity. I think I'll do the in-school music and I'll just play pan outside. And that actually fueled me to like, continue to use pan as my main instrument because I think at that age, I recognized that the teacher didn't have the capacity to say, oh, well bring it in class and let me see what it's about. They didn't try to be inclusive. They were kind of like, pick this or that... he did ask me if I did play an instrument and I did tell him what it was, but his knowledge of the instrument wasn't enough where he thought that he could integrate that into what he was doing as a music educator in his classroom, which is unfortunate. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Although steelpan was a family tradition for Elena, her migration to the US transformed it into a broader representation of her cultural heritage. She discovered that many people held limited views about the pan and its cultural origins. Elena expressed that she views these moments as educational opportunities:

I think by extension of immigrating and also realizing that this was an instrument that my country had created... I've known the history about how pan was created for a while, but I play it now and I'm able to tell people... Even if they don't recognize the flag, they don't recognize where my accent comes from. You recognize this. We made that. You've seen this thing, and I know you think it comes from Jamaica, but it actually comes from where I was born... when I recognized that other people didn't know about it, it became more about me educating them. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Reflecting on her experiences of exclusion from her school music program, Elena's family often asked if this made her feel sad. However, sadness was not what Elena experienced. Instead, the exclusion, coupled with her understanding of what the steelpan represents and can do, instilled in her a sense of pride in her heritage. Elena expressed that as a child, she thought,

I know what my instrument is capable of. I've seen everybody, it was like, you know, we were watching *Pan is Beautiful*<sup>28</sup>, all that stuff I've seen pan play, every type of music, classical, under the sun, classical jazz, everything. I've seen it. So being able to say, well, you know, actually people in my country have been using this instrument to play everything. That's when it became about that heritage for me. It's like, well, I can tell you a lot more about myself and where I come from through this, the context of this unique instrument. You know. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

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<sup>28</sup> A steelband music festival in Trinidad and Tobago.

Although Elena frequently encountered individuals with limited or unfamiliar perspectives on steelpan, she leveraged moments of pop culture popularity to educate others. For instance, she highlighted the 2000 hit "Who Let the Dogs Out?" by Baha Men, which gained international fame and won a Grammy for Best Dance/Electronic Recording. Elena used this opportunity to inform people that the song was originally a soca tune from Trinidad and Tobago, written and performed by Trinidadian Anslem Douglas in 1998. Additionally, Elena pointed to the influence of Robbie Greenidge's steelpan performance in the popular tune "Just the Two of Us" by Grover Washington Jr., written by Bill Withers, Ralph MacDonald<sup>29</sup>, and William Salter.

Throughout her school years, Elena remained engaged with steelpan performance, supported by her mother who made sure they attended numerous pan events. According to Elena, had they lived closer, her mother would have enrolled her in CCA to pursue formal music education. During her teenage years, Elena joined the Blessed Anne Marie Steelband (BAMS), a youth band recommended by a member of her aunt's band who also arranged music for BAMS. Elena began her time with BAMS in January, diving headfirst into preparations for the PANfest competition. That year, Elena and her band celebrated victory at the event. However, the following year brought a challenging competition where BAMS faced defeat by CSP. Elena vividly remembered the moment she realized their reign was about to end, marking a poignant point in her musical journey. She recalled,

And I remember going to that competition and hearing them play, and I was like, they're gonna beat us. And my whole band got mad at me because I said out loud that they were gonna beat us. And they were like, how could you say that before we go on the stage?

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<sup>29</sup> Ralph MacDonald was a Trinbagonian Grammy Award-winning percussionist and composer whose understated Afro-Caribbean rhythms were known as "the ghost" behind the hit records of a multitude of 1970s and '80s pop stars (New York Times, 2011).

But what I recognized was the level of music and the level of execution that they were coming with. And I was able to recognize was like, yeah, that's gonna be the band that's gonna give us trouble this year. Because I was like, I know we won last year, but, and sure enough, they won. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Despite the rivalry, the festival served as a catalyst for enduring friendships among the band members. Elena reminisced,

...and afterwards we started to hang out as just the students. 'cause they were like, oh, you guys are great...this is the first time we're close enough 'cause we all weren't like driving or anything. And then from there, that friendship led me to come in and they would invite me to more ... So, I would be around the organization. And then the next year I started to take lessons with Matthew because then my mom was like, well, you need a formal teacher for if you're going to continue improving on your music. You need somebody outside of yourself to teach you music literacy and all that stuff. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Elena pursued her music theory education at the CCA under the tutelage of Matthew Darbet, a White American who held a bachelor's degree in steelpan and was the director at CSA at the time. Mr. Darbet taught Elena at the Pan Champs panyard, where she and several CCA students frequented. Matthew recognized Elena's talent and, over time, began inviting her to perform with CSP's alumni band and participate in select events. As Elena approached the end of her high school years, she joined Pan Champs, and her friends from CSP also joined the ranks of PC members while still enrolled with CSP.

Elena went on to study music business at a conservatory and in the years to follow, she worked in community outreach music programs as an administrator and educator. Elena

discussed the challenges and perceptions around incorporating “non-traditional” instruments like the steelpan into mainstream music education, noting that many music teachers still hold outdated views about certain instruments, seeing them as mere novelties rather than legitimate tools for music education. She expressed,

I think a lot of music teachers here still don't understand. They still have an old-time perception of the instrument where it is associated with vacation and travel and kind of just a novelty type of thing. And not it being a musical, like a [sic] actual musical instrument that you can learn proper education from. The same music education that you would learn on any other instrument. And that happens with a lot of instruments that have not been accepted by the Western canon as the traditional instruments to teach on.

(Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Elena contrasted the steelpan with other mallet-based instruments that are accepted and taught in schools, such as the xylophone, highlighting a reluctance to integrate “cultural” instruments into the traditional Western canon. She stated, "I don't see it any different than a marimba... that has notes in a specific order and orientation that you have to learn. But they will teach us xylophone in that same band class." I could sense Elena’s frustration regarding educators' lack of knowledge and openness, which she says hinders the integration of instruments like the steelpan into educational frameworks in the US.

Elena reflected on her experiences working in a university faculty outreach program, where she observed the inclusion of Orff instruments in early childhood music education. She believes that instruments like the steelpan are ideal for teaching music theory and other concepts efficiently. As a steelpan advocate, Elena recognizes the steelpan as a valuable educational tool, capable of facilitating rapid learning in music theory and tonal harmony. Educators often exhibit

reluctance in adopting steelpan instruments due to various reasons, including the perceived high cost. In our conversation, she challenged the concerns regarding the cost of integrating such instruments, arguing that it is comparable to outfitting a classroom with “traditional” instruments. She stated, "A lot of people worry about the cost, price, and different things, but then, comparative to buying tubas and bassoons... You're talking about the same, like comparatively in terms of the money." (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

In her role at CCA, Elena's teaching philosophy emphasizes the holistic development of her students, not just in technical proficiency but also in their understanding of music as a communal and cultural activity while also meeting each individual student's needs. Regarding this educational process, Elena explains,

the main assessment [is] performance in addition to traditional assessment of like, do you recognize all this music theory?... being able to do it as the group and really finish the performance, whatever we were working on is the true test. So, from that performance level, thinking about everybody at whichever level that they've come in for us and being able to work with them, and kind of customize the parts of music if we can, as much as we can to be able to challenge them to get past where they were. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Elena places a strong emphasis on exposing her students to a variety of musical styles and historical contexts, while also emphasizing the integration of their music education into broader cultural and community education. She articulates the goal of teaching not just musical skills but using music as a vehicle for broader community and cultural educational outcomes, challenging and expanding the audiences' perceptions of what musical instruments and styles are considered legitimate and valuable. Highlighting this, Elena said, "we're always teaching the

audience because they still do not think, even their parents, some people don't think that pan can play certain music." (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

Elena's teaching extends to fostering a sense of community and shared cultural heritage among her students. She discusses the importance of students understanding the ensemble setup and being aware of their roles within it, "you need to understand what's going on around you at all times." Through this approach, Elena also instills a sense of responsibility and interdependence among the students, who she identifies as "isolated individuals" at their age. She commented,

At that age range, they're all so very individual. They think about me, me, me, <laugh>, very isolated individuals. And the thing about performance as an ensemble is, it's a team. If you cut out, there's the relationship between that. Yes, you have to be responsible for yourself, but also you have to know how to interact with your team or the music that's going on around you as well, and know why your part is crucial. If it's not here, you're missing all of these things. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

In addition to her role at CCA, Elena remains an active performing member and committee member of Pan Champs. Throughout her time in the area, she has witnessed the fluctuation in the presence of community and school steelbands—many blossoming while others diminished. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, which led to the dissolution of many organizations, Elena credits the endurance of the surviving community steelbands to their ability to build and maintain strong relationships and create diverse opportunities. She expressed her thoughts, stating...

I mean, it does go back to people and relationships, right? Even if they haven't formalized as an organization, they have a very strong core of people who are looking for

opportunities... Being able to say that you can perform for any type of function... do a workshop and talk about the heritage of this instrument... we still are carrying on Caribbean heritage... focused on making sure that maintains so they offer that as a [sic]opportunity for people to come in for second generation if they want to get the kids involved. And then by extension, exposing that to the community around the area.

...Maintaining those relationships is really key. Backing from key organizations like the Embassy. They rotate around, showcasing who's who is in the area, right? ...So, I think, you know, key players come with any band or organization...there's somebody investing, usually it's the players or the management. (Elena Marshall, interview, December 22, 2023)

**Nathan.** Nathan's earliest memories were on the island of Bermuda where his Barbadian family lived. While still very young, his family migrated to the US to take advantage of a work opportunity. Accompanying Nathan's family were several other Barbadian families who sought similar opportunities. When this opportunity expired, Nathan's family made the decision to move back to Barbados and suddenly 9-year-old Nathan found himself moving back home to a place he never really knew. When they arrived at the Grantley Adams International Airport in Barbados, Nathan saw and heard pan for the very first time. He remembered:

We get to the airport and who would eventually become my first [pan] teacher ever was performing at the airport for tourists to come in and I said to my dad, what is that? Like, I wanna do that. And he's like, this called a steelpan. (Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023)

However, it was not until two years later when Nathan entered secondary school, that he joined the steelband and “never looked back.” Nathan played with the school steelband all throughout

secondary school. During the July/August vacations, he also participated in steelpan camps led by his mother's cousin. While Nathan's academic goals were focused on the sciences, his passion for steelpan led him to remain involved in steelband throughout secondary school. His musician friends, who were older, often let him use their music text books which allowed him to learn some music theory.

It was a matter of coincidence that Nathan's family secured Green Cards at the time he completed secondary school. While Nathan was technically fit to go to college, he opted to do 12<sup>th</sup> grade at a US high school to score the opportunity of getting a scholarship to pursue tertiary education. The transition from a Caribbean education system to the US education system was a culture shock and a hard transition for Nathan, who described the US system as "patronizing." Additionally, when his family moved, Nathan was unable to bring his instrument with him. Feelings of depression and homesickness overwhelmed Nathan and his sister as they felt their relationships with friends back home begin to thin.

...needless to say, when I got here, it was with my sister and I, we were both extremely homesick. Um, I wasn't eating, I wasn't sleeping. And I could see in real time my relationships with people back home, just, you know, thinning out. Um, and then because I had to move without my pan. That was the biggest thing. So, I hadn't touched the pan in like maybe six months... eventually one day my mother's driving through somewhere like southern Maryland, and she sees a sign for Pan Champs... so I called them. He said, come in, see if you like it, come to a rehearsal or two ... it was like a breath of fresh air. (Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023)

For Nathan, this was his first interaction with Caribbean people in the Washington, DC metropolitan area who were proud of their heritage. In prior interactions with Caribbean people in the area, Nathan observed that they often did not desire to expose their Caribbean heritage.

I'd only interfaced with maybe two West Indians <sup>30</sup>since I'd been here in those like nine months. One of them was on a bus, and the other one was a woman that worked at the car dealership that my dad got his car from. A Guyanese woman who did not want me to expose that she was Guyanese. She didn't even want to admit it to me. Um, and that was something, by the way, that I've seen over and over again. Um, at least in the DMV<sup>31</sup>. I don't think you get that in other major cities, but, um, yeah. They'll go out their way to hide their accent from you. They will look displeased if you ask where they're from.

(Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023)

Nathan's experience at Pan Champs encapsulated a welcoming and familial atmosphere. He recounted his initial encounter with the group, highlighting the camaraderie and immediate acceptance he felt, which quickly evolved into meaningful relationships. For the first time since migrating to the US, Nathan felt a sense of home, inclusive of an experience of "Caribbean time"<sup>32</sup> in the DMV.

So, Mr. Bedford told me to come in for their Friday rehearsals. He told me that rehearsals started at either seven or nine, let's say seven. So, I get my dad to drop me off at seven o'clock. I think we might have been early even. I was so excited. We get there and he's already there, you know, he's cleaning up the space and we sit there, and we talk for like two, three hours before anyone even shows up. Um, like they were late to their, but it

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<sup>30</sup> A native of the West Indies, which comprises the Greater and Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean.

<sup>31</sup> A term used to refer to the Washington, DC metropolitan area including DC, parts of Maryland, and parts of Virginia.

<sup>32</sup> Caribbean time is a relaxed approach to time where punctuality is less rigid.

was, I mean, everyone was nice, you know, got to meet people... there was like a core group and quickly made friends. Um, and we became like a, a family, you know, we'd hang out and they wasted no time, um, welcoming me into that group. They invited me to their parties. We'd hang all the time. Um, they'd drop me home whenever I needed pick me up. They would, you know, it, it was, it was a real family experience. (Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023)

While Nathan had previous experience playing with and seeing other steelbands perform in the Caribbean, it was his very first time seeing a steelband of musically literate players. Upon further inquiry, he learned that most of these musicians, now in their early to late twenties, had graduated from the Caribbean Cultural Academy, where they learned music theory and steelpan performance throughout elementary, middle, and high school.

When the high school experience did not work out for Nathan, he ventured to community college where he met internationally known steelpan musician—and former CCA music instructor—Victor Provost who subsequently encouraged him to pursue a bachelor's degree in music performance at George Mason University (GMU) where Provost taught. Due to transportation costs and feasibility, Nathan's start at GMU marked his exit from Pan Champs. At GMU, Nathan found that being “othered” served as a tool for making new friends and starting conversations with new people. He said, “being “other” has always served me more than it's hindered me in terms of, um, making connections. It's always people hear an accent, or they see me doing something and it just initiates easy, quick conversation” (Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023).

While at GMU, Nathan received an invitation to teach music theory and steelpan at CCA, working directly with CSP and the beginning steelband. In the interview, Nathan discussed the

nuanced aspects of his teaching style and approach at CSP. He described his ultimate goal as equipping students with the necessary skills to pursue tertiary education in music if they choose, emphasizing a balanced development of both practical playing skills and theoretical knowledge. He explained, "My ultimate goal is to give them the skills they need that should they choose to, they can go into any tertiary education space with this instrument," highlighting the importance of fundamentals such as skills and dexterity, technical skills, arranging, functional harmony. Nathan specifically stressed the significance of aural skills, which he believes are often “lacking” in other disciplines. This emphasis stemmed from his observation during his time at GMU, where he and his steelpan peers would often skip aural skills classes. Nathan said,

...at Mason, the pan students were infamous for always skipping our aural skills classes because, I mean, we could hear all this stuff already. We were bored... the sight singing was useful for sight reading. Um, and that was the major thing I used to go for, just to practice my sight reading...Like, we kind knew what's happening. Um, and that was because in a steelband setting, when you're learning by rote, you have and you want to be functional, and to be an asset to the band rather than be a hindrance, you have to be able to hear certain patterns. You have to be able to pick up melodies quickly to hear what's happening in the background behind you, to orient yourself with like, where you are in the song. Or to, for a queue, for instance, as when to enter. So aural skills is something that I really, really focus on with those kids. (Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023)

In the interview, Nathan also touched on the pedagogical strategies he employs to address individual learning needs, particularly when conventional methods prove challenging. He provided an example of adapting his teaching to accommodate students with dyslexia, a learning

difference that he discovered can affect how students read music. "A lot of the kids I've noticed have not, a lot of them, a few of them have dyslexia. And I didn't know until literally this year that dyslexia messes with how you read music," he shared. Nathan's perception of the younger group of students revealed insights that led him to adapt his teaching approach. He observed that a high incidence of general learning disabilities might be present within the group, although this perception is based on his own experience and not on any formal documentation or disclosure of disabilities. Nathan said:

...it's a really high incidence of just general learning disabilities. That might just be the sample size that we have... because of that, it's also really stretched me as an educator in terms of having to adapt to that. I have a 7-year-old who doesn't know the alphabet, who doesn't know how to count. So, I had to make up this arbitrary color system for notes via stickers on each note on the pan...obviously the drawback is I can't put him on different pans... she (Cecilia) understands, is that you sacrifice group progress for individual progress. So even though you won't have a finished product with a group, you'll get a finished product within each individual child. (Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023)

Nathan elaborated on the challenges and successes he faces in integrating sight reading into his lessons. He adopts a practical approach where he introduces sight reading specifically when he observes a need, rather than making it a constant part of the curriculum. Nathan said, "I always give them pieces where I know they're going to have trouble with this spot. We're going to have to reinforce this spot." he noted, emphasizing the adaptive nature of his teaching to meet students' needs.

The integration of cultural and individual learning needs forms a core part of Nathan's teaching philosophy. He aims not only to teach music but to foster an appreciation and understanding of musical skills that students can carry forward into any musical setting they might choose in the future. At the time of the interview, Nathan identified as an active performer and medical student. He articulated his cultural identity as more so being a part of the Caribbean, than just Barbadian. Nathan had this to say about his cultural identity:

I would definitely say my nationality is a big part of my identity, that being Barbadian. ...and more so regionally. Coming here has given me that sense of perspective too, that it's more about the region than it is any individual country. (Nathan Samuel, interview, December 30, 2023)

### **Themes: Family, Service, Cultural Identity and Continuity, (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation**

#### ***Family***

Family, although most referred to by relation, often extends beyond biological ties nurturing a sense of belonging and connection. In this study, the theme of family is prominent in the narratives of Debbie, Elena, and Nathan, as well as in the organizational structures of the Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA) and Pan Champs.

Nathan's family experienced migration as a family unit to Bermuda, the U.S., and back to Barbados, a rare occurrence among Caribbean families where adults often find opportunities abroad. Recognizing Nathan's sadness, his parents encouraged him to join Pan Champs, where he found a family-like atmosphere. Elena's family shaped her musical journey in a similar yet distinctive way. Born into a lineage of pannists, Elena was surrounded by music from an early age. Although financial constraints prevented formal piano lessons, her family still nurtured her love for music by providing a keyboard and facilitating her summer trips to Baltimore, where she

practiced steelpan with her aunt and uncle's band. Her mother's support exposed Elena to steelband activities in the Baltimore/Washington, DC area, leading her to engage and perform with other local youth of similar cultural background. Even when excluded from her school music program, Elena's family continued to immerse her in her Caribbean culture. For Debbie, CCA became a family tradition and connection to her father's heritage. It was a given for her and her siblings that Saturdays were to be spent at CCA, playing pan and engaging in other subjects. Outside of Debbie and her siblings' enrollment, Debbie's parents were actively involved with CCA serving in various roles including leadership positions. Additionally, four extended family members attended CCA and performed with Caribbean Steel Pulse.

Pan Champs reflected direct familial connections that were imported from CSP. Whole families were involved, creating an intergenerational culture where each member contributed and served a role. Beyond these biological ties, the family-like atmosphere Nathan described was clear as younger members referred to their elders as "Aunty" and "Uncle", consistent with the way young people in Trinidad refer to their elders. The visit from elder Keith St. Clair Preddie was also met with respect and reverence.

The CCA, led by Cecilia and Mike Carter, embodies family as a support system and source of inspiration. Cecilia conceived the idea for CCA after observing the impact steelpan had on their daughter, Kalifia, whose grandmother gifted her her first steelpan. Over the years, Kalifia has been involved in the organization, serving as an instructor, director, and outreach personnel. The presence and participation of multiple generations in both CCA and Pan Champs seems to foster an environment where cultural practices are preserved and passed down.

In these narratives, family remains essential in transmitting and reinforcing cultural practices and values, creating a supportive environment that nurtures musical growth, shared identity, and cultural continuity.

### ***Service***

Service, defined here as the act of giving back to the community that has shaped one's cultural identity, is a cornerstone of the Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA). This commitment to service manifests in various forms, including mentorship, volunteer work, and community engagement. It reflects a collective ethos where individuals strive to contribute to the community that nurtured them, including differentiating teaching to meet individual needs.

Service is embedded in the structure of the CCA. As expressed in Cecilia's interview, CCA was founded with the core objective of serving youth. This service has manifested through mentorship, volunteer work, and community engagement, promoting cultural education, academic growth, and inclusivity. This spirit of service continues to be reinforced by CCA alumni who return to volunteer, present, perform, serve as chaperones or serve in administrative roles. Furthermore, CCA thrives on the contributions of its volunteers and partnerships, reflecting a collective commitment to serving their community. These partnerships have included regional student groups, embassies, and other organizations, which allowed CCA to expand their impact, while maintaining reduced fees for low-income families. The addition of adult English classes for non-native speakers, and collaborations with student organizations at Howard University and the University of Maryland extended the program's reach. Mike Carter continues to serve as a mentor and tutor, blending academics and arts to ensure holistic development.

Nathan Samuel embodies the principle of service through his dedication to teaching music and steelpan at CCA. His pedagogical approach aims to provide students with both

practical and theoretical knowledge, equipping them for future academic or musical pursuits.

Nathan emphasized personalized instruction, adjusting his methods to accommodate students' varied learning needs. He creatively used color-coded note systems for students with dyslexia, demonstrating his commitment to inclusive education. He sought not just to teach technical skills but to empower students to thrive in a musical environment that valued their unique abilities.

Similarly, Elena Marshall saw her role as Music Director at CCA as a chance to serve the community through music education. She aimed to create an inclusive, nurturing environment where students could learn steelpan while developing a sense of belonging. Elena guided students to view music as a communal and cultural activity, where each individual's contribution was essential for the ensemble's success. At Pan Champs, she corrected harmonies, helped members with their parts, and emphasized the importance of interdependence and shared cultural identity.

Debbie's mother served as the parent coordinator, diligently managing event logistics and participating in clean-up efforts after events. Her father, in a leadership role, oversaw many aspects of the organization. Debbie's brother, an alumnus, frequently returned to offer supervision, chaperoning, and performing with CSP.

At Pan Champs, service was evident in how members supported one another musically and beyond. Elders were respected, while non-playing members ensured band members were well-fed during rehearsals. Members encouraged each other, shared their skills, and provided positive reinforcement to cultivate a spirit of camaraderie. Rehearsal ended around midnight and many players stayed afterwards to further help each other.

### ***Cultural Identity and Continuity***

While nationality was an important part of participants' identities in this study, there was also a broader sense of identity encompassing both homeland and larger diasporic groups. This broader identity manifested in various aspects of their lives, reflecting their cultural heritage, beliefs, and day-to-day practices.

**Mike: African and Caribbean diasporic identity.** Mike, the only participant in this study who was not born into Caribbean culture, identified with the broader African diaspora, finding a connection with a more global African and Caribbean diasporic cultural identity. This identity was influenced by growing up in the culturally diverse environment of New York city, and further influenced by his wife's Caribbean identity.

**Cecilia: Trinbagonian of African heritage.** Cecilia's identity as a Trinbagonian of African heritage is rooted in the traditions and culture of Trinidad and Tobago. This is reflected in her commitment to cultural preservation and education at the Caribbean Cultural Academy. The cow heel soup she offered me was a culinary masterpiece, bursting with the rich and authentic flavors reminiscent of Trinidad, like a savory time capsule. Although Cecilia does not play pan, she actively participates in continuing and preserving parts of her culture that she was not allowed to engage in during her upbringing in Trinidad. A review of photos over CCA's 28-year history revealed that, although Cecilia's current style of dress is more European influenced, she often wore Indian-style clothing, such as salwar kameez, made with African printed fabrics. Typically, salwar kameez is not made with African prints, indicating that these garments were intentionally and custom-tailored. This choice of attire reflects her heritage, as Trinidadian culture encompasses both African and Indian influences, and demonstrates her broader

appreciation and honoring of her African ancestors (See Fig. 4.1). The presence of tropical plants in her home further emphasized her connection to her Caribbean roots.

**Elena: Black Caribbean Woman.** Until her move to the US, Elena was deeply embedded in the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. Her involvement in her aunt and uncle's Baltimore steelband provided a vital means of cultural continuity, especially considering her exclusion from her school's music program. For Elena, participating in steelband is not just about maintaining a tradition but also about playing an important role in its continuity for others, serving as a bearer and transmitter of this cultural practice from her home country. This was seen at CSP rehearsals where she serves as an instructor, as well as at Pan Champs where her primary role is a playing member.

Elena's inclusion of her gender in her identity is significant. Historically, during the early stages of the steelpan's invention and development, women were not allowed to play steelpan or associate with panmen (see *Outcast* lyrics in chapter 1). As a woman, Elena stands out as one of the two solo female steelpan performers in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. Her identity as a woman in this field is a testament to the progress made in gender inclusivity within the steelpan community, reflecting the broader societal changes towards gender equality in traditionally male-dominated fields. As a teacher, Elena values holistic musical development, which, by her account, includes Western music theory and exposure to varied musical genres and methods of learning in addition to traditional steelpan methods. Elena, being aware of the complexity of being a musician in the US, recognizes the need for versatility and comprehensive musical education. Furthermore, Elena plays a role in the ongoing movement to "legitimize" steelpan and steelband. She programs varied repertoire not to merely meet the US audience's

expectations but to prove and assert that steelpan is a legitimate musical instrument that is capable of diverse musical expressions.

As a teacher, Elena values holistic musical development, which, by her account, includes Western music theory and exposure to varied musical genres in addition to traditional steelpan playing. This view of teaching demonstrates Elena's awareness of the complexity of being a musician in the US, recognizing the need for versatility and comprehensive music education. Furthermore, Elena plays a crucial role in the ongoing movement to "legitimize" steelpan and steelband. She programs varied repertoire not to merely meet the US audience's expectations but to prove and assert that steelpan is a legitimate musical instrument that is capable of diverse musical expressions.

**Nathan: Barbadian and Caribbean.** Nathan's sense of national identity developed in Barbados during his nearly teenage years after living abroad for several years. This sense of national identity persisted as his family moved to Maryland. The perceived denial of West Indian heritage he claimed to frequently see in the DMV was counteracted by his involvement with Pan Champs. Here, his national cultural identity expanded into a broader Caribbean identity. Nathan still holds on to his Barbadian identity. Photographs from CSP's 2019 PANfest performance show Nathan proudly displaying a Barbadian flag (see Fig. 4.6). At Nathan's home, thick Barbadian accents could be heard, even thicker than what was heard when he was interacting with CSP, highlighting his connection to his Barbadian roots.

**Figure 4.6**

*CSP Members, Nathan, and the Carters after the band's 2019 PANfest performance*



**Debbie: American, Black, Trinidadian, and Christian.** For Debbie, being Black and Trinidadian is a dual identity that encompasses both her nationality and her family's heritage. Since the age of five, Debbie has spent anywhere from seven hours a week to now twelve hours a week at CCA, with five of those hours being actively engaged with Caribbean Steel Pulse. CCA and CSP have become a part of her family and a family tradition. During her interview, she exuded a sense of comfort and familiarity when speaking about her interactions with the Trinbagonian pan students on her most recent visit. Having been born and raised in the US, Debbie's involvement with CSP acts as a bridge connecting her, an African American girl, with her father's heritage in Trinidad and Tobago. At home, Debbie regularly hears her father speaking in his Trini accent, which is a constant reminder of her Trinidadian heritage. When

playing calypso and soca music at CSP, her entire body comes to life dancing and smiling. In contrast, this vivacity is noticeably absent when she performs pieces like the "Christmas Canon," which are more classically influenced. Outside of CSP, Debbie does not perform any other instruments. She mentioned a brief encounter with the flute, which she described as a horrible experience that she quickly moved past in our conversation. Although Debbie did not say much about the actual experience, her words, "It was just not me," "They weren't teaching us like that," and "We didn't even learn any songs," reflected that flute, and the way it was being taught, did not fit in with her identity.

Maintaining one's home culture in a foreign land is often challenging, but in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, participants found ways to continue their Caribbean heritage. Partnerships with country-specific entities, like embassies, helped promote the presence of Caribbean organizations in the area. The organizations in this study not only teach the performing aspect of steelpan, but also included the history and fostered cross-generational learning through adult classes at CCA and by involving young children in Pan Champs, passing on cultural traditions to both younger and older generations. These organizations teach culture.

Nathan's words, "a slice of home" and "a breath of fresh air" captured the sense of the belonging he felt. The presence of global flags at CCA and the US-Pan-Trini banner at the Pan Champs facility symbolized the bridging of cultures, using pan as a unifying tool to foster community and continuity. The unified diasporic identities, pride in these identities, along with the reflections on friendship shared by Debbie, Elena, and Nathan, and the support from the Carters' friends and neighbors, embody the spirit encapsulated in the chorus of the 1950 calypso "Victory Test Match" by Trinidadian calypsonian Egbert "Lord Beginner" Moore. Lyrics are below in the left column with my own explanation on the right.

*Verse 1:*

*Cricket lovely Cricket  
At Lord's where I saw it  
Cricket lovely Cricket  
At Lord's where I saw it  
Yardley tried his best  
Goddard won the test  
They gave the crowd plenty fun  
The second Test and West Indies won*

*Chorus:*

***With those two little pals of mine***  
*Ramadhin and Valentine*

*Verse 2:*

*The King was there well attired  
So they started with Rae and Stollmeyer  
Stolly was hitting balls 'round the boundary  
But Wardle stopped him at twenty  
Rae had confidence  
So he put up a strong defense  
He saw the King was waiting to see  
So he gave him a century*

*Chorus*

*Verse 3:*

*West Indies first innings total  
Was three-twenty-six Just as usual  
When Bedser bowled Christiani  
The whole thing collapsed quite easily  
England then went on  
And made one-hundred-fifty-one  
West Indies then had two-twenty lead  
Goddard said, "That is nice indeed."*

*Chorus*

*Verse 3:*

*Yardley wasn't broken-hearted  
When the second innings started  
Jenkins was like a target  
Getting the first five into his basket  
But Gomez broke him down  
While Walcott licked them around  
He was not out for one- sixty-eight*

*"With those little pals of mine"*

This calypso, commemorating the West Indies cricket team's first test match victory, resonates within the Caribbean cultural context. Cricket is not merely a sport in the Caribbean; it is a part of community life and represents a unifying force for the West Indian nations that compete internationally as one team.

*"West Indies voices all blended"*

The historical significance of cricket and its role in fostering a collective West Indian identity parallels the findings of this study. Participants did not solely identify with their national origins but embraced a broader Caribbean identity, inclusive of Afro-diasporic and Caribbean-American elements. This broader sense of identity reflects the interconnectedness and shared cultural heritage that transcend individual national boundaries, much like the unity displayed by the West Indies cricket team. This collective identity, celebrated in Lord Beginner's calypso, mirrors the communal bonds and shared aspirations that have been pivotal in shaping the experiences of the participants in this Caribbean steelband community music program.

*"People shout and jump without fear"*

The historic victory of the then British West Indies cricket team over their colonial rulers, England, carries considerable weight, especially as it prefigured the first wave of independence movements across the Caribbean, beginning in 1962. Similarly, the origins of steelpan, which emerged as a form of overcoming restrictions imposed by colonial authority, reflect a parallel spirit of triumph and determination.

*Leaving Yardley to contemplate*

*Chorus: The bowling was superfine  
Ramadhin and Valentine*

*Verse 4:*

*West Indies was feeling homely  
Their audience had them happy  
When Washbrook's century had ended  
**West Indies voices all blended**  
Hands went in the air  
**People shout and jump without fear**  
So at Lord's was the scenery  
Bound to go down in history*

*Chorus: After all was said and done  
Second Test and the West Indies won!*

### ***(M/m)usic (E/e)ducation***

In this study, (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation refers to the systemic conflict experienced by individuals in music teaching and learning spaces that are not typically included in “formal” Music Education arenas. Although CCA and CSP are “informal” spaces, they provide culture-rich environments where, as evidenced in this study, music education clearly occurs. The narratives explored revealed the role of Music Education in CCA and CSP, in shaping the experiences of individuals like Elena, Nathan, and Debbie.

Elena's story is representative of the barriers in public school music education while shedding light on its potential to be inclusive. Although her family supported her musical pursuits and provided her with a keyboard when formal piano lessons were financially out of reach. She faced barriers to access her school's music program due to the inability to afford an instrument. This financial barrier highlighted the inequitable access to music education. Her teachers' unfamiliarity with steelpan and their inability to integrate it into their curriculum led to exclusion, something particularly unique to less familiar instruments like the steelpan. However,

the summer trips to her aunt and uncle's steelband in Baltimore allowed Elena to immerse herself in the steelband culture and develop her talent in a welcoming, familial setting, which she was able to continue upon moving to the US. As a performer, Elena also sees her role as an educator to educate audiences about the steelpan. Elena's teaching philosophy emphasizes holistic development, blending technical skills with community building. As Music Director at CCA, she supports an inclusive environment where students could find belonging while developing technical proficiency in steelpan and understanding the instrument's cultural significance.

Nathan's family supported his involvement in steelpan camps and bands in Barbados, fostering his musical development and passion for the instrument. Upon moving to the US, pursuit of better tertiary education opportunity led Nathan to enroll in US high school, although he had already completed the content in the Caribbean. Like Elena, Nathan also had a negative experience within the US school system. Nathan found that American music education often lacked the aural skills necessary for effective steelpan learning. As a steelpan instructor at CCA, he adapted his teaching methods to meet the varied needs of students, emphasizing practical skills like sight-reading and improvisation, as well as theoretical knowledge. He also tailored his approach for students with learning challenges, such as dyslexia, by using color-coded note systems to improve accessibility. His goal was not only to impart technical expertise but to empower students to thrive in an inclusive environment.

At the CCA, education has been central to the organization's mission. Led by Cecilia and Mike Carter, CCA emphasizes holistic education, offering academic tutoring, music lessons, cooking, and other subjects. Their Saturday and after-school academies are designed to provide comprehensive learning experiences that blend theoretical and practical education. Volunteers and instructors emphasize mentorship and adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate

students' unique needs. For instance, Nathan's color-coded system for students with dyslexia or Elena's personalized guidance during steelpan rehearsals demonstrates the inclusive and tailored educational approaches practiced at CCA.

Debbie's story further highlights the importance of adaptive teaching methods at CCA. In her “formal” music education space, the teaching methods did not work for her. She specifically commented that the teacher and method of teaching were not like those at CCA. Learning under Nathan and Elena, she mastered steelpan techniques through a blend of sheet music, muscle memory, and rote learning. Although she found memorization from sheet music challenging, Debbie’s instructors at CCA helped her develop systematic strategies for reading, memorization, and performance. This tailored support enabled Debbie to overcome difficulties and excel as a pannist, ultimately attaining musical fulfillment in this “informal” community setting.

Pan Champs also reinforces the value of learning through community engagement. In the panyard, teaching and learning occur through collaborative practices, with members correcting each other's parts, sharing knowledge, and providing positive reinforcement. The communal environment fosters a spirit of camaraderie that is essential for skill-building and reinforces the cultural significance of steelpan.

In conclusion, this study highlights the important role of both “formal” and “informal” (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation in shaping musical and cultural identities. The experiences of Elena, Nathan, and Debbie illustrate how community music programs like CCA and CSP provide essential, culture-rich environments where teaching and learning thrive beyond the constraints of traditional school settings. These programs address gaps left by “formal” Music Education, offering inclusive and adaptable approaches that honor and integrate participants' cultural backgrounds in rich music educational experiences. By fostering community support and

employing diverse teaching strategies, these “informal” settings help students overcome barriers and achieve musical fulfillment while supporting the intellectual and cultural growth of all learners.

## **Summary**

### ***Purpose of the Study and Research Questions***

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a specific Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The research was guided by the following questions:

1) What is the nature of teaching and learning in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

2) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their cultural identities?

3) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their musical experiences?

This chapter included my explorations of how teaching, learning, cultural identity, and musical experiences intersect within a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The narratives of the participants, along with insights from my investigations of the Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA) and Pan Champs, have provided answers to the research questions posed.

### ***Research Question 1: What is the nature of teaching and learning in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?***

My findings showed that teaching and learning in this community involve multiple processes including interpersonal, practical, theoretical, and historical elements. A culture-led

pedagogy which prioritizes the cultural context and personal development of students alongside their musical education, was evident. This method respects and integrates the cultural heritage and experiences of the students, creating a more inclusive and relevant learning environment.

Traditional steelband methods, like rote learning, are fundamental to the art form and practiced in this community, encouraging players to intuitively grasp rhythms and melodies. Music reading is not a prerequisite, making this ensemble more accessible to students who may not have such music training. This approach lowers barriers to entry, allowing a broader range of participants to engage with the music. However, teaching Western music notation, theory, form, and harmony is also prioritized as a means to increase students' access to music and performance, and as form of legitimization.

Teacher skills-building is also a key component, with educators like Nathan and Elena emphasizing adaptive learning strategies that address individual needs. This includes developing specific skills such as aural skills, allowing students to identify and replicate musical elements by ear; taking creative liberties in their performances; arranging music to fit the unique needs and abilities of the ensemble; and understanding the function of different instruments within the steelband. By incorporating these elements, educators foster a holistic understanding of music theory and performance. Additionally, the inclusion of historical context with these practical and theoretical elements enables students to excel musically while preserving the cultural heritage of steelpan.

***Research Question 2: How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their cultural identities?***

Participants described their cultural identities in both national and broader diasporic contexts. They identified themselves through specific national origins (Trinidadian, Barbadian, American) while also embracing their place within the Caribbean diaspora.

Nathan, for instance, perceived his identity as “Caribbean,” which transcended specific national borders. His experience Pan Champs provided him with "a breath of fresh air," offering a cultural comfort space where he could reconnect with, explore, and affirm his identity. Having moved around as a child and not developing a connection with Barbados until his almost teen years, as an adult, Nathan’s involvement in Pan Champs allowed him to navigate his cultural roots more fluidly.

Debbie's identity as American, Black, Trinidadian, and Christian underscores the intersectionality of her cultural background. For her, CCA and CSP were extensions of her family tradition and heritage. Since the age of five, Debbie has spent significant time at CCA, where she engages with her cultural roots through the steelband. This involvement acts as a bridge connecting her African American upbringing with her father's Trinidadian heritage. The familiarity and comfort she feels in these spaces enable her to express and affirm her cultural identity, which is enriched by her participation in the steelband. CCA’s culturally sustaining practices, such as teaching the history of steelpan alongside performance skills also help students connect with the broader Caribbean culture and heritage.

Mike and Cecilia Carter emphasized their affinity with the African diaspora, viewing their identities within a broader Afro-Caribbean and African context. This perspective reflects a deep connection to their ancestral heritage, which they continue to nurture and celebrate through their involvement with CCA. Cecilia started CSP, providing students with steelpan experiences that she was not allowed to participate in as a child. Mike spoke about the students' experiences

with moko jumbies in Trinidad. These cultural expressions are integral to their identities and are actively sustained through the organization's practices. While Cecilia and Mike, both senior citizens, may not actively participate in all these cultural activities, they ensure that CSP provides these experiences for the students, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Caribbean cultural heritage.

Elena's identity as a Black Caribbean woman is deeply rooted in her Trinidadian culture. Her involvement in her aunt and uncle's steelband provided a sense of continuity and connection to her cultural heritage, especially after facing exclusion from her school's music program in the US. For Elena, being part of CSP and Pan Champs is not just about participating in a musical tradition but also about being a custodian of her culture, ensuring its transmission to future generations. Her role as one of the few solo female steelpan performers in the Washington, DC area highlights the importance of representation and the breaking of historical gender barriers within the steelpan community.

The current study reveals that the organizations in this research serve as crucial platforms for cultural identity exploration, development, and affirmation. CCA and Pan Champs provide culturally sustaining environments where participants can learn about and engage with various facets of their cultural heritage. They offer more than just musical instruction; they create spaces where cultural traditions are taught, celebrated, and preserved. The inclusion of historical context in the curriculum helps participants understand the cultural significance of steelpan, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

***Research Question 3: How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their musical experiences?***

Participants conveyed a sense of joy, belonging, and purpose. They recognized steelpan as both a communal and cultural practice. For Debbie, musical experiences within CSP were characterized by systematic learning and an inclusive environment, where instructors helped her develop her skills through personalized guidance. Debbie did not perform outside of steelpan; she had a brief and negative encounter with playing the flute at school, which she described as a horrible experience, attributing it to the way it was taught to her. This adverse experience in her school music program pushed her to fully embrace steelpan, where she found a nurturing and supportive environment that contrasted with her in-school music education experiences.

Elena's experience further highlighted the shortcomings of traditional school music programs. She was excluded from her school's music program due to the inability to afford an instrument and the lack of accommodation for her steelpan. This exclusion motivated her to seek musical fulfillment outside the school setting. At her family's Baltimore band and later CSP and Pan Champs, she found inclusive environments that valued her instrument and provided her with the opportunity to develop her skills and contribute to the cultural continuity of steelpan. Elena emphasized the communal aspects of steelpan, where each player's role is crucial to the ensemble's success. She also benefited from the inclusive nature of steelpan and its potential to be an educational tool in US music educational spaces, offering a more culturally responsive approach to music education.

Nathan highlighted steelpan as a "slice of home" and a cultural anchor that kept him rooted in his Caribbean heritage. His musical experiences at Pan Champs highlighted the importance of having access to music that honors and incorporates participants' backgrounds. The supportive environment at these organizations allowed him to thrive and develop a deeper connection to his cultural identity through music.

In summary, the participants' experiences at both CSP and Pan Champs illustrate the profound impact of culturally responsive music education. These organizations provided a supportive and inclusive space that facilitated musical growth and reinforced cultural identity and community bonds. These experiences stand in stark contrast to their experiences in traditional school music programs, thus highlighting the need for educational settings that embrace and integrate diverse cultural practices.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of participants in a specific Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The research was guided by the following questions:

1) What is the nature of teaching and learning in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area?

2) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their cultural identities?

3) How do participants in a Caribbean steelband community music program in the Washington, DC metropolitan area describe and perceive their musical experiences?

I employed an ethnographic case study design to explore this topic thoroughly and with appropriate attention to the contextual and cultural details within the case and across the participants' individual experiences.

In this chapter, I begin with a summary of my findings followed by a juxtaposition of the findings with the prior literature. Next, I will elaborate on the implications of practical applications in music education within different structures, particularly in diverse and multicultural settings. I conclude the chapter with implications for future research and my final thoughts.

### **Summary of Findings**

In this dissertation, I identified four thematic areas—family, service, cultural identity and continuity, and (M/m)usic (E/e)ducation, which aligned with the research questions posed.

### ***Family***

I uncovered that family was a pervasive theme across narratives, extending beyond mere biological connections to encompass communal and cultural bonds formed through music and community. Participants like Nathan, Elena, and Debbie described how family dynamics intertwined with musical engagement, fostering deep cultural connections and a sense of belonging. Organizational structures such as the Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA) and Pan Champs embodied familial principles, creating environments where generations congregated to share and learn.

### ***Service***

Service was foundational to the operations and ethos of CCA, where the founding mission focused on providing support and developmental opportunities for youth through music. This commitment was visible in the voluntary contributions of alumni and community members who engaged in various capacities such as mentoring, teaching, and administrative support. The narrative of service also manifested through practical applications like offering music education accessible to all community members, exemplifying a model of inclusive cultural engagement that strengthens community ties and individual growth.

### ***Cultural Identity and Continuity***

Participants articulated their cultural identities through a dual lens of national origin and diasporic connections, reflecting a broader network of belonging. This was particularly evident in how individuals like Nathan and Elena navigated their Caribbean identities within the broader diasporic Caribbean community in the US. The study highlighted how community music programs serve as vital spaces for maintaining cultural continuity, allowing participants to explore and express their heritage in a foreign land.

### ***(M/m)usic (E/e)ducation***

Music Education within the Caribbean steelband community was marked by a blend of traditional and innovative teaching methods. Rote learning, a staple of steelband pedagogy, was complemented by sheet music and adaptive teaching strategies to cater to diverse learning needs. Educators like Nathan and Elena were particular in adapting educational content to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness, addressing the holistic needs of students. This approach not only supported skill development but also enriched students' understanding of their musical heritage.

While the methods of teaching and learning at CCA created a pleasant learning environment for Debbie, her in-school music experience contrasted sharply. Elena, on the other hand, faced restrictions in her school's music program as she could not participate in an ensemble with her steelpan.

### **The Present Study in the Context of Prior Literature**

#### ***Community Music***

My findings within this study emphasize the participatory and inclusive nature of community music, bridging socioeconomic, racial, and intergenerational gaps within the community. Participants in this study experienced community music as a medium for cultural expression and identity formation, which aligns with the heterogeneous and participatory nature of community music as described by Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016).

The origins of community music in the US can be traced back to immigrant communities and Native American traditions, emphasizing the role of religion and the development of music categories aimed at educational, performative, and cultural transmission purposes (Leglar & Smith, 2010). The introduction of steelpan to the Washington DC metropolitan area exemplifies this historical narrative as international students from the Caribbean brought their cultural

practices, including steelpan, with them when they came to study at Howard University. Consistent with Higgins (2006) and Veblen (2008), participants in this study engaged in community music practices that resist rigid definitions due to their fluid boundaries and inclusive nature. For example, the music teaching and learning practices Debbie experienced at CCA led to an ongoing sense of musical fulfillment that contrasted sharply with the negative experience she encountered at her school.

The dynamic nature of community music, which fosters cultural expression and identity formation, is evident in the narratives of participants in this study. For Nathan, meeting Caribbean immigrants who were proud of their heritage reinvigorated him during a time of depression and homesickness after immigrating to the US with his family. Elena experienced a profound sense of community drawn from shared cultural heritage and expression. Her exclusion from her school's music program, coupled with her existing experiences in playing pan in a community band, motivated her to excel in pan performance. For Debbie, involvement in community music began even before she could play an instrument, as she participated as a flag girl, embedding her within cultural expression and community music practices from a young age. Debbie's introduction to cultural expression through steelpan at a very young age is also evident of the fluid boundaries and inclusive nature of community music. These findings support the views of key scholars in the field (Rice, 2007, 2013; Veblen, 2008), emphasizing the role of community music in providing a platform for cultural expression, identity formation, and personal development. By situating my findings within the broader discourse of community music, this study contributes to the understanding of how community music serves as a vital space for cultural preservation and social cohesion.

In this study, I highlight the role of community music in fostering cultural identity and cultural continuity among participants, resonating with the work of Higgins (2012) and Schippers (2018), who highlight the role of community music as an organic phenomenon and as an intervention in promoting social cohesion and cultural heritage. My findings indicate that Cecilia founded the Caribbean Cultural Academy to help children through an art form from her culture, which she herself was never allowed to participate in while in Trinidad due to the lack of acceptance of steelpan in much of society. As a community music organization, CCA places a strong emphasis on cultural heritage, with students not only learning to perform music but also engaging deeply with the culture. This engagement is facilitated through diverse teaching and learning methods, fostering relationships with other culture-based organizations (both Caribbean and non-Caribbean), and participating in cultural immersion experiences through international trips and exchanges with other Caribbean-based ensembles.

Kenny (2017) asserts that community music is situated at the intersection of education, performance, and social justice. This study aligns with that perspective, demonstrating how community music serves as an educational tool that extends beyond traditional classroom settings. Traditional steelband pedagogy heavily relies on rote learning, where students learn by listening and mimicking rather than reading sheet music. This method is culturally rooted in the steelband tradition and fosters a deep, intuitive understanding of rhythm and melody, encouraging students to internalize music through aural skills and muscle memory. This approach makes music accessible to those who may not have formal music reading skills. Incorporating sheet music complements rote learning by providing a structured understanding of musical arrangements. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive learning experience, combining the strengths of both methods. It offers students the opportunity to develop their aural

skills while also gaining the ability to read and interpret written music, which can be particularly beneficial for those who pursue further musical education or professional opportunities. The adaptive and inclusive teaching methods employed by educators in this study reflect an approach to community music education that caters to diverse learning needs. This approach supports the assertions by scholars like Kenny, illustrating how community music not only educates but also performs a vital social function, promoting cultural continuity and social cohesion.

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) theory posits that individuals categorize themselves into groups based on common attributes or cultural backgrounds, leading to an in-group preference. This preference facilitates a sense of pride and belonging among members who share similar identities or cultural practices. At CCA, the dynamics of social identity and in-group preference were clearly observable and had profound implications for both inclusion and exclusion. The story of Chase, a White American student, illustrated a challenging aspect of in-group preferences. Despite the inclusive ethos of CCA, Chase's experience highlights a nuanced barrier where cultural alignment and understanding were pivotal. His father withdrew him from the program, perplexed by the intense dedication of the students, which he could not relate to or fully comprehend. This scenario highlights a divergence from the typical in-group solidarity expected in community music settings, suggesting that the cultural specificity of the music and the community's practices might inadvertently foster a sense of exclusion or misunderstanding among those who do not share the same cultural background or do not perceive its significance in the same way.

Conversely, Nathan's experiences in the DMV area provide a contrasting perspective on social identity within the Caribbean diaspora. Initially encountering individuals who seemed to conceal their West Indian identity, Nathan observed what he perceived to be a lack of pride and a

sense of hiding among lone West Indians. However, this changed dramatically when he engaged with groups that shared a common Caribbean and steelpan cultural heritage. In these group settings, there was a sense of pride and a rekindling of cultural identity, reflecting Tajfel and Turner's notions of in-group preference and solidarity. For Nathan, these encounters were more than just social interactions; they were reaffirmations of identity and belonging, providing a “breath of fresh air” and a “slice of home” that contrasted significantly with his earlier observations of cultural concealment.

The journey of ethnic identity development, as outlined by Phinney (1990) in her adaptation of Cross's Nigrescence model (1971), delineates a three-stage process beginning with an unexamined ethnic identity, moving through an ethnic identity search or moratorium, and culminating in ethnic identity achievement. This theoretical framework provides a robust lens through which to analyze the personal narratives of individuals navigating their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Nathan's story exemplifies this developmental trajectory in a compelling way. Initially, his identity was unexamined characterized by a lack of connection to his heritage when he returned to Barbados, a homeland that felt foreign despite its familiarity. This phase represents the first stage of Phinney's model, where the ethnic identity is often taken for granted without deeper reflection or engagement. The shift to an active search for his ethnic identity occurred in two significant locales: first, in Barbados upon his engagement with steelpan music, and subsequently, in Maryland. In Barbados, the communal and cultural aspects of playing steelpan initiated Nathan into a community where he began to forge meaningful relationships and connections. This involvement marked the beginning of his ethnic identity search, where he started to explore and affirm his Barbadian roots through the tradition of steelpan music.

Upon moving to Maryland, Nathan encountered further complexities in his identity exploration. The diasporic context in the DMV area presented challenges, as he met other West Indians who seemed to hide or downplay their cultural heritage, showing a lack of pride in their identity. However, the discovery of Pan Champs, as facilitated by his parents' encouragement and support, represented a turning point. Here, Nathan found a community that celebrated and reinforced Caribbean culture and identity, aligning with his own growing self-awareness and pride in his heritage. This juncture represents a critical point in Phinney's model—the transition from identity search to achievement.

Nathan's story reaches a resolution in the stage of ethnic identity achievement. At Pan Champs, surrounded by individuals who shared his cultural background and embraced their collective identity, Nathan achieved a sense of ethnic identity that was both affirming and empowering. His experiences there solidified his sense of self as part of the Caribbean diaspora, characterized by a strong, positive connection to his cultural roots.

This narrative not only highlights the individual journey of identity development but also illustrates the broader implications of community environments in facilitating or hindering such development. For instance, environments where cultural heritage is downplayed or not celebrated can hinder individuals' progress through the stages of ethnic identity development by fostering feelings of isolation or internalized cultural inferiority. Additionally, a lack of supportive community structures or opportunities for cultural engagement can impede individuals' ability to connect with their heritage, delaying or disrupting the transition from identity search to achievement. Nathan's experiences underscore the importance of positive, supportive community environments in promoting a robust and affirming ethnic identity. Community music settings like Pan Champs can serve as crucial platforms for cultural

expression and identity affirmation, supporting individuals in their transition through the stages of ethnic identity development. Nathan's progression from an unexamined state to a fully realized ethnic identity achievement highlights the dynamic interplay between personal experiences and community support in the process of identity formation.

### ***Music and Cultural Identity Formation***

In the present study, findings show that participants in the Caribbean steelband community in the Washington, DC metropolitan area embrace a collective or broad diasporic identity that extends beyond their national origins. This broader identification is facilitated by the steelpan, which serves not only as a cultural artifact but also as a form of community and medium through which participants can engage with and express their shared heritage.

Nathan's journey exemplifies how music can facilitate the expansion of personal identity. Initially, Nathan's sense of self was constrained by his limited exposure to his Barbadian roots. Although his start as a steelpan musician was later than other members of the ensembles, his desire to perform served as a bridge into the Caribbean community in the Washington, DC area. Nathan's involvement with the steelpan music community connected him with immigrants who were proud of their roots, allowing him to embrace a broader Caribbean identity, demonstrating music's capacity to broaden one's self-concept through engagement with culturally significant practices. Nathan's experience at Pan Champs, where he participated in steelpan traditions, highlights how cultural immersion through music can redefine personal and communal identities, enhancing his connections with the wider Caribbean community.

Similarly, Mike's narrative shows how exposure to diverse cultural elements, including music, can augment an individual's identity. Mike, despite not being a musician, developed a more inclusive identity through his exposure to the rich cultural milieu of New York, where he

was exposed to Caribbean and Latin American influences. This exposure helped him move beyond his African American and Southern heritage to embrace a broader Afro-diasporic and Afro-Caribbean identity.

Debbie and Elena's musical experiences within the community music programs at the Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA) and Pan Champs also provided critical support for their cultural identity development. Debbie, who does not perform as a musician outside of steelpan and had a negative experience with the flute, found a sense of belonging and identity through her involvement with CSP. Essentially born into the steelband tradition, Debbie's strong connection with music and culture helps her navigate her identity as an African American girl with Trinidadian roots. Elena's exclusion from her school's music program pushed her to pursue a holistic approach to steelpan teaching and learning, such that her students may be equipped to find success in a broad range of musical environments. Elena sought cultural continuity through her aunt and uncle's steelband, highlighting the importance of inclusive and culturally relevant music education in supporting identity formation.

These findings align with scholarly perspectives on music and cultural identity. Frith (1996) asserted that music acts as a formidable force within cultural practices, shaping and reflecting both individual and collective identities. Jung (2014), Kyker (2013), and Stokes (2004) highlight music's dual role in expressing preexisting identities and providing a medium for constructing new ones. Additionally, Ong (1999) and Rice (2007) emphasize the complex interactions between music and cultural identity formation, underscoring its role in preserving and transforming cultural narratives.

In the context of the diverse cultural environment of the United States, music in this study serves as a unifying element that transcends ethnic and national boundaries, fostering a shared

sense of identity and community among participants from various backgrounds. Similar to how Caribbean nations compete as the West Indies in international cricket, shared cultural practices like music foster a broader Caribbean identity. The ability of music to bridge diverse cultural gaps is particularly important in diaspora communities, where individuals may feel disconnected from their cultural roots. By participating in steelband music, these individuals maintain and celebrate their heritage, reinforcing their connections to the Caribbean while adapting to their new contexts in the US.

Overall, this study shows how community music programs like CCA and Pan Champs provide spaces where participants can explore and express their identities in a supportive environment. By bridging the gap between their Caribbean roots and their lives in the US, these community music programs foster a sense of unity and continuity essential for cultural preservation and personal development. This process aligns with the theoretical perspectives of music's role in identity formation and cultural continuity, contributing to the vibrancy and resilience of the larger cultural community.

**Cultural Identity and Expression Among Youth.** Youth development is a unique process marked by rapid changes and explorations of self. Music serves as a pivotal channel for self-expression and identity formation, particularly among young individuals who are navigating the complexities of adolescence. This period is characterized by a search for meaning and belonging, making the role of music in youth identity formation especially significant (Campbell, 2008; DeNora, 2000). The findings of this study highlight the role of community music programs Caribbean Steel Pulse and Pan Champs in providing spaces where youth can explore and solidify their cultural identities. Through engagement in these programs, young participants developed both musically personally.

My findings reveal that within the Caribbean steelband community explored, participants like Debbie, Elena, and Nathan utilized their musical engagements to forge and reinforce their identities. For Debbie, the community music setting provided a space to cultivate meaningful friendships that went beyond mere acquaintances, embedding her within her cultural and musical community. These relationships, developed through shared musical experiences, were instrumental in her journey of self-discovery and identity affirmation. This aligns with DeNora's (2000) assertion that music acts as a resource for the ongoing construction of the self, particularly crucial during adolescence, a period marked by intensive searches for identity.

Cecilia described her own daughter's development, highlighting a narrative where involvement in steelpan music helped her "come out of her shell," expressing her individuality and gaining confidence. This growth, both musical and personal, showcases how engagement in community music can lead to personal development. Campbell (2008) emphasizes that for young individuals, music is not merely an artistic endeavor but a fundamental medium through which they explore, affirm, and represent their evolving identities.

Elena found in music a powerful tool for building friendships and social networks, which were important not only for her personal identity formation but also for her sense of belonging in the community. These relationships, cultivated through collective music-making, allowed her to navigate her cultural identity more fluidly and with greater confidence. Her story illustrates the social impacts of music in creating bonds and fostering a sense of community among youth, supporting the notion that music can shape and reflect both individual and collective identities (Frith, 1996).

Nathan's experiences as an immigrant youth, emphasize the familial and friendship-oriented aspects of the steelband community. The "family-like" atmosphere at Pan Champs

provided a foundation for building strong interpersonal connections, which were important for his broader Caribbean identity development. The communal music-making activities fostered a sense of home and belonging, which was especially important for him as someone navigating between his Barbadian roots and his new life in the US. His narrative highlights how music can be a crucial element in bridging cultural gaps and fostering a cohesive identity in diaspora contexts, as noted by Rice (2007).

These findings support the broader discourse on music's role in identity formation within multicultural and diasporic contexts (Jung, 2014; Kyker, 2013; Stokes, 2004).

**Cultural Identity and Music Education.** Elena's experience within the educational system shows how traditional school music programs often marginalize minority cultural expressions. Although sidelined by her school's music program—which did not accommodate the steelpan or fully recognize its cultural significance—Elena's identity and musical engagement were not stifled. Instead, this lack of support propelled her to seek and participate in community music spaces where her cultural background and musical preferences were celebrated. The existence of such community music platforms played an important role in ensuring that Elena's cultural identity continued to flourish. These community spaces—including her family's band, CSP, and Pan Champs—allowed her to connect with her cultural roots through the steelpan, fostering a robust sense of identity that might have been otherwise compromised.

Elena's journey raises critical questions: How might her musical and cultural identity have developed if community music settings were absent? Would she have been able to find a similar sense of belonging and cultural expression without these supportive environments? This highlights the risk of cultural erasure that students might face when educational institutions fail to embrace a broad spectrum of musical expressions. For Elena, the community music setting

was not merely an alternative; it was a necessary refuge providing the cultural validation and engagement absent in her school experience. Her journey through these in-school and community learning environments also influenced her perspective as an educator, compelling her to advocate for a more inclusive and culturally comprehensive approach to music education.

These findings align with the literature on cultural identity and music education, which emphasizes the implications of how educational systems handle diverse cultural backgrounds. Scholars like Banks (1993) and Abril (2013) have examined the dynamics within educational settings that often prioritize dominant cultural ideologies and musical traditions, potentially marginalizing minority cultural expressions. This prioritization not only communicates a hierarchy of cultural values but can also impact the identity formation of students from diverse backgrounds. Hess (2015) extends this critique by highlighting how the predominance of Western classical music in school curricula can sideline other musical traditions, such as those from the Caribbean, thereby affecting the cultural identity development of students associated with these traditions.

This juxtaposition of Elena's experiences against the backdrop of scholarly discussions by Banks, Abril, and Hess illustrates a critical gap in formal music education—a gap that community music settings strive to fill. These settings emerge as essential environments for safeguarding cultural diversity and ensuring that all musical traditions have a place in the educational narrative, thereby promoting a more inclusive and equitable approach to cultural identity formation in music education.

**Cultural Identity and Media.** In the context of the present study, the utilization of steelpan music within popular media exemplifies how cultural identity is shaped and reinforced. The integration of steelpan sounds by mainstream artists such as Grover Washington, Jr., 50

Cent, Selena Gomez, Soulja Boy, Jimmy Buffet, and John Williams showcases the instrument's broad appeal and its ability to reach diverse audiences. This serves to subtly educate and familiarize global listeners with an element of Caribbean culture.

As discussed in Chapter 1, a recent episode of *Sesame Street* highlighted the cultural significance of steelpan through the character Wes, and his father, Elijah. This narrative illustrates how media platforms can participate in cultural dialogue, embedding a sense of pride and historical awareness in young viewers. With *Sesame Street* reaching a global audience, its messages about cultural diversity and heritage have the potential to shape the cultural perceptions and identities of current and future generations.

By comparing these media portrayals with the experiences of participants in the Caribbean Cultural Academy, where individuals like Nathan and Elena use pop culture references and incorporate popular tunes in the repertoire that the students perform, we see a vivid example of how media can influence identity formation. These instances reveal the potential of media and popular culture not only to entertain but also to educate and shape identities in ways that bridge traditional cultural expressions with modern global influences.

Arnett (2002) emphasized the influence of media on shaping cultural identity, particularly noting its impact on youth in forming bicultural identities. This observation helps to understand the nature of cultural exposure that young people face today, as they navigate identities spanning both their heritage and the broader, globalized culture. Media can reinforce cultural roots while simultaneously introducing new, blended cultural experiences. The findings of this study align with these perspectives, demonstrating how the presence of steelpan music in popular media and programs like *Sesame Street* aids in cultural identity formation, supporting the assertions by

scholars like Arnett's (2002) assertions on the significant role media plays in identity development.

The examination of community music programs like Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA) and Caribbean Steel Pulse (CSP) highlights their important role in supporting cultural identity and facilitating the expression of diasporic identities. These programs serve as vibrant arenas for cultural engagement and preservation, acting as both unifying forces and spaces for social identity negotiation. They provide platforms where cultural identities are expressed, contested, and reaffirmed, demonstrating the importance of understanding the specific cultural contexts and diverse backgrounds of participants. The study emphasizes the integrative role of community music in combining cultural, educational, and social objectives, promoting both individual growth and community cohesion. This finding aligns with scholarly discussions on music's role in shaping identity, emphasizing its capacity as an agent for cultural negotiation and identity formation. Community music settings are identified as vital platforms for young individuals to engage with their cultural heritage and explore their evolving identities in multicultural environments, particularly where traditional cultural expressions are at risk of being overshadowed by dominant narratives. By juxtaposing these findings with existing literature, it becomes evident that community music programs facilitate the interplay of cultural preservation, identity negotiation, and community integration, offering valuable insights into the intersections of music, culture, and identity in contemporary settings.

### **Connecting the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study integrates scholarly perspectives and experiential insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of community music in cultural engagement, education, identity formation, and immigrant experiences. This

framework, which emphasizes the interconnected social, pedagogical, and cultural dimensions of community music, was crucial in guiding the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

In applying this framework to the study, it became clear that community music settings like the Caribbean Cultural Academy and Pan Champs play a pivotal role in fostering cultural identity and continuity. The framework's focus on the interconnectedness of cultural elements was reflected in the participants' experiences, particularly in how they navigated their Caribbean identities within the broader diasporic community in the US. For example, Nathan's journey from an unexamined ethnic identity to one of ethnic identity achievement highlighted how community music can serve as a critical space for identity exploration and affirmation.

The framework's emphasis on the pedagogical dimensions of community music was also evident. The study found that the blend of traditional and innovative teaching methods at CCA, including rote learning and the use of sheet music, catered to diverse learning needs and enriched students' understanding of their musical heritage. This dual approach supported the holistic development of students, underscoring the framework's premise that varied pedagogical practices are essential for effective music education. The social dimensions of the framework were reflected in the communal and service-oriented nature of the CCA. The organization's commitment to providing support and developmental opportunities for youth through music exemplified the role of service in community music. The voluntary contributions of alumni and community members, who engaged in mentoring, teaching, and administrative roles, highlighted the importance of social engagement and support networks, which are central to the framework.

The conceptual framework also helped illuminate the broader implications of community music for cultural preservation and social cohesion. By focusing on how music intersects with cultural identity and serves as a symbol of socio-political narratives, the study demonstrated that

community music programs are vital spaces for maintaining cultural continuity. Participants like Cecilia, Nathan, Debbie, and Elena were able to explore and express their heritage, reinforcing the framework's assertion that community music is integral to cultural and identity formation.

Overall, the conceptual framework was instrumental in guiding the study and interpreting the findings. It provided a lens through which to understand the role of community music in the lives of the participants. My findings validated the framework's emphasis on the interconnectedness of cultural, social, and pedagogical elements, highlighting the significant impact of community music on cultural engagement, education, and identity formation.

### **Implications for the Profession**

#### ***Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Teaching Approaches***

Music Education conferences are often laden with discussions about culturally relevant pedagogy and creating inclusive spaces. The findings in this study emphasize the importance of putting these discussions into practice by adopting inclusive and culturally responsive teaching approaches. Elena's case illustrates this well: although her school music teacher appeared to show interest in her steelpan, he did not take further action to include it as part of her in-school experience. For Debbie, the teaching methods at CCA that led her to achieving musical fulfillment were absent in her formal education space, resulting in a negative experience. These examples highlight the need for school music educators to use examples from community music spaces to create inclusive environments where young musicians can identify with and develop a sense of musical identity and positive experiences both within and outside of school.

#### ***Broadened Curricula and Teacher Training***

Educators should broaden their curricula to include a wider array of musical traditions that honor the cultural heritages of their students and communities. Music teacher training

programs must emphasize cultural competence and the integration of diverse musical practices within their curricula. Pre-service music educators should gain practical experience by participating in ensembles outside the Western European classical tradition and engaging with youth-serving community music organizations as part of their internships. Training should also include strategies for arranging music for non-traditional instrument groupings, enabling students and educators to incorporate diverse cultural backgrounds and diverse musical practices into the classroom setting. For example, if Elena's band director had been trained to adapt parts from the wind ensemble repertoire to her steelpan, she could have been included in the school band.

### ***Shifting from the Western European Art Music Focus***

This shift from the conventional Western European art music (WAM) focus could enhance the learning experience for all students and facilitate the development of their cultural identities. Moving away from an exclusive emphasis on WAM and incorporating diverse musical traditions could foster a more inclusive environment where students from various backgrounds see their heritage valued, boosting engagement and confidence. Elena's and Nathan's stories underscore the importance of these inclusive methods. Nathan, an immigrant youth, found a community of other Caribbean immigrants and second-generation Caribbean youth who were proud of their heritage in community spaces. This sense of belonging was crucial for his cultural identity development. For students from Western European backgrounds, exposure to diverse musical traditions may broaden their musical perspectives and appreciation, enhancing their understanding of global music, and potentially fostering open-mindedness and cultural empathy. This approach can also inspire creativity through exposure to new rhythms, scales, harmonies, instruments, etc.

### ***Accessibility and Inclusivity in Music Education***

Caribbean Steel Pulse (CSP) exemplifies successful accessible and inclusive music education. By providing subsidized tuition, CSP's parent organization, the Caribbean Cultural Academy (CCA), ensures that financial constraints do not prevent participation. This approach contrasts sharply with many school-based music programs where the necessity to purchase or rent instruments can exclude economically disadvantaged students. CCA simplifies entry by eliminating formal applications like Free and Reduced Meals (FARMs) forms, making the registration process more welcoming, especially for youth from non-English-speaking households. Additionally, CCA does not consider immigration status a barrier, ensuring music education is accessible to all, regardless of legal or citizenship status.

### ***Systemic Changes and Equitable Practices***

The community-based approach of CSP highlights the limitations and challenges within formal education systems, which often require students to buy or rent instruments. This comparison underscores the need for systemic changes within formal educational settings to adopt more equitable practices, ensuring all students have opportunities to explore and develop their musical talents. The provision of instruments and meals at CCA creates a welcoming environment that fosters continuous engagement, promoting a sense of community and belonging among participants. Considering the steelband approach, where most people do not own their own instrument, this model could translate effectively to wind ensembles or orchestras. Implementing a panyard-like practice model, where instruments are shared and provided by the institution, could make these musical experiences more accessible. This approach would lower financial barriers, encourage participation from a wider demographic, and promote a communal learning environment, similar to the inclusive practices seen in community music settings.

### ***Learning Methods and Community Engagement***

Both rote learning and communal learning played important roles in fostering a sense of community and belonging. At Pan Champs, rote learning is the predominant teaching method, while at CCA, these methods are employed alongside other pedagogical approaches. Traditional music education in many schools predominantly focuses on Western European notation systems. While working from Western notation can be a valuable tool, this approach may inhibit the development of aural skills by becoming overly reliant on visual aids. Nathan expressed how integrating varied teaching techniques, including rote and communal learning, enhances aural skills and reinforces communal and inclusive learning environments. This approach echoes the successful practices observed at Pan Champs and Caribbean Steel Pulse.

### ***Spatial Marginalization and Integration***

A notable trend in the location of these ensembles reflects a subtle form of "othering." CSP began in the Carters' basement, moved to a church basement, and is now situated in the basement level of an apartment complex. Pan Champs currently operates from the lower level of a church, having previously been located in a rented space adjacent to a tire shop and near train tracks. This experience contrasts with the open community spaces in Trinidad, where steelbands practice in residential areas. These placements, partly due to practical considerations like noise levels and the portability of the instruments, also indicate a lack of mainstream acceptance and integration. In educational settings, steelbands are often placed as lobby entertainment prior to main events featuring ensembles like wind bands and string orchestras on stage. Addressing this issue involves recognizing the importance of these cultural practices and integrating them more visibly within community spaces.

### ***Centering Black Music***

The Caribbean Cultural Academy is a powerful community that centers Caribbean identity while actively working to increase the visibility and knowledge of steelband as an art form. By providing a space where the cultural heritage of the Caribbean is celebrated and preserved, CCA offers a vibrant contrast to the marginalization of Black music often seen in schools and other mainstream music spaces. At CCA, Black music is not an afterthought or an elective; it is the core of their programming and pedagogy. The academy fosters an environment where students can explore and embrace their cultural roots through music, engaging in learning experiences that highlight the rich history and traditions of the steelband. This inclusive approach ensures that students see their identities reflected and valued, promoting a sense of pride and belonging. Additionally, CCA's commitment to cultural education extends beyond music performance, incorporating historical and social contexts into their teaching methods. This holistic model not only nurtures musical talent but also empowers students with a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage, counteracting the often superficial or tokenistic inclusion of Black music in traditional educational settings. By doing so, CCA not only preserves the art form but also challenges and redefines the narrative around Black music in broader cultural conversations.

Music educators and institutions should look to models like CCA to integrate more comprehensive and culturally responsive curricula in their programs. This includes making Black music central to music education rather than peripheral, and ensuring that the historical and social contexts of these music forms are taught alongside performance. By doing so, educators can create more inclusive and representative learning environments that respect and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of all students. Additionally, adopting similar community-based

approaches can help bridge the gap between in-school education and cultural heritage, potentially fostering a more inclusive and engaging atmosphere for music learning.

### ***Conclusion***

By addressing these implications, the field of music education can progress toward more inclusive, accessible, and culturally responsive practices. Such an evolution could not only nurture musical skills but also strengthen “community ties and supports the cultural identity formation of its participants.

### **Implications for Future Research**

#### ***Insider Knowledge***

The findings of this study, particularly in relation to the influence of insider knowledge on the depth of understanding achieved, raise important considerations for future research within community music settings and similar cultural contexts. My position as an insider, with direct ties and personal experiences within the Caribbean steelband community, enriched the interpretation of participant narratives and the overall analysis. This insider perspective facilitated a nuanced comprehension of the cultural nuances and the intricate dynamics of the community, which might have otherwise been overlooked by an outsider. This intimate knowledge of the community allowed me to access deeper layers of meaning in participant responses and observe subtleties in interactions that might be missed by someone without such background. For instance, understanding the Caribbean panyard environment provided a richer context for analyzing Nathan’s experiences at Pan Champs.

Given the benefits of insider knowledge as demonstrated in this study, future research in similar contexts should consider the engagement strategies of researchers relative to their subjects. While not essential, having an insider or collaborating closely with someone who

possesses deep connections to the community can greatly enhance the richness of the data collected and the authenticity of the findings. This approach can also help in navigating the cultural sensitivities and complexities that are often inherent in such communities, ensuring that the research is conducted respectfully and ethically.

While my insider position offered benefits as a researcher, it also required me to constantly check my biases and preconceptions to ensure they did not unduly influence the research outcomes. I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process, documenting my reflections, potential biases, and the evolution of my thoughts. This journal was supplemented by voice notes recorded before and after site visits, allowing me to capture immediate reflections and feelings. Engaging in regular discussions with a neutral peer debriefer also provided an external perspective on the research process and helped me recognize and manage my biases.

My dual role as an insider and researcher likely created an environment where participants felt a mix of pride and pressure to perform well. This dynamic highlighted the importance of reflexivity in recognizing and accounting for the ways my presence might have shaped the data collection process. It emphasizes the need for researchers in similar positions to remain vigilant about their influence on the research setting and to employ strategies to minimize any potential biases.

This reflection on the role of insider knowledge highlights the need for careful consideration of researcher positionality in studies dealing with cultural and community-focused themes. As such, this study serves as a catalyst for further scholarly discourse on effective research methodologies in culturally specific and community-engaged settings.

### ***Future Areas of Research***

In the field of music education, future ethnographic case studies should explore the dynamics of insider versus outsider research in community music settings to further understand how these positions impact data collection, participant interaction, and interpretation of findings. Investigating these dynamics can provide valuable guidelines for conducting culturally sensitive and impactful research, enhancing the theoretical and practical contributions to the field of community music and beyond. This reflection on the role of insider knowledge highlights the need for careful consideration of researcher positionality in studies dealing with cultural and community-focused themes. As such, this study may serve as a catalyst for further scholarly discourse on effective research methodologies in culturally specific and community-engaged settings.

Future research should explore community music organizations in various regions of the US to understand how different cultural and demographic contexts influence their operation and impact. This study focused on a metropolitan area with a vibrant Caribbean immigrant population, where the Caribbean Cultural Academy plays a central role in preserving and promoting steelband music. Investigating similar organizations in areas with fewer Caribbean immigrants or in rural settings could reveal unique challenges and opportunities. For instance, in regions without a strong Caribbean presence, community music organizations might need to adopt different strategies to engage participants and foster cultural identity. These studies could examine how organizations adapt their programming to local cultural contexts and the extent to which they are able to create inclusive spaces that celebrate diverse music traditions. Comparing these findings with those from metropolitan areas can provide an understanding of the varying

needs and effective practices across different community music settings, contributing valuable insights to the field community music.

### **Final Thoughts**

The profound connection between music and cultural identity development unearthed in this study accentuates the importance of community music programs in the US, particularly those that are rooted in the music of diasporic communities. These programs do more than teach music; they serve as vessels for cultural preservation, cultural continuity, education, and personal development. They offer a platform where youth and adults can explore, develop, and express their identities through their own cultural heritage. This experience is particularly important for immigrants and members of diasporic communities, as music is part of culture and becomes a bridge to their heritage, connecting them to roots that might otherwise be buried deep in their everyday environments.

Furthermore, the study highlights the need for music educators to embrace a broader, more inclusive approach to curriculum development. In the US, the traditional focus on Western European classical art music, while valuable, does not fully represent the contributions of global musics. As an educator, I see the necessity of integrating diverse musical traditions into our teaching practices not just as an enhancement of the curriculum but as a critical step towards fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive educational environment.

This research has also reinforced the importance of practical accessibility in music education. The model implemented by the Caribbean Cultural Academy, where barriers to entry are minimized, exemplifies how music programs can be made accessible to all. This approach is something that I strongly advocate for, believing that no one should be denied the opportunity to pursue musical education due to economic or bureaucratic constraints like forms.

As I conclude this study, my final thoughts linger on the potential for future research to further explore and expand on these themes. There is a rich field of inquiry available in the intersections of music, identity, and community that can continue to inform and improve our practices as educators and community leaders. This study amplifies the voices of Cecilia, Mike, Elena, Nathan, and Debbie in the ongoing dialogue about the role of music in shaping our social and cultural landscapes. I am eager to see how future scholars and practitioners will build upon this work to continue making a difference in the lives of individuals and communities around the globe.

As I reflect on the culmination of this research journey, the insights garnered from Caribbean Steel Pulse and Pan Champs not only enhance my academic pursuits but also resonate with me on a deeper, more personal level. As an educator, immigrant, steelpan practitioner, researcher, and a member of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, I have traversed the journey of cultural identity development, educational inclusivity, and community engagement that this study explores. In essence, this journey has not only been an academic exercise but a personal reaffirmation of my life's work and values. It has been a privilege to merge my professional insights with my personal experiences, contributing to a field that is as dynamic and vibrant as the music it celebrates.

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