Using solo and small ensemble instruction to promote lifelong engagement in music by challenging the large ensemble method of orchestra instruction through P.A.R.

by

S. Justin Zeleski

B.A. Ed., University of Nebraska – Kearney, 2005
M.Ed., American Intercontinental University, 2007

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2022

Abstract

High School graduation often marks a point where students, who have participated in music, drop out of participation. Misconceptions, inequitable skill development, and an overemphasis on semi-professional large ensembles continue to perpetuate this problem. This 7-month qualitative study in Millard, Nebraska used Participatory Action Research (PAR) to develop, implement, and empower students to become independent musicians by closing a null curriculum centered around the exclusion of solo preparation and small ensemble instruction. Over the span of eight weeks, students engaged in self-directed learning during the class period after which they answered surveys and interview questions to get to the heart of their experience. The results indicated that students enjoyed participating in the unit and developed practical skills that all independent musicians use while simultaneously maintaining the mandated school curriculum and large ensemble expectations. Limitation of schedule, demographics, and SES invite opportunities for further research while curricular recommendations can provide a foundation for future curriculum development centered around skill acquisition, student-directed education, and lifelong learning.

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Major Professor
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

For most of my career, I taught orchestra at the middle school level in the Clark County School District of Las Vegas, Nevada.[1] My responsibilities included starting students in their orchestral learning in grade six and moving them to a proficient level by grade eight. The goal was to prepare them for the high school teachers who would round off their educational experience. After teaching there for twelve years, I moved to Omaha, Nebraska. In Nebraska, I took over as a high school orchestra director for a large suburban school. For the first year, I did what most teachers do in a new position; survive and maintain or improve the program's quality. There was a steep learning curve with many unique challenges that were different from teaching middle school. The hardest thing I had to do was figure out the end game.

There is no explicit goal at the high school level as at the middle school. The end game for middle school is obvious; get the kids ready for high school. However, at the secondary level there is not a natural continuance once a student graduates. Students may attend college, trade school, find a job, or simply cease their education. High school graduation marks the end of secondary schooling, and likewise the end of easy opportunities to perform with musical groups such as orchestras (Myers, 2008). Therefore, if a graduate does not have the requisite skills needed to gain admittance into college, community, or small ensembles, they may end up excluded entirely regardless of desire and access. In John Kratus's article, *A Return to Amateurism in Music Education* (2019), he argues that secondary education lost sight of the purpose of music education when it became infatuated with semi-professionalism and the competition of musical performances that sprung up in the early 1920s. This emphasis had the

[1] Grades 6-8.

effect of alienating many potential students who were not interested in what has now become scholastic musical performance. In another article, Kratus noted that the opportunities for musicians to play in orchestras and bands are diminishing and becoming excessively competitive. At the same time, the number of performing groups has steadily dropped over the past several decades (Kratus, 2007). This problem begs several fundamental questions:

- Why do we prepare students in our classes and push them toward mastery when the chances of either getting a job or playing in a group are so drastically uneven?
- Is music alone enough?
- Was I doing a disservice by teaching students and helping them invest in a skill they may never use again?
- For what are the students preparing?

As I asked myself these questions, it was tempting to sit back and say, yes, music alone is enough. For this fixed moment, I was providing a service for the students. However, at that point, I was confronted by the stories I have heard from so many adults, young college students, and hairdressers when I told them what I do.

Throughout my professional career, I have asked anyone who says they used to play in an orchestra why they quit. Usually, I get a range of answers like it costs too much, I was not good enough, I did not know I could play in the orchestra while doing my other studies, or they did not know where they could play. Most of the time, our conversation will conclude with me advising them how they could start again, but knowing that few will try to do it. It is so much easier to continue playing than it is to restart. Over time, I realized what I must do for my students to continue to play music, and I would educate others about the common misconceptions about

playing music as an adult. From this point on, the endgame for the high school orchestra was preparation for a musical life.

One of my passions is Taekwondo. In my school, I was taught that Taekwondo stops being an activity at the blackbelt level and becomes a lifestyle. A blackbelt identifies that a student has become proficient at the art. In music class, we also identify students as proficient. Many students may be considered highly proficient or advanced by the time they graduate high school. At that point, music should not be an activity but a lifestyle. How one defines a musical life can be somewhat subjective.

There are many ways people can engage with music, ranging from continued participation in music-making on one end of the spectrum to simply being aware of music in an educative and proactive way (Weidner, 2020). As alluded to before, I will define musical life as a lifestyle. In this lifestyle, the person is actively involved in music by performing for themselves or others. At the very least, each student possesses the skills, knowledge, and ability to play. The logical follow-up question is, what skills and knowledge should a student know? This question is at the heart of many different curricular philosophies. However, here it can be generalized as the ability to play the music the performer chooses. As a basis of learning, the skills and knowledge change because they depend on the performer's musical choices. The challenge is that this needs to lend itself more readily to application in the heterogenous orchestra class where there may be upwards of 60 students at a time.

The traditional model of teaching orchestra tends to be utilitarian in purpose (Mark & Madura, 2013) and teacher-centric (Allsup & Benedict, 2008) while also prejudicial toward any other styles of music than western music(Abramo & Bernard, 2020; Kratus, 2019). While efforts have been made to address these issues (Mark & Madura, 2013; Raessler & Kimpton, 2003), the

fact remains that students who get a classical education in most public schools are learning and experiencing music in a way that runs counter to that of most actual working and amateur musicians (Kratus, 2007). As a gigging musician in Las Vegas, I was asked to perform several hours' worth of music from memory and was responsible for preparing and rehearsing on my own. I was rarely given sheet music to use at the gig, and nearly all paying gigs involved covering or writing popular music styles. This reality highlights how musical engagement, and performance, has changed since the traditional ensembles first entered the curriculum in the late 1800s. Therefore, the way we teach music should also change. Yet, offering orchestra in schools is as important and valuable as ever. How we teach orchestra, and the way students should use their instrument, needs evolving. What needs to change so we can meet this new reality? Who gets to decide what is essential in the curriculum? Addressing these questions is one of this study's aims: to see if a group of invested stakeholders can make the sorts of decisions that might produce for themselves a working system that empowers each orchestra student to continue toward a post-graduation full of music and the benefits it provides.

In this chapter, I will outline the following issues: my subjectivities, operational definitions, the rationale for the study, the theoretical perspective, the research purpose, methodology and methods, research questions, limitations/possibilities, and a summary of the chapter.

Subjectivities

Kakali Bhattacharya (2017) suggests that the best way to understand your subjectivity is to consider your subject positions. These positions are attached to labels you use to identify yourself. Alan Peshkin (1993) states that one's subjectivity "affects the results of all…investigation" and is "an amalgam of the persuasions that stem from the circumstances of

one's class, statuses, and values interacting with the particulars of one's object of investigation" (Peshkin, 1988, p.17). Therefore, to understand my subjectivities, I must first itemize my positions. Then I can better understand how these subjectivities will interact with the analysis and findings of the study.

I have many labels that I attach to myself. The ones that probably most pertain to this specific study include the following:

- Teacher,
- Poor economic upbringing,
- Musician,
- College graduate student,
- Graduate researcher,
- Realist,
- Social Constructivist, and
- Social-Meliorist.

I needed to be mindful of each of these labels because of the power attached to them. This power affects how I behave, believe, and interpret the world around me. Also, some of these labels can influence others.

First, I must address two essential subjects: a teacher and a graduate researcher. Each subjectivity holds a different kind of power. As the teacher, I am recognized as the authority in the room in both subject matter and behavioral enforcement. I am authorized to control each student's grades, status in the orchestra, and general freedom through assigned tasks and room management. Also, I influence students outside of the classroom because I can directly communicate with parents. Considering these powers, I behave as an authority, assuming that

students obey my directives. Likewise, I assume that students know of these powers and behave accordingly. This understanding is a nonverbal contract that all participants, including myself, have been conditioned to observe. However, this role differs from the role I played in this study. If I was not conscious of this position, it would have been easy to slip into teacherlike scripts or assumptions, which could have negatively affected the power dynamic of the group. I performed the role of researcher, which likewise brings powers, assumptions, and behaviors.

Researchers hold powers that differ from the teachers but are essential to understand. In the researcher's role, I was seen as an authority regarding my subject because the school administration gave me the authority to conduct the study. This authority could have influenced the participants' behaviors around me. As I conducted observations and discussed topics with students, there was the possibility that their behaviors would change because they were being observed. The consequence was that I must assume, to a certain extent, that students were giving me the answers I wanted instead of the actual answers. Developing a meaningful relationship with the study participants and properly explaining my role as a researcher was vital to the study's success. These positions were further complicated because I was both teacher and a researcher. My ability to walk the line between these two personas was highly dependent on my ability to be open, honest, and transparent with my participants so that they felt comfortable enough, to be honest, open, and transparent with me about their perceptions.

My subjectivity of being a musician and college student was vital because they brought prejudices regarding the value of musical life and university attendance. As a musician, I value music highly as a subject and assume that because my students are in my class to learn about music, they must also. However, this assumption is only sometimes the case, and I needed to keep it in mind when working with the study participants. Being a college student and graduate, I

place a high value on preparations for admittance into colleges and universities and see those as the natural progression of students from high school. My perspective does not mean I devalue people and students who choose not to attend university. My perception regarding my study participants is that they should naturally flow into the college/university setting. My subjective stance directly relates to the nature of my study.

Initially, I looked at the gap between college and high school orchestra participation. Later I changed my perspective to explore what the natural progression of becoming a musician should be. This exploration allowed me to discover that my position from high school to college was flawed because, as one of my students said, "we're not all going to be music majors." With my previous understanding dismantled, I needed a more holistic view of high school music instruction. I came to understand that my orchestra class was a mode to teach students the ways that music can bring satisfaction and meaning to my students' lives. With this understanding in mind, the curriculum had to be changed from one focused on the traditional preparations for classically trained musicians to one that developed independently stable musicians capable of charting their musical course. This curriculum would center on the student's needs and the skills necessary to continue making music independently.

The most significant impact on my view of music education comes from my experience as a student, my family's values, and my parents' experience and post-graduate life. I was raised by very well-educated parents who worked in nonprofit careers. Consequentially, no funds were available for the private instruction I needed to pursue a musical career. Experiencing the inequity in music education drives my passion when dealing with social injustice. As a result of this life experience, I am naturally biased toward the success of the intervention we created. I feared I would do something in my analytical process that would skew the results to a favorable

outcome. I attempted to counter this urge by utilizing a more democratic form of research in the form of Participatory Action Research. The added voices from the committee checked against my natural inclination toward the success of the intervention.

The final listed subjectivities are those of a realist, social constructivist, and social meliorist. Realism and social constructivism come together to reflect the philosophical stance that there is such a thing as reality and that we can experience and are influenced by it. Once we have observed or experienced something real, we can construct our social understanding. The stance of social constructivism affects how I teach as I am constantly engaging with my students in a group setting to define music and how we produce it. This stance is crucial because it will change how I view things and learn them in the analytical process.

Being a social meliorist is closely tied to my views on social justice and the idea of fairness in schools. People deserve to have a fair chance to succeed in life. Therefore, when I see injustice, it motivates me to action. This stance could have impacted how I interacted with the study's participants. For example, when I observed students being left out of groups, it was tough to keep from intervening.

My default worldview is contained within these subjectivities. Therefore, to accurately observe my participants in this study, I need to be aware of how my views are biased. Once I am aware of my tendencies, I can take corrective measures to ensure a less subjective view of what is occurring. This understanding was necessary to avoid biases and correctly play my part in the study.

Operational Constructs

Table 1.1

Listing of Operational Constructs

Construct	Definition/Background
Curricula and Curriculum	There are several definitions of curriculum, which can be significantly influenced by the philosophical foundations from which the user subscribes. For example, Cleo Cherryholmes (1988) defines curriculum as “a study of what is valued and given priority and what is disvalued and excluded” (p.132). In contrast, Elliot Eisner defines curriculum as "a series of events intended to have educational consequences, often conceived as a set of plans or materials" (Eisner, 1984, p.259). In this case, the word curriculum refers to both ideas. It was both a series of educational events and a plan that is the expressed educational values of the educational institution.
Curriculum-in-Use	The definition of curriculum-in-use is from the article by Daniela Jeder (2013) and refers to the curriculum that is taught and not just planned.
Explicit Curriculum	Those things explicitly taught in schools (Eisner, 2002)
Individualized Focus & Instruction	Many systems produce excellent musicians, and many teachers address the individual acquisition of skill development. However, this term is used throughout the paper to signify the development of the individual musician from a holistic stance. Understanding this position means they are recipients of a completed education that considers the necessity for a student to be successful as soloists and small ensemble members within the traditional confines of the large ensemble orchestra.

Lifelong Engagement	Lifelong Engagement is defined as participating in musical activities including but not limited to composition, practicing, performing, and generally engaging with music as an art over the course of one's life.
MCAs	Model Cornerstone Assessments. A "instructional and assessment framework into which teachers integrate their curriculum to help measure student learning" (NAfME, 2014b)
Musicing	According to David J. Elliott "Musicing is a contraction of music making. By musicing we mean all forms of music making" (Elliott & Silverman, 2014, p. 16)
Null Curriculum	Defined by Elliot Eisner (2002), a null curriculum deals with what schools do not teach implicitly or explicitly. The null curriculum has the effect of being taught by its absence. Daniela Jeder further elaborates that the null curriculum is not taught because it "is not important for their [the student's] training and therefore for the society in which they live" (Jeder, 2013). The null curriculum is also sometimes referred to as a hidden curriculum.
Semi-Professional Ensembles	This term describes a musical group that acts and performs like a professional group but is not paid. Many bands and orchestras around the country are semi-professional ensembles. They put on public performances, have required uniforms, spend thousands on new music and instruments, and often compete against one another for pride and awards.
Standards	This term is short for an educational standard. An educational standard defines the outcomes that students should achieve through the course of their studies. Often this is set by state and federal governments, but professional organizations such as NAfME have their own recommended standards that teacher professionals follow.
PAR	Participatory Action Research. A branch of Action Research where participants and the researcher are placed on equal footing in making research decisions.

The Rationale for the Study

Over the past 20 years, many studies have focused on music's cognitive and emotional benefits (MakeMusic Inc., 2011; Mark & Gary, 1999; Mark & Madura, 2013; Mattulke, 2019; Raessler & Kimpton, 2003; Schmidt, 1996; The Royal Conservatory, 2014; Vitale, 2011). Through these efforts, music education advocates have routinely defended music's position within the hierarchy of academic subjects by propagandizing the extra-educational benefits such as cognitive development, increased reading ability, improved motor function, increased focus, full brain development, improved social skills, improved test scores, and improved attendance (MakeMusic Inc., 2011; The Royal Conservatory, 2014). There are many scientific and cognitive reasons for teaching music in schools. However, the main reason people teach music and engage in music is not its scientific benefits but because there is something about engaging with music that makes people feel good and because they love it (Raessler & Kimpton, 2003). In a 2016 article, Bergee et al. (2016) found that love of music was one of the key reasons people choose to become musicians (and music educators) after high school. Unfortunately, no matter how much a student loves music, many roadblocks stand in the way of their continued participation. Opportunities to perform music after high school often require an audition, typically a solo performance favoring classical music. For students in public education, this usually means that they must learn from private teachers instead of classroom teachers (Abramo & Bernard, 2020) or gain knowledge and the ability to find and create performing groups independently (Kuntz, 2011).

The current audition system places students who do not take private lessons at a disadvantage (Abramo & Bernard, 2020). In addition, the current structure of the music curriculum in the United States is centered around large ensembles of the band, choirs, and

orchestras (Mark & Madura, 2013). The overemphasis on large ensemble performances creates an inequitable situation for music students. This situation is perpetuated because of the profession's overreliance on private teachers to train students for auditions. When one looks at the curriculum of orchestra classes, a null curriculum (Eisner, 2002) surrounding solo and small ensemble instruction is evident. Also, the exclusion of small ensembles and solo music from the orchestra class sets an unrealistic expectation for how to engage with music outside of the school.

Research by Krause et al. (2020) shows that how we teach often leads to students developing misconceptions surrounding what it takes to continue enjoying music performance throughout their lives. Other research also finds that limited access to musical opportunities and the inability of music programs to adequately prepare students to play music after high school leads many future musicians to give up after graduation (Lamont, 2011; Myers, 2008). While music educators can do little about external restraints such as time and money, knowledge acquisition and misconceptions can be tackled by better educating the students for lifelong engagement with music. One way the students could be better educated is by closing the null curriculum surrounding independent performance and refocusing the attention of curricula on practical musical goals in addition to technical study.

In 2014 the National Association of Music Educators (NAfME) published a new set of standards emphasizing the Artistic Process of “Creating; Performing/Producing/Presenting; Responding; and Connecting” (NAfME, 2014a; NCCAS, n.d.) Now students are asked to be able to create their programs, justify them in context to the performance, come up with rehearsal and practice strategies, evaluate peer and personal performance, and finally perform (Burrack & Parkes, 2018). This process highlights the development of a complete musician on the individual

level. The new standards also represent new challenges for the music director as most large ensemble musical literature only develops some musicians, leaving those on accompanying parts behind in development (Mark & Madura, 2013). The emphasis on the individual, coupled with little in the way of a nationally accepted secondary music education curriculum, shows that further research is needed to better understand how to develop the individual in the ensemble classroom.

I recently surveyed a social media group for orchestra teachers regarding solo literature and their curriculums. The poll found that 84% of responding teachers thought learning solo literature was necessary and that 50% did not have anything in their curriculum regarding solo literature but thought it was an important subject. This finding mirrors my conversations with other band and orchestra teachers. Despite the understanding that solo literature and small ensemble performance are perceived as necessary, there needs to be more research on how they can be incorporated into the ensemble curriculum. Therefore, part of this study will attempt to start a conversation about the role of solo literature in the high school orchestra ensemble curriculum. Another part will explore possible actions that may assist the future orchestra teacher in preparing students to meet the expectations expressed in the NAfME standards. This outcome should be a more well-rounded and practical education that prepares their students to be self-sufficient musicians.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to bring together orchestra stakeholders in a collaborative effort to discover actionable ways of adapting the curriculum and instructional methods to prepare and empower students for lifelong engagement in music.

Research Questions

Three are many entry points in determining the research questions for a PAR study. One way is to tackle a problem that has been determined in advance that the participants have a stake in (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This study was designed to address the two primary research questions:

1. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to provide students with the necessary skills for lifelong engagement with music?
2. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to empower students to take control of their musical journeys?

Throughout this study, several other questions were added out of intrigue, necessity, and usefulness by members of the PAR committee. Some of these questions warranted further investigation, while others were steppingstones toward the primary questions. These questions will not be enumerated here but may be mentioned throughout this paper.

Methodology

I have chosen to engage in Participatory Action Research (PAR) with the youth and other stakeholders as the methodology for this study. I have done this for several reasons.

1. It has been a long time since I have been a teenager, and I am no longer an expert teenager. Teens today face many challenges and have developed many skills that did not exist when I was a teen. Luckily, I have a classroom full of experts at being a teenager in an orchestra program. I have the theoretical knowledge, the experience as a teacher, and the years of being a musician, but they have the day-to-day lived experience of being a student in my classroom.

2. If there is a problem to be solved involving teenage orchestra students, they should take part in finding a solution that makes sense to them in their real lives as opposed to the imagined lives that adults in power may only glimpse.
3. The differing and sometimes opposing views that parents and administrators can bring to the discussions we will be engaging in are valuable as we tackle a problem involving every level of the educational structure.
4. By shining a light onto the subject of this study from as many different angles as possible, through the lived experiences of parents, teachers, administrators, and students, we can better understand what is happening in our experiments. These different lenses of experience also yielded new and exciting questions, insights, and knowledge that would have been impossible in many cases without them.
5. The purpose of this study lends itself to the practicality of action research, which aims to produce meaningful, actionable, and realistic solutions to a problem within its real-world context. Through this process, new knowledge is gained through experience, that experience is reflected upon, and new learning cycles are designed and attempted.

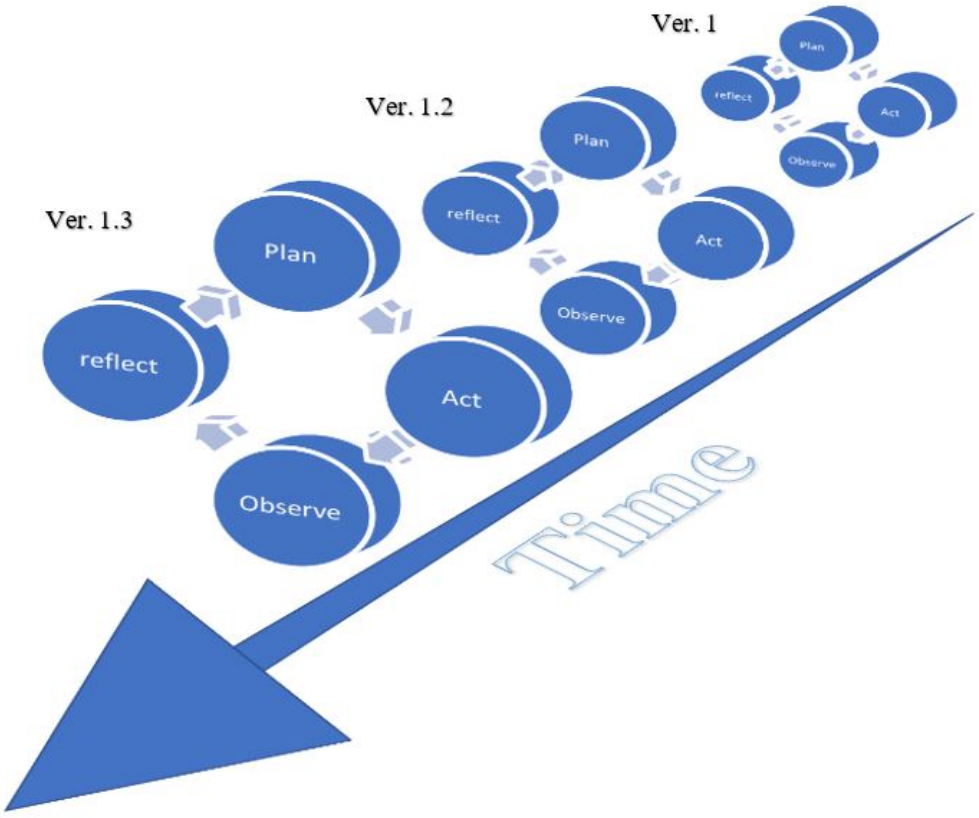
We must first understand its origins and nuances to provide further awareness of the benefits of action research and PAR methodology.

PAR has its roots in the theoretical foundations of action research. Action research is often attributed to social psychology founder Kurt Lewin (1951). Dr. Lewin was tired of research that only produced understanding-based knowledge (Lawson, 2015). He demanded that research also provide actionable knowledge. Several key tenants of action research come from Lewin's writings, including "Knowledge for practice must be derived from practice" and "the knowing is in the doing" (p.xii). Lewin developed a model of inquiry comprising a series of interlocking

cycles consisting of four phases; planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (See Figure 1.1) (Schwandt, 2015).

Figure 1.1

Action Research Cycle



As the researcher continues through the cycles, they can make meaningful inferences about what is going on and then adapt the plan to provide a potentially better solution for the problem. This foundational setting is the basis of all action research, including PAR. However, PAR has its own set of traits that are important to understand.

PAR is the name given to a broad group of action research methodologies (Schwandt, 2015), and Lawson is quick to note that it took much work to find a consensus on its definition

(Lawson, 2015, p.xi). In its simplest form, PAR is action research that values the participation of people other than the lead researcher. Some of the key tenants of PAR include the following:

1. Emphasis on collaboration between the researcher and other participant researchers to define the problem and choose methods.
2. A democratic nature regarding procedural decisions.
3. The objective of producing valuable and actionable knowledge.
4. The hope of empowering people who are often overlooked and oppressed. (Lawson, 2015a; Schwandt, 2015).

One group of oppressed and underappreciated people are the youth of the world.

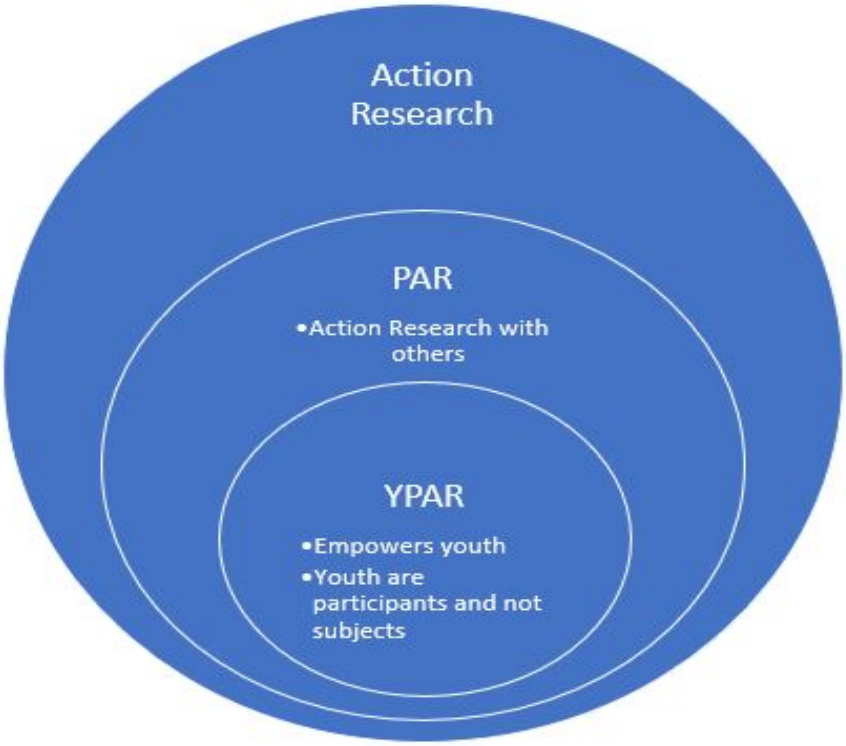
There is a methodological branch designed to empower and assist youth in action research called youth participatory action research (YPAR). YPAR seeks to give a voice to a population of people who are routinely researched on and rarely empowered to create their own research (Lawson, 2015b). Consequentially we know a great deal about their problems and very little about how we can work together to fix them (Bozlak & Kelley, 2015). Before I explain why I was not using YPAR exclusively, I want to give you some background on what YPAR is.

There are many ways to define YPAR. According to Caraballo et al. (2017), YPAR is "a critical research methodology that caries specific epistemological commitments toward reframing who is 'allowed' to conduct and disseminate education research with/about youth in actionable ways." Bozlak and Kelley (2015) describe YPAR as being a methodology that "enfranchises youth as co-researchers" (p.68) by building on their strengths instead of focusing on their problems. They continue that YPAR "is structured to yield solutions (interventions) to significant problems that affect young people…while at the same time providing them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to thrive in life" (p.68). YPAR is a branch of

Participatory Action Research (PAR) that works specifically with youth and trains them to conduct their research as equals to the primary researcher (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Figure 1.2 illustrates the relationship between Action Research, PAR, and YPAR.

Figure 1.2

The Relationships Between Action Research Methodologies



Just as action research builds off each cycle to try and generate more meaningful understanding, each level of action research builds off the previous ones to help a more specified population. In a way, this is not dissimilar to Lewin's action research process. As researchers attempt to aid a population, the methodology is refined and adapted to fit the needs of the researcher and the group. With this understanding, it was possible to see why YPAR would be useful to this study. However, as I mentioned previously, I will not be using YPAR as a methodology.

There are three main reasons why I choose not to use YPAR in this study. The first is that while YPAR is very useful in some settings with youth, there are difficulties when the epistemology of YPAR meets up with the epistemology of schooling. According to a paper written by Christopher J. Buttimer (2015), the epistemology of schooling is a term that represents the current way schools approach teaching and student learning. Under the epistemology of schooling, teachers are the experts who then pass on their knowledge and expertise to the students. This knowledge is measured by standardized tests and awards such as grades, honor roll lists, diplomas, and certificates given out to students by the school. The biggest problem with using YPAR in this study is that it was the anthesis to the epistemology of schooling. YPAR is a critical political position that seeks to not only enfranchise the youth of the project but attempt to flip the power structure currently employed by most high schools in the United States. This political stance is one reason that most YPAR work is conducted outside the school in clinics, summer programs, and extracurricular social organizations, typically led by university researchers (Fine, 2008). Because this study requires that it occur in the classroom and during the school day, it would require more work to properly deploy YPAR strategies.

The second reason YPAR was not used is that it alienates other key stakeholders. In YPAR, the youth are considered equal researchers with the adults, typically university researchers and other teachers, and are also considered key researchers. In this study, other stakeholders, such as parents, wished to participate alongside the youth and other teachers in the research process. Engaging in YPAR would have alienated these stakeholders, who may have valuable insights for the group. To address the needs of the study and the need for curricular revision driving the study, we must also engage with those stakeholders who have the keys of authority over the curriculum and school life. This group is always comprised of adults in key

leadership positions, such as district-level administrators and parents, with only cursorily involvement by youth. To alienate their perspectives leaves the solutions created by the PAR committee open to vulnerabilities. Without the voices of adults, the findings could be rejected at higher organizational levels or be seen as overly liberal to such an extent that solutions would render themselves powerless for implementation once placed abreast of the epistemology of schooling. While the discovery of radically new methods of instruction and curricular design may have merit for the future, they are only valuable if they can be used realistically.

The third and final reason not to use YPAR is that it would exceed the needs of the study. In a typical YPAR study, the students are trained in clinics on theories, methodologies, and analytical methods. They use this knowledge to design and implement their own research without excessive influence by adult participants (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Ginwright, 2008; McIntyre, 2008b). This study had already decided upon the research questions and problem. What was needed was a counsel of stakeholders, which must include interested youth, to carry out the research, assist in collecting data, assist in analyzing the data, and counsel democratically on what steps should be taken next. This methodological need negates some of the political driving of YPAR as emancipatory epistemology. However, PAR as a methodology allowed students to receive the emancipatory empowerment YPAR provides while still including other stakeholders. All members of the PAR committee were equal participants. The committee and the decisions based on collected results were run as a democratically aligned research group. One of the critical decisions we made as a committee was what methods we would use to collect data.

According to Caraballo et al. (2017), data collection methods can be qualitative and quantitative. Therefore, many methods such as surveys, opinion polls, testimonies, focus groups, and interviews could be used. These data collection tools were discussed and chosen by the

committee of researchers. The committee tended to lean on surveys and interviews as collection methods. I included my observations which I kept in a research journal. Also, we established a monthly and sometimes bi-monthly meeting where we engaged in honest and open communication about how the study was going, what it was like to do it, and what adjustments were needed. Each of these decision-making meetings constituted a version of the PAR cycle where we reflected on what we collected, planned the next step, and implemented it. These committee meetings were recorded.[2]

Theoretical Perspective

My theoretical perspective comes from combining three different yet related theories epistemologically linked by social constructionism, student-centered learning, and Participatory Action Research (PAR). These theories are Change Theory, as described by Kurt Lewin, experiential learning theory (ELT), and empowerment theory. Each theory holds keys to understanding the way I looked at this problem.

The absence of individualized instruction produces issues of exclusion which will alienate some students. As a population, students are not always viewed as an oppressed group. Yet, they are routinely subjected to curricula imposed upon them rather than being developed to meet their specific needs. National standards set generalized aims for curriculum planners and leave enough flexibility for school districts to customize instructional goals to meet the needs of students. These new standards are not represented in the current Millard Public School curriculum.[3] Change Theory and PAR both hold that it is necessary to attempt a change in the

[2] Only some meetings could be transcribed, as there were issues with the recordings in a few instances.

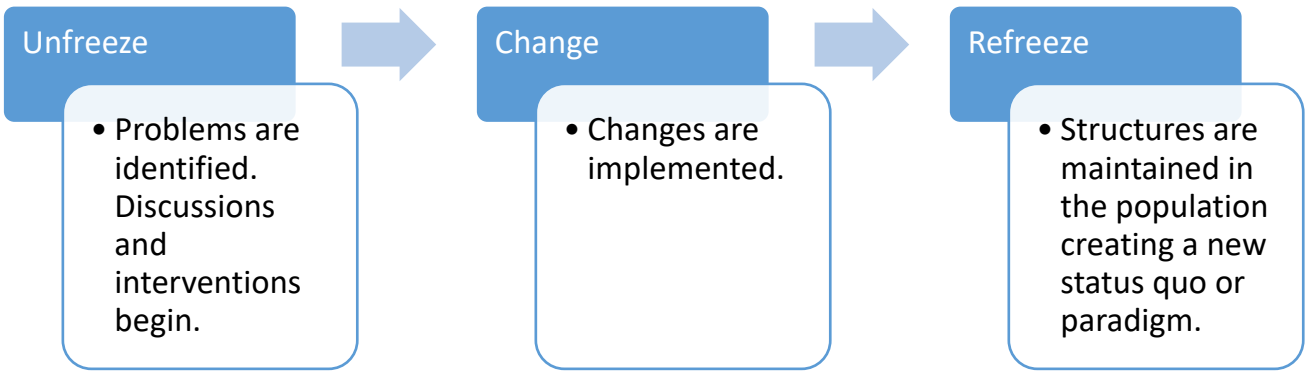
[3] Standards alignment is one of the critical items that the curriculum planning committee is working on, so this should be better represented by the time of this dissertation's publication.

specific context where it is needed (McIntyre, 2008a). To address systematic changes, Kurt Lewin suggested the analogy of reforming an ice cube. This model is often referred to as the unfreeze, change, refreeze model of change or Lewin's Change Theory (Schein, 1999).

In the model proposed by Lewin, we must undergo three distinct phases. Figure 1.3 Illustrates how this three-step process works.

Figure 1.3

Lewin's Change Theory Process



The first step is to unfreeze the system that is currently in place. This step is sometimes done inorganically from a perceived need, and sometimes this is done naturally to a system. The second step is to mold the system into its new form. This part is done by addressing the problems and beginning to discuss and implement the interventions that will eventually lead to the change. The final step is to refreeze the system in the new format. This final process is best done when the entire population where the change is to occur also changes. In this way, one might avoid issues many managers have faced when making personal changes, namely that the person changes but then unlearns the change once integrated into their previous population (Schein,

1999). While this simple three-step process has been lauded for its simplicity, it has also been vilified as too simplistic (Cummings et al., 2016). It is true that there are many elements of change that Lewin's model does not directly address, but as a premise, it works. It explains many of the results we found which is provided in Chapter Four. This theory only partially addressed the problem and was, in many ways, the patriarch of Lewin's model for Participatory Action Research.

Bringing the voices of students, parents, and administrators to the table is a familiar idea when a district wants to make changes. What is different in this study is that it was done within the confines of the orchestra program specifically. PAR is democratic. Therefore, having the group buy into change is a critical element of change theory. For our group, the first thing we did was discuss what our vision for this program would be. The vision we produced was one where the student's need for a voice was heard when making decisions regarding how they engaged with music. These needs were added to the educational goals to provide a musical experience and continue individual student growth in technical/performance skills. This vision helped us to create a new understanding of what an orchestra classroom can do and how it can prepare students for the reality of musical life post-graduation. It also gave us a safe place to discuss change, create interventions, gather and analyze research, and ultimately affect change. We discovered that discussing a change alone did not provide the insights required for authentic learning. To learn, one must also experience, and to teach, one must provide meaningful experiences for our students. This understanding is the key concept behind David Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT).

In David Kolb's book, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (2015), he outlines the process whereby students can learn through experiencing,

reflecting, experimenting, and repeating this process. The following diagrams can help us understand this process. Figure 1.4 is the diagram from Kolb's book, and figure 1.5 is the simplified version I will use with my students.

Figure 1.4

ELT Cycle as per Kolb

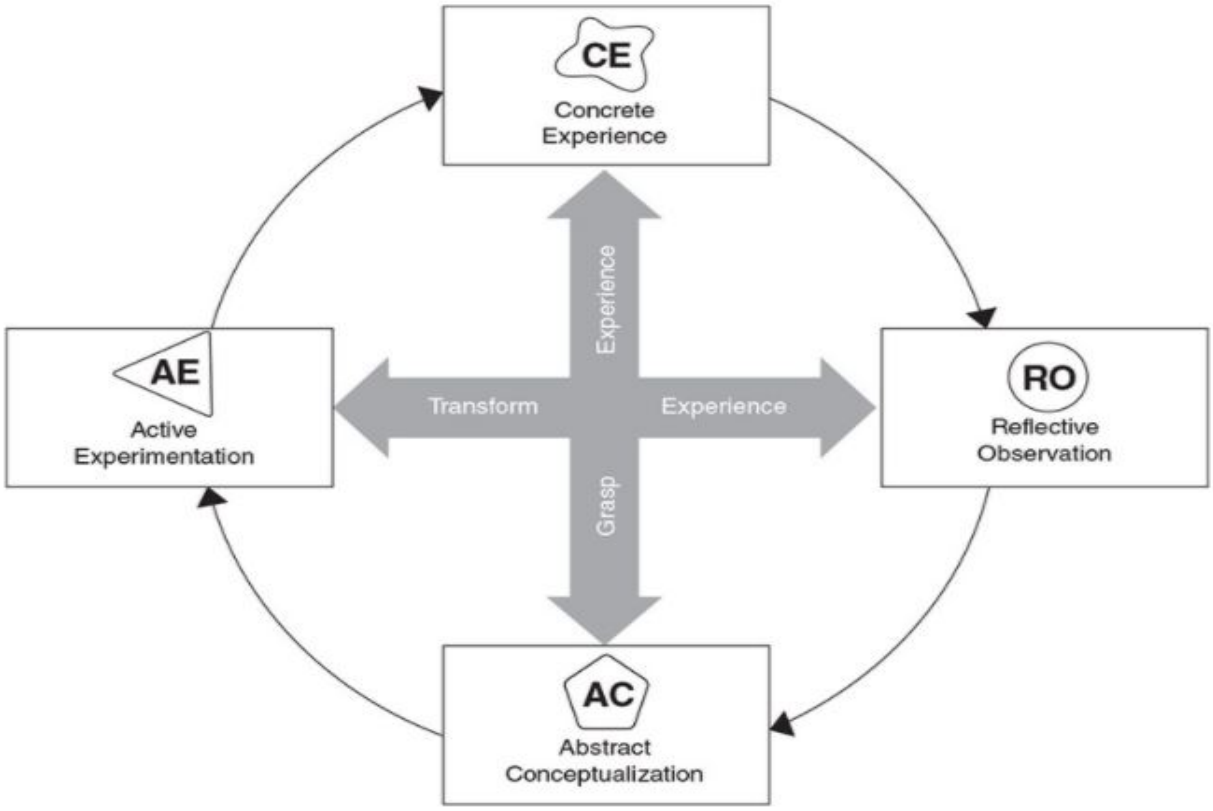
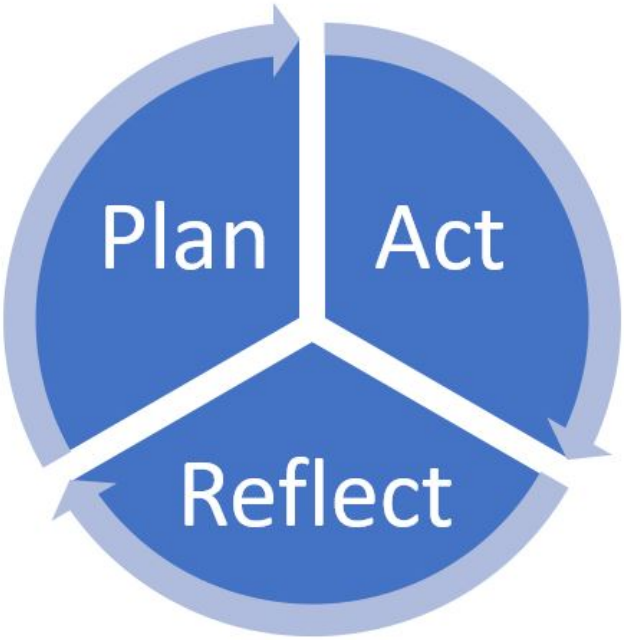


Figure 1.5

Simplified Version of Kolb



Although most people start with planning or reflecting, Kolb acknowledged that a learner could start in any spot in the cycle. Planning, acting, reflecting, and repeating are vital to music classroom learning and represent the most common way musicians prepare and practice for performances. Also, this process resembles our action research cycle (Lawson, 2015).

The third lens is that of empowerment theory. The definition of empowerment theory is numerous, varied, and changes, depending on the context and use of the theory. Regardless of its uses, the key characteristic of empowerment theory revolves around the "aim to be inclusive, empowering, and emancipatory" (Schwandt, 2015, p.87). Regarding education, especially with youth, empowerment is about "providing learning opportunities that engage young people in a process that enables them to speak back" (O'Neill, 2015, p.390). In an early and often cited article on empowerment theory, Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) state that "empowerment-

oriented interventions enhance wellness while they also aim to ameliorate problems, provide opportunities for participants to develop knowledge and skills, and engage professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts" (p.570). While the area of empowerment theory has developed considerably since the 1990s, this early understanding of how empowerment theory works as an intervention is key to how PAR could empower the participants of this study. When we give young people a voice, possibilities arise for finding better solutions than what might be possible otherwise. This emancipatory action may also spur on the study participants in ways that may be unlikely if they did not have a voice in the research. As evidence of this, I cite another article by Zimmerman (2000) where he provides a table of how various empowering processes lead to potential outcomes of empowerment, as can be seen in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

A comparison of Empowering Processes and Empowerment Outcomes across Levels of Analysis

Level of analysis	Process ("empowering")	Outcome ("empowered")
Individual	Learning decision-making skills Managing resources Working with others	Sense of control Critical awareness Participatory behaviors
Organizational	Opportunities to participate in decision-making Shared responsibility Shared leadership	Effectively compete for resources Networking with other organizations Policy influence

Note. Adapted from *Empowerment Theory: Psychological, Organizational, and Community Levels of Analysis*, by Marc A. Zimmerman, (2000), copyright 2000 by Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

As seen in table 1.2, a direct line can be drawn from various empowering processes to an empowered outcome.

Empowerment also played another essential part in this study. According to Krause et al. (2020), one of the key reasons students drop out of musical activity is that they cannot disassociate the activity from the context in which they learned it. By empowering the participants of this study to have a voice and take responsibility for their own development and success, the ability to sever musical activity and school context may be achievable.

Summary

How the current education system trains young musicians must be revised. It has been exposed as having a null curriculum in independent musical development and solo music knowledge. Combined with the current system, this null curriculum has created a situation where those who cannot afford private lessons are blocked from access to higher levels of musical awareness. This occurs because they are not taught what they need to be independent musicians.

Lewin's Change Theory, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, and Empowerment theory serve as trifocal lenses to view the results of this study conducted through the PAR methodology. The findings of this study should be meaningful for students, parents, and school administration because it was aimed at producing real-world solutions for a problem that is just being identified through empirical research. This study should be meaningful for those interested in PAR research by providing an example of how to use this methodology in the school. Music educators should find this study helpful because it provides an example of adjusting the curriculum to include solo and small ensemble learning. This instruction had many positive results for the participants, which can be found in Chapters Four and Five. Finally, this study should help researchers to understand how solo and small ensemble instruction can be used to meet the needs of learners and promote lifelong engagement in music. This study will continue the work started by scholars such as Joseph Abramo, Cara Bernard, Martin Bergee, David Kolb, John Kratus,

Amanda Krause, and Kurt Lewin, from whose research a great deal of Chapters Two and Five are composed.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

A review of the available literature revealed the following insights:

- Music education in the United States has developed practically as the needs of communities changed and interest in the arts grew. The effect of this evolution is that music education is decentralized nationally which has led to a variety of curricula (Mark & Madura, 2013).
- Current methods of instruction within music education fail to adequately prepare students for a musical life outside of high school due to their overemphasis on performing in large ensembles (Abramo & Bernard, 2020; Krause et al., 2020; Mark & Madura, 2013).
- To succeed in music, the need for a private instructor is nearly essential, and this reliance on extracurricular instruction creates inequity within the field (Abramo & Bernard, 2020).
- Current standards in the United States are beginning to take a more holistic and artistic approach to learning and that this opens the way for new ways to approach music curriculum.
- A null curriculum regarding individual performance ability for all students is well known but little researched, which necessitates further exploration for both research and solutions.
- Participatory Action Research (PAR) will provide a solid foundation to explore and identify solutions.

Many professional organizations have taken it upon themselves to make curricula for dispersion amongst the schools of the United States of America (USA) (American String

Teachers Association, 2018; ASTA String Curriculum, 2011; Burrack & Parkes, 2018; NAfME, 2014a). While those curricula have provided a good roadmap for the development of orchestra students, public school orchestra programs in the USA are preoccupied by performances (Raessler & Kimpton, 2003). This approach to student development produces ill-prepared students for continued musical endeavors post-graduation because it favors the group over the individual. Therefore, the explicit curriculum and the curriculum-in-use need to be critically analyzed and fixed in a meaningful way by those who most directly work with it, the students, and teachers. It was in this light that I suggested engaging in Participatory Action Research (PAR). In doing so, meaningful, equitable, and realistic solutions were discovered, and a model was produced for other teachers, administrators, and districts to utilize within their curricula. This chapter will explore the current literature regarding the traditional orchestral curriculum and supporting the use of PAR to address real-world problems for youth in schools. Finally, I will illustrate the gap within this literature that my study will begin to fill. The chapter will be divided into three parts. Each part will address the previously mentioned areas and conclude with a chapter summary.

Part I: The Present Curriculum

In this section, I will present what the literature has to say about the current state of the orchestral curriculum in the USA. It will be organized by subsections covering the practical nature of curriculum development in the USA, the status quo, and the development of national music standards and curricula in both private and public settings.

A Brief History of Curriculum Development in Music Education

The development of music education in the United States has been well documented in several books. This literature review will not be retelling the history of music education in

totality. However, it will instead provide an overview of how the curriculum came to be in the United States for contextual purposes. For a more comprehensive understanding of the history of music education, one can look to the often cited books by Charles Gary, James A. Keene, Patrice Madura, and Michael Mark.

The development of music as a curricular subject and its subsequent evolutions, has been one of reform and practicality. Its roots lay in the music of Europe, as nearly all early American settlers were from European countries (Keene, 1987; Mark & Gary, 1999). The first curricula to develop in the United States came in response to poor singing in pre-colonial Christian congregations and manifested themselves in the form of singing schools (Humphreys, 2017; Keene, 1987; Mark & Gary, 1999; Mark & Madura, 2013). [4] In these singing schools, local musicians put together songbooks and taught churchgoers to sing from them (Mark & Madura, 2013). [5] After the American Revolution, Massachusetts passed laws establishing the first publicly funded schools (Humphreys, 2017). Later, music education advocates such as William Woodbridge, Lowell Mason, and Samuel Elliot began a push to include music in the curricula of common schools (Humphreys, 2017). In 1838 Lowell Mason convinced the Boston School Committee to include music as a curricular subject for the first time and began teaching it in an upper elementary school (Humphreys, 2017; Mark & Madura, 2013). Shortly after this time, touring orchestras and bands from Europe began to make trips to the United States, which

[4] It can be argued that the first European style music instruction began with Spanish missionaries and conquistadors who taught music to Spanish and Native children as a way of assimilation (Cox & Stevens, 2017). I do not address this in the body of the work as it was not relevant to the overall understanding of how music education became systematically engrained into the school curriculum. However, it is interesting and important to note in terms of its historical accuracy.

[5] The first book published in British North America was *The Bay Psalm Book* which contained songs to be sung by congregations, although the notation would not be included until the 9th edition in 1698 (Humphreys, 2017).

electrified audiences who became accustomed to continually better performances. The popularity of these musical ensembles drove public interest (Mark & Madura, 2013). In 1898, the Murdock company began to offer orchestra classes at All Saints School in Maidstone England. Eventually these classes were observed by Albert Mitchell, Paul Stoeving, and Charles Farnsworth who brought the pedagogies to the United States. In 1913, Boston became the first city in the US to offer classes during the school day in orchestra. After World War One, school orchestra programs boomed across the country (Raessler & Kimpton, 2003). Since this time, the number of orchestra students and programs have waned with the rise in popularity of band and choir programs.

At this point, it is essential to acknowledge the writings of John Kratus (2019). His articles on the purpose of Music Education are essential to the discussion on music curriculum development and its impact on the current curricula. He writes that up until about the mid-1900s, music education tended to favor a curriculum that was primarily focused around developing student understanding toward a more amateur level of engagement.[6] Kratus argues that the purpose of music education began to change into a more semi-professional centering after the Schools Band Contest of America was held in 1923. This contest was put on to spur the interest of US consumers to buy more band instruments. Additionally, the contest required repertoire lists and semi-professional standards for performances, both of which continue to permeate all elements of scholastic musical ensembles. As school music programs began evolving into semi-professional musical ensembles, music educators began to look at their programs to address issues that began to develop. This reflective process led to the development of the Music

[6] Amateurism "one who engages in music purely for the love of doing so" (Kratus, 2019, p.32).

Educators National Conference (MENC, now NAfME) and the publication of the Journal of Research in Music Education (JRME) in 1953 (Mark & Madura, 2013).

Since the initial publication of the JRME, at least eight other research journals have been published, illustrating the interest in graduate studies in music education amongst professionals and academics. Given this interest, I was surprised to find few articles on curriculum development with researchers instead focusing on subjects such as technique. This interest in technical subjects does not indicate a lack of interest in curriculum design amongst music educators, only that subjects dealing directly with the practical elements of music instruction seem to take precedence. For instance, many conferences, discussions, and informal articles deal with curricular issues in music education. One such conference of note was the Yale seminar of 1963.

Mark and Madura (2013) state that the Yale seminar of 1963 was convened with the specific purpose of "addressing problems facing music in American schools" (p.28). The seminar participants realized that "in terms of educating students…large-ensemble performance is limiting for individual members, whose knowledge of music might be restricted to a second violin part, a third clarinet part, or a tuba part" (p. 9). The members of the Yale Seminar realized that students who were regulated to non-primary parts were denied the ability to grow their skills. This exclusion of musical learning has created inequity within the curriculum and flies in the face of the goal of music education "to educate all children in music and to provide the widest possible variety of musical experience" (p. 10). This issue was recognized in 1963! Nevertheless, I can testify that little has changed in how music education is taught and experienced in public schools. The method books have been updated, the pedagogy adjusted, and the music written more fairly, but the inequity persists.

Thanks to the work of Charles Gary, James A. Keene, Patrice Madura, and Michael Mark, the early history of music education can be seen rather succinctly as it relates to the development of the curriculum. This history shows that from the onset, the music curriculum was Eurocentric and based upon necessity. Also, due to the pragmatic nature of music education, many pedagogies, curricula, instructional philosophies, and expectations have left the field susceptible to divergence and inequality.

The demand of audiences for better local live performances and the rise of semi-professionalism has overtaken the way instrumental music is taught in the United States. These initial pushes for stronger performing groups have hurt and helped music programs. The price for semi-professional performances is being exacted upon the students of the programs. Inequality of instructional opportunity and a surplus of semi-professional musicians vying for an ever-shrinking supply of jobs has pushed music education to a critical point. Over the following three subsections, we will dive into the status quo of music education and the efforts of professional organizations, such as the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) and the National Association for Music Educators (NAfME). They have published researched supported curricula and standards to bring conformity and structure to an otherwise flexible and uneven field. We will see that despite their best efforts, and while improvements are being made, at this point in the history, curriculum is still essentially unchanged from its inception.

The Status Quo, The Private Studio, and the Inequity of Music Curriculum

A school is a community unto itself, and it exists within a residential community. In this situation, schools can both influence and are influenced by the residential community. Curriculum in the US is also primarily developed at a community or local government level. This locally based authority has led to significant differences in the quality of education as resources

in capital and community standards change based on the demographics of its community. In Linda Darling-Hammond's Book *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* (2010), she highlights many of the problems related to equity and education. In particular, she gives accounts of how school funding, typically generated from local property taxes, can affect the school and its ability to educate. She describes how struggling schools were helped by the federal government when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was passed. This act provided employment and welfare support for many families, reducing poverty and increasing children's access to health care. Other acts helped fund schools to assist disabled children and invest in curricular development. She writes that by the 1970s, "federally funded curriculum investments transformed teaching in many schools" (p.18). Those investments led to a more equitable opportunity for students of minority and urban schools by cutting the achievement gap by half! Adequately funding schools allows them to invest in the curriculum, directly impacting students. However, the inverse is also true. When students cannot receive the services and education they need at the public level, they must provide it independently. In my own experience, I have seen this firsthand.

In my career, I have been able to teach in rural, urban, and suburban settings. I have only worked in one school that properly funded its programs in all these areas. This school was a suburban school situated in an affluent area of the city. In all other schools, I was required to fundraise and work many hours outside of the typical contract day to provide the education necessary for my students. This type of work is often seen as part of the job but is not a typical burden that other departments have. As a result, the curriculum I could use was often limited to what students could afford. Individualized instruction was not easily attainable as there were up to 250 students and only one of me. This situation is the reality of the job. We must teach all

students equally but cannot teach each student individually. This reality means the curriculum is left vulnerable to inequity because students are lumped together in the large ensemble.

Large ensemble-based instruction allows school administrators to group orchestra students into fewer class times during the day. The students in large ensemble classes are taught in mixed ensembles with up to 20 different instruments in a room, forcing the teacher to spend less time on the specifics of each instrument and less time with each student. Having so many students at one time renders proper assessment nearly impossible as it may take hours to listen, assess, and give feedback on playing tests. The consequence is that teachers are forced to either offer fewer grading opportunities, and therefore less individual accountability, or less rehearsal time for the large ensemble leading to poorer performances and worsening reputations from the public (Speer, 2012). In these situations, music becomes the curriculum rather than having a set block of learning goals akin to what you would see in other classes. This approach to curriculum was identified as problematic by participants of the Yale seminar because the available literature was composed for artistic worth over educational value (Mark & Madura, 2013; Wendrich, 1967).

Large ensemble-based music programs, by design, do not teach students to be independent musicians, which is problematic for lifelong participation in music. While schools favor group instruction, auditions value individual performance. Ambitious students are thus forced into a situation where they must perform in a way that they are unaccustomed. In addition, eligibility for honors groups, colleges, college scholarships, or joining musical groups outside the high school requires a musician capable of independent musical skills. This absence of individual

preparations creates a null curriculum.[7] While decisions must be made regarding what content is taught in the curriculum, the absence of meaningful learning damages the students and the program because of its exclusion. In a poll I gave to music teachers in an online community, many teachers reported that they do not include solo preparation in their curriculum but want it to be addressed somehow. This brief poll revealed that while teachers understand the importance of solo performance, it is not being taught. This result begs the question, where will students learn this critical information and develop the skill? Simply put, they pay someone else to teach them outside of school.

According to a study by Mark A. Bailey (2018), 79% of students who participated in All-State ensembles (a good sample group for college-prepared students) took private lessons. The pairing between the classroom teacher and the private teachers has been a bond that has prepared students for colleges and all-state ensembles for a long time. The opportunity to learn from a master of the instrument you are training in, along with the one-on-one attention, goes a long way to helping students get a leg up on the competition. However, these benefits are rarely free and therefore work adversely for students who come from more humble means.

To understand the true cost of private lessons in the USA today I posted a poll to the School Orchestra and String Teachers Facebook group. This group is a closed group comprised of over 11,000 educators from around the USA. In the poll I asked group members how much private lessons cost in their area or how much they charged for private lessons. They were given the following options: (a) Less than $30.00 per half hour, (b) Between $30.00 - $60.00 per half

[7] Defined by Elliot Eisner (2002), a null curriculum deals with what schools do not teach implicitly or explicitly. The null curriculum has the effect of being taught by its absence. Daniela Jeder further elaborates that the null curriculum is not taught because it "is not important for their [the student's] training and therefore for the society in which they live" (Jeder, 2013). The null curriculum is also sometimes referred to as a hidden curriculum.

hour, (c) More than $60.00 per half hour, (d) Write in your own answer. The poll gathered 232 responses, with five people writing their answers. The clear majority was less than $30.00 per half hour (48%) but followed closely by between $30.00 - $60.00 per half hour (39%). Of those who wrote in their answers, the typical answer equated to about $1.00 per minute, with some being set by district policy and others by studios. When I followed up with the respondents to the majority group question, the answer for the average price was just below $30.00 per half hour at $25.00 per half hour.

We can surmise from this poll that while most private teachers try to keep their price at a reasonable rate for their students, when accumulated over a month, we get a range of prices from $100.00 - $240.00 per month! That is a lot of money for most families to spend on additional music classes, especially when they are already learning music at school. This result is also supported by Bailey's (2018) research, where he found that 60% of All-State musicians were from high-socioeconomic status schools leaving 29% from medium-socioeconomic schools and only 11% from low-socioeconomic (Low-SES) schools. The percentage of public school students in high-poverty schools is typically higher than in low-poverty schools (NCES, 2020). The idea that music teachers outsource their audition preparations to only those students who can afford private lessons illustrates a grating social justice issue inherent in the current curriculum system within the United States. Research by Joseph Abramo & Cara Faith Bernard (2020) has found this disconnect between high school and college preparations to be a significant factor for why many students in minority groups are not auditioning for college. Likewise, research by Krause et al. (2020) has discovered a lasting impact on continuing music after high school due to students being poorly prepared for musical life outside of an institution. This issue must be corrected in the curriculum of public-school orchestra programs. If music curriculums are meant

for all students, but the exclusion of solo literature forces students to learn it elsewhere, then the only possible conclusion is for the curriculum to be redesigned to accommodate the needs of individual learners to provide a fair and equitable education to all students.

National Music Standards are Changing

When it comes to the politics of curriculum development in the United States, it can get rather complicated, especially in an educational environment where standardized tests attempt to hold teachers and schools accountable for student work. If we held all schools to the same standards, there would be a national curriculum, however, this is different in the United States. Despite several organizations (including professional organizations and state/local governments) around the country produce standards for instruction, no centralized curriculum is available.[8] The reason for this is that the US Department of Education (DOE) does not hold the control to dictate curriculum but instead supports the educational goals of the President and supports the educational goals of state and local school systems (*An Overview of the US Department of Education-- Pg 1*, 2018). It is the state and local school boards that decided curricular matters. As of 2010, the most recent census year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that there were 97,767 public and 30,681 private school districts (United States Department of Education & National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). That is a combined total of 129,498 school districts and 129,498 potential curriculums! This number has been steadily increasing, so it is safe to assume that as local control remains in school districts, the number of different curriculums will also enlarge. Effectively changing curriculum over such a diverse range of schools without centralized curricular oversight is difficult. In this section, I will present the

[8] It should be noted that in 2009, 48 states, Washington DC, and two US territories adopted an effort to develop unified standards to address this problem (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2021).

literature as it pertains to some of the efforts of professional organizations to provide standards for instrumental music instruction. What should become apparent is that as we better understand the unique nature of music instruction, we are moving the focus more from large ensembles toward individual performance expectations.

In music education, the primary organization for the development of professional and curricular standards is the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), formally the Music Educators National Conference (MENC). In 1967 MENC created the Goals and Objectives Project to develop applications in music education for new educational theories (Taetle & Cutietta, 2002). Eventually, the research started in 1967 and moved into the 1990s when governments and organizations started looking toward standardizing education. In 1994 MENC produced the first 9 National Music Standards (See Appendix A for a list of the 9 National Music Standards) (MENC, 1994). These standards set the tone for curriculum and instructional pedagogy in school districts for years.[9] Several years after MENC reformed as NAfME, they released new standards to better align the field of music education with core standards being rolled out by the USDOE (NAfME, 2014b). The new standards were released in 2014 and were based on the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS). Now armed with new standards (Appendix B) and evaluation methods known as the Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs), NAfME hoped to bring the field into the 21st century. It should be noted that while these standards do provide an essential jumping-off point for curriculum designers and music teachers, the final decision for what is and is not included still falls on local school boards,

[9] Millard Public Schools, the research site for this study, still utilizes the 1994 standards in their music curriculum. However, this is being revised over the next three years to align the district with common core music standards that most closely align with 2014 NAfME standards.

districts, and teachers. However, there are other examples of structured national and international music curriculums from around the globe. One such area is the development of curricula used by private music teachers in the United Kingdom and Canada.

In 1889 the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, two of the United Kingdom's most renowned institutions, came together to create the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. That organization then created a series of standards divided into eight grades. This system eventually became a curriculum guide for teachers designed to stimulate music students to reach higher levels of achievement (The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, n.d.). Each grade is comprised of both technical and performance elements. Information about the ABRSM exams is available for free from their website (see Appendix C for a chart that correlates ABRSM, RCM, and ASTA skills into Suzuki books). Two years before the ABRSM was formed in 1886, the Royal College of Music (RCM) was founded as the Toronto Conservatory of Music (TCM) (Schabas, 2005). As one of the oldest conservatories in the Americas, the RCM has held a long-standing position as a leader in music education. Like the ABRSM, the RCM eventually created a curriculum for private teachers to follow. Their system is divided into ten levels and covers technical and performance elements. In 1998, after the development of the standards movement in the United States, the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) also created a curriculum for private lesson study known as ASTACAP or ASTA Certificate Advancement Program. This program is divided into six levels which are made up of progressive repertoire lists and technical/theoretical skills like both the ABRSM and the RCM (American String Teachers Association, 2018).

The three curricular programs (ABRSM, RCM, ASTACAP) constitute a real effort on the part of professional organizations and music schools to formalize expectations of musical

proficiency through the creation of curriculum, assessments, and pedagogy. These programs could be successful for learning solo literature so long as students begin with the first step and continue through the program. The standards set by NAfME serve as a good starting point for curriculum development. Unlike the more rigid curriculum such as the ABRSM, RCM, and ASTACAP, the MCAs are designed as an assessment tool that sets a common standard of performance but can fit into the current curriculums already in place.

According to Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins's article *Cornerstone Tasks* (2001), a cornerstone assessment is intended to act like the cornerstone of a building. The assessments serve as a starting point for curriculum designers to backward plan the curriculum; because the assessment is grounded on the essential skills and knowledge needed. Learning outcomes, class goals, class expectations, and even performance repertoire can all be planned using the MCAs as an end-point objective. With the new NAfME standards rooted in realistic and artistic foundations for musicians, the MCAs can provide a place where every student is the focus.

Now that each significant professional standard has been outlined, it should be noted that 36 states used the NAfME 2014/NCAS standards. Only one state, the state of Utah, was still using the NAfME 1994 national standards, but Indiana has state standards that appear to be based on the 1994 standards. Twelve states had their own system of standards that, for the most part, was at least partly based on the NAfME 2014/NCAS standards but with added criteria such as critical thinking and various history/analytical domains. You can view which states follow which standards in Appendix D and a description of the standards for the 12 states that did not prescribe to the NAfME 2014/NCAS standards in Appendix E. Given the state of standards, the variety out there, and the independence of music teachers to create or adapt their own

curriculums, I had to ask what do teachers use? To find out, I conducted another poll for my teachers' group to see if I could get a snapshot of what is going on out there.

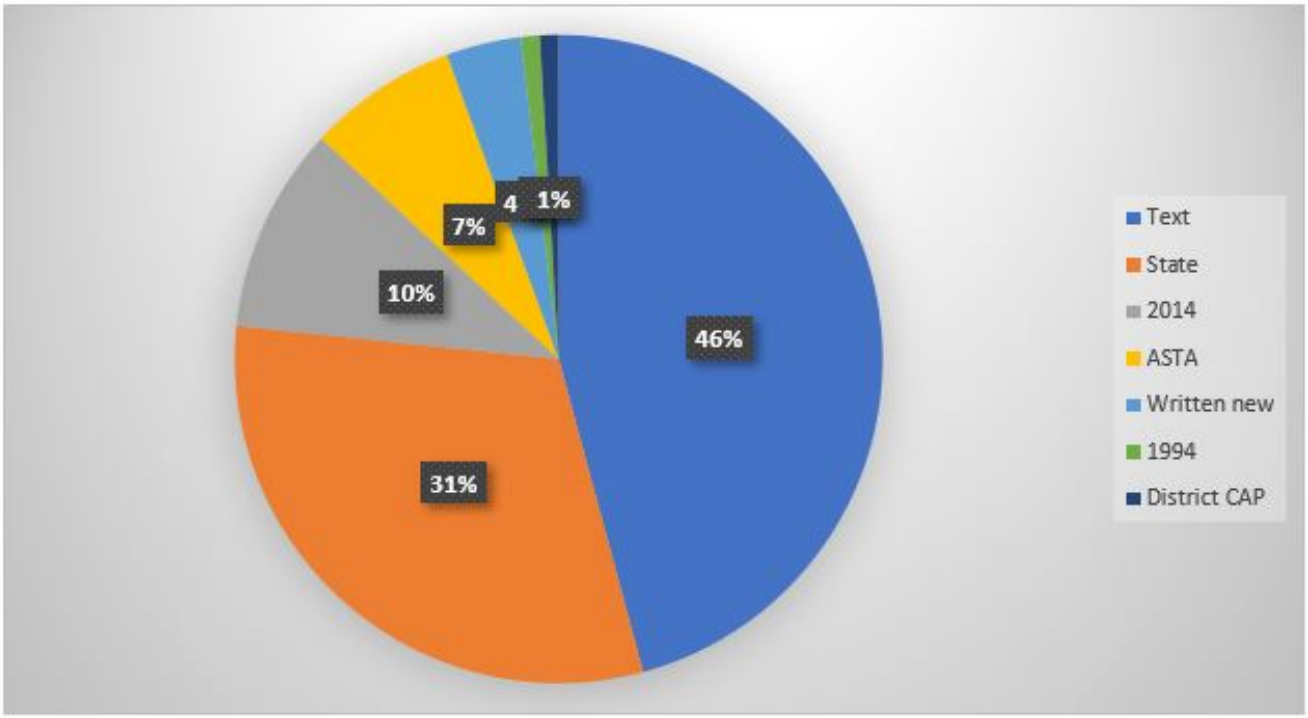
The poll asked, 'what do you use as the basis of your school/district's orchestra class curriculum?' I then gave them seven options, including one where they could write their answer. The seven options were (a) Textbook based pedagogical curriculum (follow the essential elements, string basics, string explorer, orchestra expressions, books as the curriculum), (b) Specified State Standards, (c) NAfME 2014 revised National Standards for Ensembles (Creating, Performing), (d) ASTA string curriculum standards, (e) NAfME 1994 National Standards (The list of 9 standards such as 1) singing alone or with others…), (f) Not sure, (g) Other (write-in). There were 100 responses to the poll, and the results were that 49% of respondents utilize textbooks as a base of their curriculum, 33% of respondents use specified state standards as the basis of their curriculum, 11% use NAfME 2014 revised national standards, 8% use the ASTA string curriculum standards, 4% wrote their own curriculum (write-in option), 3% used either the 1994 standards or a district designed CAP. The results can be viewed in Figure 2.1.

Interestingly, even though every state in the US has mandated standards, most of the teachers polled use a textbook based curriculum. This situation is problematic from a curricular standpoint because textbooks are not necessarily aligned with the mandated standards of state and professional groups. The standards are trying to keep the attention on the individual development of each student, and teachers are not using them. In that case, the inequity brought on by teaching in large heterogeneous classrooms continues despite efforts to change it.

Another interesting observation from this data shows that there might be a disconnect between what standards teachers think they are following and the mandated standards. I draw this conclusion from the 33% of teachers reporting that they follow state standards vs. the 11%

Figure 2.1

Results of the Standards Poll



who follow the NAfME 2014 revised standards. Knowing that nearly all the states in the US follow the NAfME 2014 revised standards, it may seem apparent that teachers need to realize that, for the most part, the state and NAfME standards are the same. While it is possible that all 33% of the teachers who signaled that they follow state-mandated standards are in states where the NAfME standards are not used, this seems unlikely.

Taken all together, the standards that are being developed today attempt to correct the issues seen in years past by mandating that orchestra teachers focus more on the individual development of the students and the artistic process. Unfortunately, not all teachers know what standards are being used or are relying on texts to do their curriculum planning for them. This trend could continue inequity by not correctly teaching students in the classes to be independent musicians.

Part II: PAR as a Method for Addressing Real-World Problems

Participatory Action Research has several different definitions depending on the author. Michelle Fine in her book *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion* (2008), has an chapter where she replies to many of the typical questions she gets from others relating to PAR and YPAR. She states that "PAR is not a method"; it was "a radical epistemological challenge to the traditions of social science, most critically on the topic of where knowledge resides" (p.215). Limarys Caraballo, Brian D. Lozenski, Jamila J. Lyiscott, and Ernest Morrell define PAR as "a critical research methodology that caries specific epistemological commitments toward reframing who is 'allowed' to conduct and disseminate education research with/about youth in actional ways" (Caraballo et al., 2017, p.313). In this definition, Caraballo et al. (2017) state that it was a methodology but acknowledge its epistemological founding. Whether PAR is an epistemology, methodology, or both, there are a few key tenets that PAR generally holds to and is the basis of many of its accomplishments.

1. PAR is critical in nature,
2. PAR is democratic by nature,
3. PAR is situated in the lived experiences of participants,
4. PAR requires robust youth participation in an inquiry-based process that draws upon participant knowledge,
5. PAR seeks to produce actionable knowledge that may often be used to raise the consciousness of others (Buttimer, 2015a; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Schwandt, 2015).

While these tenets define PAR, they are not rules to which researchers should strictly adhere. It was up to each collective to define their terms and understand what PAR is for them (McIntyre, 2008). For example, it was typically not PAR or any form of action research if it does not hold to

the founding principle that "those who are traditionally 'studied' must move beyond the role of being a knowledge holder and be repositioned as architects of the research process" (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This concept means moving those being studied from the subject's role into the researcher's. PAR seeks to do this by engaging with community members in meaningful ways so that they have the power to make decisions related to the research methods, analysis, and result production (O'Neill, 2015). This process has benefited the youth, community, and subject area.

Studies have found that students who become involved in PAR projects experience several benefits. These benefits include increased motivation to research, positive identity development, improved standardized test scores and literacy outcomes, and higher graduation rates than students not involved in PAR (Buttimer, 2015b). PAR projects have also been valuable to music programs because they give youth the language, knowledge, and confidence to stand up for themselves. In one YPAR project, Susan O'Neill (2015) engaged with 12 middle school learners over the summer. In this project, the learners "engaged in reflections, inquiry, and action related to why they valued participation in music" (p.398). They then engaged in YPAR processes, where the result was a music advocacy video. According to O'Neill (2015),

> Shortly after the study concluded, the authorities at this school decided to close the popular music program, which was a favorite music program among many of our young participants. As is frequently the case, the administration was trying to save money and did not consider the impact this decision would have on students at the school. On their own initiative, our young participants decided to post an edited version of their mini-documentary on YouTube, which they called “Music Matters.” This video was watched by a number of people from the local community who were aware of and outraged by the decision of school officials to close down the popular music program.

This self-advocated action resulted in the galvanization of a community and saved the program! The problem that those students faced is a familiar one that I have experienced personally, but in my case, I was unaware of the school's intention to close our school orchestra program. It was not shared with us, and when we found out, it seemed too late. Luckily, my mother organized a resistance that advocated on our behalf over the next several years. I wish I had been able to work on a project like O'Neill's, where I could learn the language and gain the knowledge to stand up for myself as those students did.

In another example from my teaching, I made subtle but significant changes to my instruction using a democratically based, youth lead and centered leadership team in my orchestra. This team of students was nominated and elected by the orchestra's body to represent them. In March 2020, our school district, like many others around the country, was closed due to COVID. Our school district is fortunate enough to have been able to purchase computers for each student in grades 9-12. This benefit meant they could engage with schooling online instead of losing out on instruction. I scrambled to create meaningful content that could be done at home and individually. After the school year's conclusion, I met, on zoom, with my incoming student leaders to determine the best course of action going forward. At the time, we knew that it was going to be necessary to celebrate diversity in the upcoming school year. We did not yet know how important a decision that would be because the protests regarding the death of George Floyd had not begun. They helped me select music, and I began planning our first show.

Even though we had begun the school year together as an orchestra, with social distance and cleaning protocols, there was much concern about putting on a public performance. I met with the students and asked them what they thought we should do. The leadership team maturely weighed the issues and suggested we should do the concert in an online format. As we rehearsed

the music, it became apparent that we would not be able to perform all the music proficiently by the time of the concert. I convened the leadership team again to discuss which songs we should cut. They thought with the sensitive nature of cultural music, none of it should be cut. The group decided that a couple of pieces would be performed as a full orchestra while the rest would be played by small groups, which the students would lead. I spent the next week getting kids into small groups, and they then led their groups to prepare this music independently. The performance was recorded and then sent out to parents, who were pleased with it.

While this example does not precisely demonstrate PAR, it does show how young people can act maturely to come up with solutions to complex problems. They did not have to do formal research to make their decisions, but they did debate the issues with great care and took their responsibility seriously. This experience has taught me to greatly respect what young people can do with real responsibility in the educational context.

In *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action in Motion* (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) we can find many more great examples of how PAR and YPAR have helped to empower young people to make meaningful changes in their lives, in their community, and their schools. In the second chapter of the book Shawn Ginwright (2008) talks about how young people were considered the property of their parents or the state. As a result, their rights were not well respected or even understood. Throughout the 1990s, more legislation was being passed in countries worldwide to recognize youth rights. However, even though they were being recognized legally as having rights, their voices were often not heard concerning the environment they spent most of their time in; the school. This oversight led Julio Cammarota to bring together youth from several cities to discuss their issues and experiences as students.

The students met at the Alex Heley Farm in Knoxville, Tennessee, giving presentations on their communities and engaging in PAR. According to Ginwright (2008), "I found that PAR facilitates a collective radical imagination among youth through what Aimé Césaire called 'poetic knowledge" (p.20). Ginwright continues by stating, "Poetic knowledge rarely comes from the confines of the traditional school curriculum" (p.20). Instead, he finds that it often comes from oppression and transforming oppressive conditions. By engaging in PAR at the farm, these students could gain an appreciation for what they often took for granted and were moved to attempt to make changes to save the better parts of their community from gentrification. This experience directly affected the community and the quality of the schools they attended.

In summary, PAR and YPAR are both educative research processes that adhere to a code of ethics that can empower participants to take control of their situations, overcome oppression, and discover meaningful action to address real-world problems with real-world results. Young people are valuable because they are most often the best ones to understand what other young people are going through. While they may not have theoretical knowledge in research or curriculum design, this knowledge is transferable to interested students. Young people have repeatedly shown that they are not just empty vessels to be filled with curriculum (Eisner, 2002). They have demonstrated time and time again that they are capable of the work and should be partners in research and not specimens.

Part III: The Hole in the Current Literature and this Study

It was clear from reviewing available literature that there are many studies supporting PAR as a solution to real-world problems and that there is a need for a more equitable curriculum. As we expand out of these more established lines of inquiry, we can find studies looking at lifelong engagement with music that illuminate the problems but offer little in terms

of curricular adjustments within the teacher's control. There are five key articles that this study will be expanding on; Abramo and Bernard's *Barriers to Access and University Schools of Music: A Collective Case Study of Urban High School Students of Color and Their Teachers (*2020*); From Dropping Out to Dropping In: Exploring Why Individuals Cease Participation in Musical Activities and the Support Needed to Reengage Them* (2020) by Krause et al.; *Developing Musical Independence in a High School Band* (2015) by Brian N. Weidner, *Music at the Tipping Point* (2007) and *A Return to Amateurism* (2019) by John Kratus.

Abramo and Bernard (2020) recommended that universities implement community-based recruitment and revised audition/application processes to close the opportunity gap for minority students, but did not discuss how to bring what is being learned in the high schools in alignment with standards or audition requirements.

Krause et al. (2020) discovered many reasons students dropped out of musical activity. They suggested that people could be reengaged if the musical activity fit with their perceptions of what a musician is and what counts as musical participation. They suggested that maybe the blame can be affixed to the music education system's priorities of semi-professional ensembles because they "focus too much on polishing performances, meeting criteria, and pupil achievement" and not enough time teaching the skills that can be used by the individual student in a variety of musical avenues divorced of the institution. Their study supports the concept of a skills-based curriculum that is more interested in developing the individuals' musical abilities over a performance-based curriculum that is focused entirely on the perception of others for success and which therefore pushes their teachers to focus on polished performances. The study also supports expanding opportunities for students to perform outside of the musical institution. Especially in less formal music-making activities such as social/musical opportunities, and

ultimately challenging the paradigms taught in education about what it means to be a musician and how music can 'fit' in a student's life. Key to this is the support of school administrators, the teacher, family, and friends if a sustained musical activity is to be supported.

Brian N. Weidner's (2015) article is important as it provides examples of how other musical groups have attempted to teach lifelong engagement in music. His study revolved around the Lakefield High School (LHS) band, because their director was focused on developing musical independence in his band. It found that three elements were responsible for the development of musical independence at LHS:

1. The environment of the ensemble,
2. How the teacher moderated their instruction,
3. The encouragement of student-led participation.

Other key findings from this study were that "chamber ensembles were a critical component to this process [development of student independence] as they provided the independent practice called for in cognitive apprenticeship" and that other methods of generating student-lead engagement would be "solo preparation, or student-directed large ensembles" (p.83)

The writings of John Kratus used in this study underpin the changes needed within the field of music education and provide further supporting evidence for the need for change. *Music Education at the Tipping Point* (2007) documented that as far back as 15 years ago, there was a disconnect between academic music education and how people, especially young people, engage with music. *A Return to Amateurism in Music Education* (2019) provides critical insight into what music used to be like and what a program centered on music-making without semi-professional concerns could be. It also provides evidence that music education has grown ever more competitive, challenging the purpose of why we teach music. Coupled with the trauma,

stress, and lost educational time caused by the uncertainty of COVID school life, the traditional way of teaching needs to be altered.

All these articles provide sound advice for promoting lifelong engagement in music education. However, I am still looking for a study that takes what has been learned and attempts a correction. I, like Lewin, am not satisfied with identifying the existing problems (Lawson, 2015). Instead, I want to test a solution and discover the knowledge that it brings.

This study continues the emerging dialogue that Abramo, Bailey, Bates, Bernard, Kruse, Meyer, and others have begun with their studies linking deficiencies in curriculum and instruction to lower college acceptance rates or continued playing after high school. Second, it will continue the discussion by bringing in the valuable voices of parents, teachers, and students as we attempt to operate within the confines of the pedagogy of schooling (Buttimer, 2015a) while simultaneously elevating the lived experience of students who will benefit from successes and failures in this study. Third, it will continue the discussion about the effectiveness of YPAR and PAR in the classroom, where many research projects struggle to operate (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Lastly, it will provide an example to future educators of how PAR can be used in their classroom, or at least what happens when PAR is attempted to fix a problem in an orchestra classroom.

Summary

In this chapter, I have laid out an argument that several key points are made visible after searching the available literature. One that the history and evolution of music education in the United States have led to a very decentralized method of curriculum development. This gradual evolution has had a reciprocating effect of producing students who are not equally trained. Two, by focusing on large ensembles as the primary educational unit for music education in orchestra,

many students are forced to pay for additional learning to continue their progress after high school. Three, the continued focus on large ensembles has created a null curriculum which has the added effect of teaching that individual performance and development are not as important as performance in large ensembles. This paradigm has the added effect of producing students who no longer want to continue playing music after high school because of the unequal treatment of instrumental training and misconceptions about musical life after high school (Krause et al., 2020). Four, while standards are evolving to meet the needs of learners, the instructional methods need to catch up because they rely on textbooks to provide a curriculum instead of standard-aligned curricula. This situation perpetuates the inequities inherent in the curriculum which have remained the same, thereby stymieing reform efforts. Lastly, that action research methods, designed to produce results that may correct problems in the classroom, have been an effective tool for producing change and teaching students to be change agents. The worth of this study lays in the new knowledge it could bring based on using PAR as a corrective method, and solutions to the curricular problem identified. At the least, it will serve future researchers as a spot to look and see what has been done to correct this issue and hopefully spark interest in this area of concern.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter will be dedicated to the details of the methodology concerning this study. Herein you should find information that would allow for clarity regarding procedural and methodological details, which should be sufficient for replication if needed. However, this study should only be replicated if consideration is given to the context and setting of those future studies. This consideration is of critical importance as the risk of replicating and generalizing from a qualitatively based PAR study may do more harm than good (Fine, 2008).

In Chapters One and Two, I have discussed elements of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the methodology I chose for my study. In Chapter One, I provided a background of PAR and why I selected PAR over YPAR. It should be noted that while this is a PAR study, it was not following the traditional format because this study proceeded with an issue that has already been identified instead of forming a committee and then discussing what issue we would address. There is precedent for this approach to PAR. In Herr and Anderson's (2005) book on action research dissertations, the gave the example of a dissertation written by Alice McIntyre. They quote McIntyre stating that she

> "entered this study recognizing that there were many predetermined aspects of this research that seem antithetical to the overall methodological stance of a PAR project…I pursued the project because of my belief in the underlying tenets of PAR: (1) an emphasis on the lived experiences of human beings, (2) the subjectivity and activist stand of the researcher, and (3) an emphasis on social change" (McIntyre, 1995, p.21).

Likewise, I believe in the core principles of PAR work. However, I have adapted my methodology to fit the timeline and external expectations often placed upon students doing a dissertation (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Hopefully, this difference will be accepted by the PAR

research community as all other elements of the process were followed. Therefore, this study will add to the continuum of research utilizing PAR as a methodology, and participants of the study should be able to experience the benefits of traditional PAR/YPAR as described in the literature from chapter two.

Positionality Statement

In Chapter one, I went over my subjectivity concerning this study. I want to add to those personal subjectivities a statement regarding my position within the context of this study's design. One of the critical elements of PAR is participation. Usually, this would refer to the participants working with the researcher to solve problems (Lawson, 2015a). However, in this statement, I will focus on my participation in the committee. Before I do so, I should better define what I mean by the term committee or research committee as I keep referring to them. The research committee included parents, school administrators, nine students, and me. I was the lead researcher on this committee, so my responsibility was to prepare committee members to do PAR work and to organize and mobilize the committee once research had begun (Lawson, 2015a). Regarding the power structure and my position, I was primarily an inside researcher and not a committee overlord; more of an equal member with a specialty in research.

Jane Zeni wrote an article titled *A Guide to Ethical Issues and Action Research* (1998), where she goes over the ethical issues regarding insider research and PAR. She defines an inside researcher as "any of us who study our own practice as educators" (p. 10). As I was investigating the curriculum used in my teaching and attempting to fix a perceived problem, I was, by this definition, an inside researcher. I was not only an insider by this definition but also an insider of the community built within my classroom. The orchestra social environment is unique in the high school setting as teachers typically have the same students year in and year out for up to

four consecutive years. In this community, I developed meaningful relationships with the students, mentored them in leadership positions, partook in their successes and failures, and interacted with them at orchestra social events. As an inside researcher, I had to carefully navigate the group's power dynamics. I took care to present myself as a researcher as much as possible instead of the teacher (Zeni, 1998). Also, I had to ensure that school policy regarding ethics was followed. Balancing these roles while maintaining a collaborative environment took some work. Therefore, I attached the following terms to my job on the committee; lead researcher, educator, and facilitator.

The term lead researcher constituted my role in the committee's power structure regarding responsibility for the study. As the lead researcher, I had several responsibilities, including training the team on their roles, maintaining a democratic environment where all participants could find a voice, and ethically representing their work in this dissertation and other writings.

I took the term educator as I was responsible for the study overall, and needed to prepare and educate committee members on the following;

1. The research problem,
2. The importance of the problem,
3. Their role on the committee,
4. How a PAR committee works,
5. What my role in the group was,
6. The PAR model of research gathering,
7. Decision makings processes,
8. Research methods, and
9. Analysis methods.

Participants needed to be trained in each of these nine areas in a respectful manner. Doing so was critical because the participants needed a comfortable position within the group dynamic.

The last term I took was facilitator because, unlike in classroom setting, my power in this group was to facilitate discussion, assist in setting goals, empower, and essentially get out of the way of the process so that the lived experiences of my committee members could come forward. For this to be a genuinely collaborative effort, I must ensure that my power as the teacher did not influence the group's dynamics. That way, they could freely express and discuss the best ways to proceed.

Research Setting, Purpose, and Questions

The research site was Millard West High School, in Millard, Nebraska, a suburban town of the Omaha metropolitan area. The overall student population was typical of a suburban or urban high school averaging approximately 2,500-3,000 students per year. This school is typical of the racial and ethnic composition of Nebraska, being predominantly white and Hispanic, with a nearly equal split of male-to-female students (NCES, 2020). As a high school Millard West is ranked excellent nationally, being in the top 10% and 5th in Nebraska (US News, 2022), for student participation in Advanced Placement classes, college preparation, and has a high graduation rate. The school also only has a 9% free and reduced lunch rate (FRL) which is significantly lower than state and district averages (NEP, 2020).

This study aimed to engage the orchestra community in a collaborative effort to discover actionable ways of addressing the problem of excluding individualized preparation in the traditional curriculum and promote lifelong student engagement with music. Our secondary goal was discovering instructional methods which allowed us to fold solo and small ensemble

learning into traditional large ensemble curricula without disturbing class flow or increasing workload.

There are many entry points in determining the research questions for a PAR study. Traditionally, the PAR researcher would convene a committee of like-minded people and work together to determine the research questions. The other way is to tackle a problem that has been determined in advance and recruit participants who have a stake in it (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I have chosen the latter (see the introduction to this chapter for rationale), and this study collaboratively researched the following questions.

1. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to provide students with the necessary skills for lifelong engagement with music?
2. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to empower students to take control of their musical journeys?

Participant Selection

Participants were selected from students in my 10-12th grade symphony orchestra class. They were volunteers who had been informed and given written consent letters before their inclusion in the study. Other factors in selecting participants included;

- Ease of access.
- Correct age group.
- Representative demographics.
- Interest in the problem being researched.
- Willingness to help fix curricular problems.
- Community support for arts programs and academic study.

- Administrative support for research within the district.
- Parental support for improved instructional habits.
- A diverse enough group to provide meaningful results across several demographic areas, including age, sex, socioeconomic status, literacy, household support, and technological support.

Participants had the option of two levels of participation. Active participants were those interested in serving on the PAR committee. They were active because they would be intimately involved in the research process. The second group was passive participants. This group consented to have data collected on them but did not want to participate further. There were 13 student applicants for the active participant category, all of whom met the criteria. There were also five adult applicants, four active in the study and three very active. The rest of the class chose to participate in the passive participant role, of which there were 43 students.

Research Design, Timelines, and Procedures for Collecting Data

This study went through three phases which will be outlined in this section. The governing school district set some restrictions on the study timeline, mainly that research was not permitted in August or May. It was the intention that this study be conducted over one 9-month school year beginning in August and ending in May. However, aside from the loss of additional PAR cycles, this timeline restriction had only minor impediments from this policy. I will now outline the details of each phase in the following sections.

Phase I

Phase one began on September 3rd, 2021, when Millard Public Schools (MPS) officially accepted my study. It consisted of three primary goals that I, as a lead researcher, needed to complete in a timely manner. These goals were

1. Informing the population pool of the study, participant selection, informed consent, and permissions.
2. The organization of the research committee.
3. The education of the research committee.

In consideration of school board policy regarding student learning and in compliance with MPS guidelines regarding research, the study could not be conducted during the first, and last month of the school year (Millard Public Schools, 2016, Section 2, ¶3, §xi), With the acceptance on September 3rd I was able to begin recruiting on September 19th. I announced the research study to the class on September 20th, and the following Monday, September 27th, I held an informational meeting for interested parents and students to get more details. At that meeting, there were three first-year students, three upper-level students, and four parents. Over the following weeks, I collected informed consent letters and followed up with students and parents who showed interest in being active participants in the study. On October 14th, I sent out a confirmation email to those participants selected for the active participant group. There were eight confirmations, seven from students and one from a district administrator and parent. On October 15th, I prepared to educate the confirmed participants on what we would be doing and sent an email about the first meeting. Over the next few days, I received informed consent letters and confirmations from three additional parents and two other students. On October 25th, 2021, we convened the first meeting of the PAR committee, and I began their education.

At the first meeting, we discussed the members' preconceptions and perspectives on lifelong learning in music, music education's purpose, and collaborative research. I summarized the relevant literature and outlined the problem. As a group, we created a form of governance that outlined how our committee would operate. The two most important rules were

1. Meetings would be convened regardless of the number of members present, but a quorum of nine would be needed to make any decisions.
2. There would be a rotating Chairman whose job would be to create the official agenda for the meeting, with input from other members and myself, facilitate the meeting, and open/close the meeting on time.

For other rules, we opted to conform to Robert's Rules of Order, although the membership did not strictly enforce them. At this first meeting, we also developed a mission statement that stated:

> The mission of this committee is to work together to envision a new way of teaching orchestra that meets community and student expectations, allows students to learn socially, and empowers them to make important musical decisions that ultimately lead to continued participation in musical activities.

As we discussed our mission and what we wanted to do, the committee decided that before we could understand how to complete our mission, we needed to first understand the community and student expectations. At this juncture, they commissioned me to send out a survey which had been approved by the school administration to collect this data from students and parents of the orchestra community. The findings of this survey are in chapter four. After our first meeting, the participants filled out forms giving me permission to record video and audio of our meetings and selected the pseudonyms I used throughout this dissertation.

Over the next few months, we met four more times, twice in November and twice in December, to analyze the survey results, decide what they meant for us, and continue our education. Over this time, they requested the key articles of my study and the first two chapters of my research proposal, which I provided to them. The group meeting in December led to the creation of our instructional unit.

The unit designed by the committee to serve as our experiment and intervention included two simultaneous threads of experience. The first was a small ensemble unit, and the second was a unit of solo preparation. Passive participants were asked to choose which they would like to participate in first, assuming they would do the other after the first assessments. The class was divided almost evenly, so everyone got their first choice. The participants were to create their small ensembles, select appropriate solos and small ensemble music, prepare them, then perform them in either a formal recital or an informal performance for the class. With this intervention designed, we were ready to begin phase II.

Phase II

Phase two was the research gathering, implementation, evaluation, and formative analysis stage. Phase two began in January 2022, when school reconvened after winter break. For nine weeks, the students were engaged in the unit of study designed by the committee during the first phase of this research project. During this time, we completed several cycles of action research (plan, act, observe, reflect, see figure 1.3) and adjusted the plan as needed until we could find a suitable solution. It is sufficient to say that the committee made specific adjustments to the unit based on their lived experiences and the committee's mission. In addition, we utilized interviews, surveys, and observation to collect our data, which we analyzed and discussed at each of our monthly meetings. Based on the data collected through these methods, the committee decided to conduct a final survey. On March 10th, 2022, committee members submitted questions to be included in the survey to me. The survey was distributed on March 14th. At our meeting on March 24th, the committee coded the results of this survey and concluded that we had enough data to end this phase.

Phase III

On April 8th, 2022, I sent out an email outlining the final phase of our research. On April 18th, we met to discuss, analyze, and attempt to answer the research questions. I noted in my journal that PAR research often brings up more questions than answers and that some of the questions the committee brought up would need to be addressed in exit interviews with both passive and active participants. Most of the information about this phase constitutes the content of Chapters Four and Five. The study officially closed on April 20th, although some committee members needed to finish their exit interviews. Those were collected before the ending timeline of the study as mandated by the district regulations. Table 3.1 outlines the roles of each of the participants in the study.

Procedures for Collecting Data

The methods for collecting data were vast, varied, and dependent upon the decisions of the research committee. The methods chosen for data collection were qualitative and quantitative (Caraballo et al., 2017), depending on the needs of the group and consistent with PAR research norms. None of the members of the research committee had experience in data collection methods except for Dr. Olson. This situation meant that I was required to teach the committee how to gather data and code it. However, several students had experience in statistical analysis thanks to the AP classes that they were taking, which meant that our quantifiable data was easier to process. all the data we collected was submitted to me, and all discussions of the data kept confidential. Members of the committee used a pseudonym, while adult members were offered the option to do so or to use their real names. All video, audio, and other representations were destroyed after the study as per MPS guidelines section 2 ¶ 6 (Millard Public Schools, 2016). In all regards, the study attempted to protect the identity of students as much as possible. In

Figure 3.1

Committee Responsibilities by Role

Role	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
Lead Researcher	1. Bring together & organize the committee, 2. Teach the committee about PAR, the subject, and how to research. 3. Assist in planning for the unit for Sem. 3.	1. Assist in data collection, analysis, and planning. 2. Make presentations to the committee about the data collected. 3. Assist in the creation of new adjustments for the future.	1. Analyze and present the study findings to the committee, the school district, and K-State as a written dissertation.
Active Participant	1. Learn about the subject, their role, and PAR. 2. Select research methods 3. Assist in planning for the unit for Sem. 3.	1. Collect data, 2. Participate in the intervention. 3. Come up with new adjustments for the future.	1. Assist in determining the final analysis of the data. 2. Come up with what needs to be presented and how to present it.
Passive Participant	Nothing	1. Participate in the instructional unit. 2. Answer survey and interview questions as best as possible.	Nothing

summary, the following bulleted list of procedures was implemented to gather and maintain data for the study.

- Students were given a pseudonym as part of the study.
    - Adult participants were given the option to use a pseudonym as well.
- Interviews, meeting minutes, and focus groups conducted as part of the study were documented, and those records were maintained in a password-protected file for the duration of the study.
- All documents, video files, audio files, and transcriptions were redacted and/or destroyed upon the study's completion in compliance with MPS section 2 ¶ 5&6 (Millard Public Schools, 2016).
- No students were identified by name in the research journal and were referred to only by a pseudonym.

The final reporting of this study was a mix of PAR and case study. The purpose of this study remained unchanged, but to report its findings, elements of case study methodology, including triangulation (Yin, 2018), were used to make sense of the participants' data. In addition, data sources, including my research journal, transcriptions of interviews, recordings of meeting minutes, and video/audio of meetings, assisted my efforts to answer the questions posed in this study.

Data Analysis

As with the methods and other elements of this study, the exact process for analyzing the data was primarily decided upon by the PAR committee. Herr and Anderson (2005) state that

> "Collaborative data analysis may not completely resemble textbook examples of the way things 'should' be done. The process is neither static nor completely under the researcher's control. Rather it was recreated in the hands of the many who are making

meaning of the data for multiple purposes, only one of which is the actual dissertation." (p.129)

Like case study methodology, the analysis of this study was triangulated between transcripts, observations, and survey results (Yin, 2018). The analysis was continuous once data started coming in (Herr & Anderson, 2005). As the primary researcher, I gathered the data as it was turned in to the committee and led the group in the analytical process (MacDonald, 2012). We used coding processes described in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* by Johnny Saldaña (2016) and fundamental mathematical analysis from which we compared and contrasted averages. Most of the data was collected during the 4th stage because PAR work is used to produce actionable results (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Lawson, 2015b; MacDonald, 2012). Many sessions felt informal, with the committee discussing the successes and failures of the intervention. As we worked through the data, new ideas emerge, new plans are developed, and the new plans implemented. The cycle repeated itself several times until we both ran out of time and collected enough data to attempt answers for the study.

The final analysis was a combination of group interviews and reflective dialogue. The committee discussed what it was like to undergo a PAR process, discussed which results were most meaningful for them, and passed along any valuable experiences they had as we conducted research together. After completing the PAR process, I analyzed my research journal, transcriptions of meetings and interviews, audio/video of meetings, committee-generated surveys, student grade data, and debriefing interviews. Finally, this dissertation's findings and discussion chapters were presented to the committee and the school district (as per MPS regulations section 2 ¶ 5&6 (Millard Public Schools, 2016)).

Summary

This study lasted seven months and involved several people's experiences and labor. During our journey, nine students and five adults worked as equals to learn, grown, and answer research questions pertaining to lifelong participation in music. Our exploration led to new ideas and processes, which produced meaningful techniques for the students to engage in. The study went through three phases (a) assemble and education, (b) data collection, and (c) analysis of the data and presentation, after which the data was presented to the committee, written into this dissertation, and then supplied to the school district. Participants were volunteers and represented students, parents, and school staff. The ability of the committee to come together and generate these new ideas, equally as partners, led to the successful conclusion of the study and the findings in chapter four.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of this study was to bring together orchestra stakeholders in a collaborative effort to discover actionable ways of adapting the curriculum and instructional methods to prepare and empower students for lifelong engagement in music. I used Participatory Action Research (PAR) as my methodology which traditionally takes its research questions from the needs of the community within which it was operating. Typically, research questions are generated by the PAR committee to address their specific needs. However, the tradition of dissertation writing usually does not allow for this organic type of research. Therefore, I had established two research questions which the committee used as a focal point for our research. They were:

1. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to provide students with the necessary skills for lifelong engagement with music?
2. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to empower students to take control of their own musical journeys?

According to Herr and Anderson's book The Action Research Dissertation: A Guide for Students and Faculty (2005), one of the unique elements of PAR is that it is an ongoing event which will often surpass the timeframe of any one study. This study is essentially the first attempt to solve the larger problem which produced varying levels of success and failure. In an ideal situation this study should span upwards of four years to conduct, instead this is a one-year snapshot of that progress and the findings it produced.

The findings of this study are the result of committee analysis, as well as my own coded analysis of committee meetings, interviews, surveys, and my observation journal. The key findings this study found are:

1. Community expectations indicate an emphasis on performance skills and a disconnect between expectations and the reality of learning music for lifelong engagement.
2. Students had a decisively positive experience with the solo and small ensemble unit.
3. Students experienced at least one, if not more, identifiable skills that most independent musicians will often use.
4. Student feedback provided several good ideas for future versions of the project, including issues with scheduling, performance, and grouping of units.
5. Based upon the data collected by the committee, most members concluded that small ensemble and solo work is a valuable use of class time and should be included in the implicit curriculum of performing ensembles.

The evidence for each finding will be presented in each of the following four sections. A summary of the findings will be included at the end.

Community Expectations

In the beginning phase of this study, the PAR committee was interested in knowing what the expectations of the parents and students were. Once the committee knew the expectations, they were able to develop the intervention which would later become the solo and small ensemble unit. I was commissioned by the committee and endorsed by building administration to poll parents and students on this question. A survey was developed which asked parents to rate 18 commonly taught music skills as not important, somewhat important, important, very

important, or top three most important skills to be taught.[10] Each of these skills fell into a category of musical development. Table 4.1 shows each of the questions and their category and Table 4.2 shows the skills ranked by most important and top 3 most important. The survey was set to randomize the selection order.

On November 9th I presented the results of the survey to the committee. There was 32% response rate (N= 195) giving us a 95% confidence ± 10. Of these responses 52.4% were parents and 47.6% were students. Figure 4.2 lays out the results of the survey as ranked by the very important and top 3 most important categories across both student and parent data groups. When the data is split apart by data group (parent v. students) the rankings reveal areas of alignment and disconnect (see Table 4.3). The top three most important skills were the same for both parents and students and are all performance category skills. These are largely the most basic performance skills of playing in tune, having good tone, and putting on quality performances. The least important skills in this ranking were also nearly identical (Performing in music contests, Improvising, and composing) except for learning music history being more valued by parents than by students. Aside from these areas an important observation arises in the fourth and fifth spots. Both parents and students expected seniors to be self-sufficient yet many of the skills needed to do so were undervalued. How could a senior be self-sufficient without the ability to find their own music, prepare music individually, perform solos, or pass an audition? This disconnect was very interesting and led to a spirited discussion about educating our parents.
In addition to the questions about musical skills parents and students were asked what they thought the appropriate number of performances were in a year. They were given the options of

[10] The commonly taught music skills were enumerated by committee members and me. Efforts to identify commonly taught skills in the research failed to produce working lists.

Table 4.1

Survey Questions by Category

#	Skill	Skill Category
1	Students should play in tune.	Performance
2	Students should perform with good tone.	Performance
3	Students should put on quality performances.	Performance
4	Students should participate in music contests.	Performance
5	Students should perform classical music.	Performance
6	Students should learn music history.	Understanding Music
7	Students should learn music theory.	Understanding Music
8	Students should learn to analyze and describe music.	Understanding music
9	Students should practice at home on a daily basis.	Musician Skills
10	Students should learn to run small ensemble rehearsals.	Musician Skills
11	Students should learn to find their own music.	Musician Skills
12	Students should learn to perform solos.	Musician Skills
13	Students should learn to prepare music individually.	Musician Skills
14	Students should learn to improvise music.	Musician Skills
15	Students should learn to compose music.	Musician Skills
16	Seniors should be self-sufficient as a musician.	Lifelong Expectation.
17	Seniors should continue playing music after graduation.	Lifelong Expectation.
18	Seniors should be able to pass an audition	Lifelong Expectation.

Table 4.2

The 18 Skills Ranked by Overall Importance (Very Important + Top 3)

#	Skill	Skill Category
1	Students should play in tune.	Performance
2	Students should perform with good tone.	Performance
3	Students should put on quality performances.	Performance
4	Seniors should be self-sufficient as a musician.	Lifelong Expectation.
5	Seniors should be able to pass an audition	Lifelong Expectation.
6	Students should learn to analyze and describe music.	Understanding music
7	Students should learn to perform solos.	Musician Skills
8	Students should perform classical music.	Performance
9	Students should learn to prepare music individually.	Musician Skills
10	Students should learn to find their own music.	Musician Skills
11	Students should learn to run small ensemble rehearsals.	Musician Skills
12	Students should practice at home on a daily basis.	Musician Skills
13	Students should learn music theory.	Understanding Music
14	Seniors should continue playing music after graduation.	Lifelong Expectation.
15	Students should participate in music contests.	Performance
16	Students should learn music history.	Understanding Music
17	Students should learn to improvise music.	Musician Skills
18	Students should learn to compose music.	Musician Skills

Table 4.3

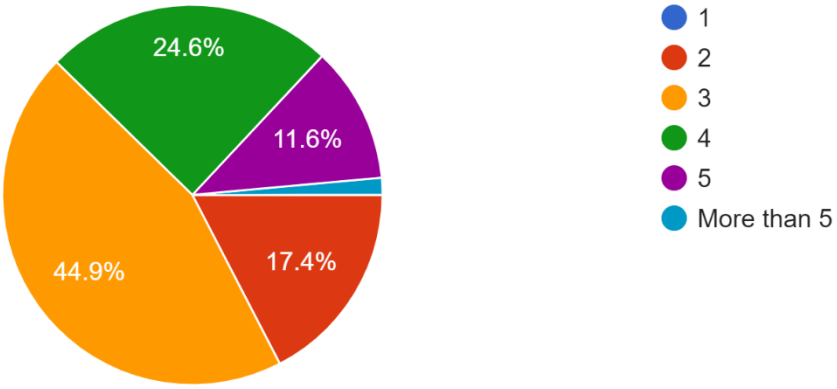
Parent Expectations vs. Student Expectations

	Parent Expectations		Student Expectations	
	Skill	Category	Skill	Category
1	Play in tune	performance	Play in tune	performance
2	Put on quality performances	performance	Good tone	performance
3	Good tone	performance	Put on quality performances	performance
4	Perform classic music	Understanding	Seniors should be self-sufficient	Lifelong Expt.
5	Seniors should be self-sufficient	Lifelong Expt.	Prepare music individually	Musician Skills
6	Practice at home	Musician Skills	Perform solos	Musician Skills
7	Music theory	Understanding	Music theory	Understanding
8	Analyze and describe music	Understanding	Find music, run rehearsals, analyze, pass an audition	Musician skill, Musician skill, understanding, lifelong expt.
9	Run rehearsals	Musician skills	Practice at home	Musician skill
10	Find music	Musician skills	Classic music	Understanding
11	Continued playing after graduation	Lifelong expt.	Continued playing after graduation	Lifelong expt.
12	Perform solos	Musician skills	Participate in contest	performance
13	Music history	Understanding music	Music history	Understanding music
14	Pass an audition	Lifelong Expt.	Improvise music	Musician skill
15	Prepare music individually	Musician skills	Compose music	Musician skill
16	Participate in contest	performance		
17	Improvise music	Musician skill		
18	Compose music	Musician skill		

one, two, three, four, five, and more than five. Figure 4.1 shows the responses to this question.

Figure 4.1

How Many Performances Should the Orchestra Perform in a Year?



Slightly under half of the respondents indicated that three performances were ideal, with two and four making up 42% of the responses. In the minority were five and more than five performances. In the 2022-2023 school year the symphony orchestra performed eight concerts with six of those occurring between the months of January and May including pre-festival contests, the LINKS orchestra festival in Lincoln, District Music Contest, and Graduation all of which are high pressure performances due to adjudication or public pressure as in the graduation performance.

After the meeting on November 9th, the committee came back to plan for the intervention we would be using to correct the issues in the curriculum. On November 30th we resolved that our intervention would consist of a two-part instructional unit where students would participate in either a small ensemble project or a solo project. After students had time to prepare, a performance would be given. The units would take place during the third nine-week term from

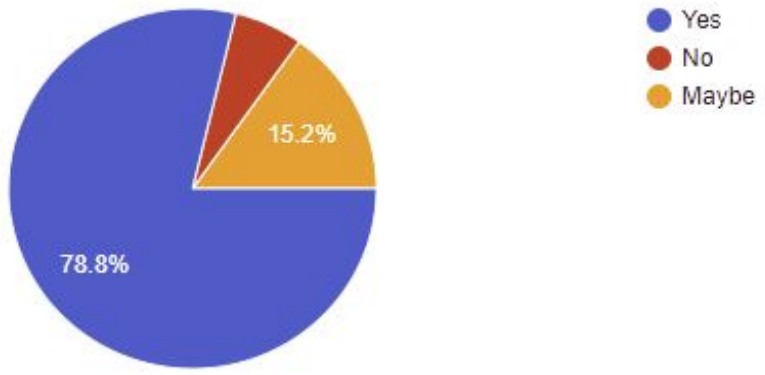
January through February. After the unit was completed, students would be surveyed on their experiences and the committee would reconvene to analyze that data.

Student Experiences are Decisively Positive

There was some debate about if education should be fun or not, however it is a commonly held understanding that people who enjoy doing something will be open to doing it again. The purpose of the committee was to design a unit of study that would help students become independent musicians. The experience of participating in the unit would hopefully lead to lifetime engagement with music. Because of our goals and aim, it was important that students enjoy the project. Across all the questions in the survey and in the follow up interviews there were several instances where students expressed enjoyment and positive learning experiences. One particularly telling question on the survey asked if students would do this project again? Figure 4.2 is a pie chart illustrating the quantified information given from a simple yes, no, maybe question.

Figure 4.2

Would Students Do this Project Again?



As can be seen in figure 4.2 many respondents would do this project again. From the population of students who said they would do the project again 54% were members of small ensembles and

46% were in solo projects. However, ascent to do a project again does not indicate enjoyment or even a positive experience. In addition to answering yes, no, or maybe, students were asked to explain their answers. It was from these answers that the committee was able to get at the true experience of the students during the solo and small ensemble unit. For the sake of anonymity all student's answers will be referred to by either pseudonym or response number. Student Five was a member of a small ensemble and they responded,

> "I would enjoy doing this project again. It was fun to work in small groups to learn how to connect with each other to play music. Although we are losing class time to work in a large ensemble, I think that it was important to learn how to work with a smaller group of people."

Student Eight was also in a small group and had a different reason they enjoyed it. They said, "I think I would do this again because it's nice to play something that I found for myself and the process of learning to play it by myself is very rewarding." Solo project students also stated that they enjoyed the project. Student 24 said "I would like to do this project again. This project broadened my horizons to music I might consider tossing aside otherwise." Each of these students experienced the project differently, yet all enjoyed the project and would do it again.

When we look at the answers from the survey the rationale for why students experienced enjoyment in the project is varied. However, 61% of respondents specifically mentioned enjoyment or fun. Of this group, 30% indicated that the reason they enjoyed this project was because they enjoyed the freedom to choose their own music. Student Five represented the second most common type of answer with 28% of respondents indicating social learning opportunities as one of the reasons why they enjoyed the project. Student 24 represented the third most common answer; learning how to choose music or developing a better understanding of

what types of music are available to them. There were other factors that played a significant role in why the project was enjoyable which came from a change we made as a committee about two weeks into the project.

The initial plan created by the committee was that students would follow an outline, like the MCAs I do in my freshman class. The procedure included playing for peers and ends in a final performance. However, there didn't seem to be enough class time to allow students, especially those in small ensembles to properly prepare for such a schedule. A meeting was held during class on February 28th, 2022, where student members and I discussed amending the plan to allow for more individual enjoyment of the project. There was a unanimous decision made at that time to remove the mandatory performance elements of the unit. Instead of performing students would utilize a reflection paper at the end of the project as both a data collection tool and a way to receive credit in the gradebook. After this vote, I sent an email to the adult members of the PAR committee and asked for their thoughts and votes. The adults voted unanimously as well. At that time, I announced the change to the class.

On the March 14th survey, we asked students how the change affected their motivation. It was the theory of the committee that changing the requirements should increase how much fun the students had with the project. There were also concerns on the committee that the change might negatively affect the motivation of the students to use the class time given them for the projects. When the committee began coding the survey the initial finding was that it increased the students' motivation and decreased their anxiety. Student 13 commented, "It did change my motivation, but kinda opposite what you would think. I was almost more motivated because I was less stressed, and I could just play for fun." This was initially an exciting finding. After the

committee was adjourned, I went back through the answers and did my own analysis. The coded answers are listed in table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Analysis of Coded Answers from the Committee

Student	Motivation +	Motivation -	Anxiety +	Anxiety -
1		1		
2				
3	1			
4		1		
5		1		
6		1		l
7				1
8				1
9	1			l
10				1
11				1
12				1
13				1
14	1			
15				1
16		1		
17				1
18	1			
19	1			1
20				1
21		1		
22				
23		1		
24		1		
25	Na	Na	Na	Na
26				1
27	Na	Na	Na	Na
28	Na	Na	Na	Na
29	Na	Na	Na	Na
30	Na	Na	Na	Na
31	Na	Na	Na	Na
32	Na	Na	Na	Na
33				1
Totals	**5**	**8**	**0**	**13**

My analysis showed that the initial findings from the group were only partially correct. While many students showed a decrease in anxiety there was also a decrease in motivation. Student 5 stated, “When the performance requirement was lifted, it changed my motivation by decreasing it. It decreased because if we weren’t going to perform it, then what was the point of doing it really.” Other students commented that “Once it changed, I wasn’t as motivated to master the piece,” and “I didn’t feel as pushed to get the assignment done or perform it.” While students were less motivated to do the project, all students except for one small ensemble student stated that they found that it was enjoyable.

When we look at students who felt there was a decrease in anxiety, all but four said that they would do the project again. Looking at the outliers, Table 4.5 is a side-by-side chart of the answers of four students who said that they experienced a decrease of anxiety but answered that they either would not do the project again, or only might do it again. What we can see in this table is that even these students, who had a decrease in anxiety, found some enjoyment in the project. Even the student who said that would not do the project again, enjoyed “just play[ing] and practice[ing] the music.”

To summarize, the students had many different experiences, but nearly all experiences showed in some way an enjoyment of the project; regardless of the type of project they worked on. Two primary themes of enjoyment were identified as the most common. Those themes were enjoyment in social interactions and the freedom to select their own music. Students experienced lowered anxiety levels when they did not have to perform their project for others. However, not performing for others led to a decrease in the motivation of students to complete the assignment fully. Overall, most students would choose to do the project again, with a few students

expressing that there were elements of the projects that they would either do differently, or simply do not like these kinds of projects in general.

Table 4.5

Comparisons

Would you do this project again?	Did your motivation change?
No. I only do projects if I have to.	It didn't really change my motivation but it did make the whole process less anxious so that was good. I think once the anxiety piece was removed it was a lot more enjoyable to just play and practice the music
Maybe. I would in a sense, I liked doing it more with [name removed] than by myself. So yes, and no.	A lot because then I could have fun playing music instead of having to stress about it.
Maybe. I would not do this specific piece again because I felt as though there were more interesting pieces in the suite that I could have played instead. However, I still enjoyed it for what it was.	This changed my motivation because I became less stressed about playing it perfectly, which made the project not seem as daunting.
Maybe. I would probably not do this project again for school but on my own I would. If we were to do another solo project for an actual concert grade then I would choose a more serious songs. I feel like also I could choose a song from YouTube whenever I was overworked	It only motivated me a bit more mostly because the added pressure was taken off and I could enjoy the music preparation with less stress.

Student Experiences Indicated the Acquisition of Independent Music Skills

While reading through the answers to the survey and interviews I was able to identify 14 different skills that musicians, such as myself, use regularly when learning music on our own. Many students experienced more than one skill with some being more commonly experienced than others. Table 4.6 lists each of the skills and the number of instances they were mentioned.

Table 4.6

Independent Music Skills Mentioned in the Student Survey

Skill	Mentions
Communication	2
Composition	2
Group Awareness	11
Increased Desire to Learn Independently	3
Leadership Skills	5
Listening Skills	11
Literature Awareness	8
Ownership	6
Personal Drive	5
Selecting Music	18
Reading Music	20
Rehearsing and Practicing	38
Teaching	2
Time Management	3

The most frequently identified skills related to rehearsing and practicing, reading music, and selecting music. Several students indicated that they learned or used more than one skill. Student One's answer is a good representation of this characteristic. They said,

> I developed the ability to play as a group and not just as a soloist. Instead of just playing my notes and expecting the group to sound good I had to listen to those around me, especially since I'm the only bass in the group.

This student picked up skills and understanding regarding group rehearsal skills, listening skills, and group awareness skills. As a member of the small ensemble, they had to develop their own part, as well as realize how it fit together. As a bassist they were the only one in their section which is like doing a solo with the difference being that often the bass part in group music is not as challenging as solo literature. Keeping this understanding in mind let's look at the largest themed skill; rehearsing and practicing.

Skills in Rehearsing and Practicing

When it comes to rehearsing and practicing there is a lot of room for variation and nuance. When coding this section, the term rehearsing referred primarily to the students in the small ensembles and the term practicing to solo project students. There are too many instances to list all the answers, so to better understand how the two types of experiences differ we can look at a few examples' side-by-side in table 4.7. As should be expected when a group performs without a conductor, the experiences of small ensemble answers tended to be outwardly focused on keeping the group together through counting, listening, and sound projection. These skills are basic and vital for any group to be able to perform a piece of music together. When it came to solo student experiences, their experiences are inward focused and are more diversified. While

Table 4.7

Side-by-Side Comparison of Student Experiences in Solo and Small Ensembles

Solo	Small Ensembles
"I tried to develop my left-hand (should be right hand) technique a bit during this assignment. I know I'm always short on my bow usage and I tried to use proper amounts of my bow for the entire song."	"I developed the ability to play as a group and not just as a soloist."
"I think I really improved with sightreading music. Once I got bored with a piece, I would just switch to another."	"I developed leadership skills…I counted them off."
"I got a self-drive to want to get better."	"I had to learn how to pulse and count in a small group."
"I developed better time management skills in order to find time to practice my solo project."	"I definitely got better at listening to the people playing around me since we had to match tempos and make sure that we were in tune, especially since there were only three of us and each of our parts would stand out."
"I developed my ability to keep self-motivated, manage my time, and be responsible for my work. During this assignment I largely had to decide for myself how to handle the workload, so I had to figure out when I was going to dedicate myself and when I could take a break."	"Definitely had to use my skill of sight reading the first time I played with my partners because they already knew the music and I didn't."
"I learned how to read tenor clef."	"Play out. If someone sounds like they truly know what they are doing, others become encouraged to play out as well."

some answers revolved around time management and personal drive/motivation, other answers were spread around the focus on technique and reading skills. As I was analyzing this, I thought that there might be a connection between what the students learned and the types of challenges they faced. To investigate this connection, I utilized the survey question asking students what the most challenging things they experienced were.

After coding the challenges survey question there were 18 instances where rehearsing or practicing was listed as being the most challenging element that students faced. After reading through these answers again this category was further broken down into technical issues and social issues. There were eight answers coded as being caused by technique issues, five answers coded as being caused by social issues, and five answers coded as being caused by both social and technical issues.

Social issues were almost exclusively a small ensemble problem. Of these many of the answers related to not being able to get everyone together.

> Having to fit three parts together was kind of awkward at first and I know [name redacted] and [name redacted] had a hard time while I was gone because it sounds weird without the melody line.

Another student said, "The main challenge we faced was playing together due to most of the group being in band as well as orchestra.[11]" Both of these groups were in the same predicament regarding the members of their small ensembles. Initially each group wanted to keep membership exclusively all band/orchestra students or all choir/orchestra students. However, ensemble members also wanted to have their friends who were full-time orchestra students in the

[11] At Millard West High School students may participate in more than one music class. In these instances, students are shared between the ensembles for half of a 90-minute block.

groups. The dilemma occurred when they attempted to include some friends instead of maintaining the integrity of their initial plan. Another issue mentioned by students regarded social strife with other members during a rehearsal. “It took us a while to get used to playing with each other” and “My group was not as motivated to play and learn the piece as I was. As such we rarely got work done and often got off task.” Social issues were not unique to small ensembles. There was one outlier from the solo project that deserves mention because the issue is so prevalent in independent learning. “A challenge I came across was not being able to ask my peers for help on certain sections, such as the transition to pizzicato, because they had their own works.” As an independent musician I have had to struggle with this problem myself. The inability to find answers to technical problems on one’s own is a common frustration. It is interesting that only one person mentioned this challenge.

The other grouping of answers related to challenges that were caused by technical problems. Table 4.8 will look at the different types of technical issues faced by students in both small ensembles and solo projects.

Table 4.8

Rehearsing and Practicing Challenges Caused by Technical Issues

Solo	Small Ensemble
“One of the challenges I came across was exploring fingerings without any guidance. I had to play around with what felt more comfortable and balance the feel with what fit the style of the piece.”	“I came across a lot of differentiating rhythms. This was strange because so did my group. This made it difficult to put everything together.”
“There wasn’t a viola part or even orchestra sheet music for the song, so I had to look up a piano tutorial and see which keys were played to figure out the notes. That was pretty hard and took a while for me to do it.”	“Staying together. It was very hard to listen to each other and then end up in the same place.”
“There are some markings in my piece that aren’t traditional music notations, so I tried to interpret what they meant.”	“Keeping tempo in a group of five.”
“Trying to learn a song by ear is very difficult.”	“The hardest part of small ensembles was keeping it together.”

Table 4.9 shows correlations between identified challenges and the lessons learned by the students. Not all responses were able to have a clear connection between the challenge and the lessons learned. These four examples provided the clearest illustration of the connection in this sample group. While these four answers are confined to the coded group relating to the acquisition of rehearsal and practice skills, when all surveyed answers are considered, we can see that 56% of respondents show a similar direct correlation in their responses.

Table 4.9

Correlations between Challenges and the Lessons Learned

Small/Solo	Challenges Experienced	Lessons Learned	Skills Identified
Small Ensemble	"The hardest part of small ensembles was keeping it together."	"I developed leadership skills… I counted them off and I also gained some knowledge about timings as well."	"How to lead and rehearse a small ensemble."
Small Ensemble	"I came across a lot of differentiating rhythms. This was strange because so did my group. This made it difficult to put everything together."	"I used a lot of techniques that I previously knew about. I also used a lot of practice skills that are learned and taught in choir and orchestra from a young age. The biggest key seemed to be repetition with the other members of my group."	"How to rehearse a small ensemble through repetition."
Solo	"There wasn't a viola part or even orchestra sheet music for the song, so I had to look up a piano tutorial and see which keys were played to figure out the notes. That was pretty hard and took a while for me to do it."	"I got better at translating [transposing] treble clef to alto clef from this project."	"Practicing and learning to read in new clefs."
Solo	"Trying to learn a song by ear is difficult."	"I began to figure out ways to learn music by ear which was difficult."	"Practicing music through the development of ear training."

Acquisition of Reading Skills

The second most common type of skills developed in this unit, as identified by respondents, is related to the ability to read and understand notation. Amongst small ensemble students the ability to sight read was commonly voiced. One small ensemble student stated:

> I got better at sight reading, as we played various pieces that were very different in style when trying to decide what piece to play. Developing a better ability to sight read different styles of music allowed me to find similarities in the different pieces that made it easier to play through it.

This participant not only experienced a practical use of sight-reading skills but also how the ability to sight read could increase one's knowledge of music by being able to play many different pieces and compare them.

While sight reading was also mentioned by solo students, the most common answer related to transposing and reading other clefs. Student 21 said "I have a deeper understanding of playing higher octaves on the A string as a result of playing in treble clef." Student 22 replied "I learned how to read tenor clef."[12]

It is important to remember that many of these skills were derived from the challenges that the students faced in their music. One solo student gave a description of the challenge they faced. "In one of my pieces I got to try and transpose treble clef into bass clef in the high and low octave" which led them to state that they were able to "somewhat read treble clef again." The connection between challenges and learning is one that is well documented and has played out in these findings.

[12] Student 22 never played a piece of music in tenor clef prior to their solo work.

Selecting Music

The instructions that participants received regarding the selection of music was simple and sparse. They were to find a piece of music that they wanted to learn how to play, and then learn how to play it. This forced every student to explore the musical options available to them and then compare what they wanted to play with their perceived abilities. Some students found this difficult. Some mentioned that selecting the music was their least favorite part. Answers like "My least favorite part was trying to find music that was fun for all of us," not only speak to this challenge, but also to the difficulty of finding music that works for every part. This challenge is the same problem that a member of the Yale convention found. Another student mentioned the challenge of acquiring music. "My least favorite part was trying to navigate free music websites and creating an account to get the free sheet music. It also is difficult to choose when there is so much music available." Writing sheet music is a labor-intensive project, and therefore if sheet music exists it may require purchasing. Other students did not have a good understanding of sheet music resources, thus requiring me to supply them. Many other students would confine themselves in ways that were overly restrictive such as only playing classical music, or music from method books. I had to help several of these students understand that they could use any resource they wanted to if they picked the piece and taught themselves how to do it. When students were asked about key takeaways from the project one of the students specifically mentioned "You shouldn't limit yourself or put yourself in a box and do whatever you want." Others mentioned that learning to find music was their key takeaway. Student 13 had as his key takeaway "I learned how to find and choose music that I want to play and enjoy doing it."

Student Feedback for Future Use

One of the only questions that I supplied to the survey was asking the students what they would change if they were the teacher. The most common type of feedback was relating to the scheduling of the unit in the school year. While the timing of the project was largely a decision based upon the confines of the research project, it is important to note the popularity of the concern. This suggestion was also reflected in nearly all the interviews I recorded from committee members. This small ensemble student's comment is representative of most of these comments.

> I would lay out specific days and times that would be dedicated to working on it. I would not incorporate it into our schedule while we were still working heavily on DMC music.
>
> This so my students wouldn't have double stress and could focus on working together.

The timing of the project with the third and fourth quarters was one that I initially thought would be better for timing because there is generally more space in the calendar. However, this year filled up quickly with extra performances. The problem was compounded by a lack in stamina created by the COVID-19 pandemic protocols the previous year. This meant that while we only learned three pieces of music from February to April, the students were overwhelmed by the high stakes performances of Graduation and District Music Contest (DMC). These stresses affected the class in unforeseen ways.

Other repeated suggestions included more time during the class for students to work on their projects. This is related to the first suggestion as well because DMC preparation was the primary driver of the large ensemble class from January to April. During our meetings as a committee, scheduling also came up and Leaf suggested:

> One possibility that we could do is kind of structure so that [we are] working our way down to the solo. So, kind of push…the solo unit kind of later in the timeframe and then having like a small ensemble before it. So, it's not directly from large ensemble to solos and then later on, we do like a small ensemble thing. But with that I [think] we can kind of work best.

This suggestion was agreed with by most of the committee members. Later in May, I brought this up with my orchestra advisory council.[13] They agreed that we should use this plan for the 2022-2023 school year. One member also noted that if we did the small ensembles first it would better prepare everyone for the large ensemble music, and that we could even include small ensemble performances in our October and December concerts.

After evaluating the data from the survey another member of the PAR committee had a plan for the solo part of the project. They suggested:

> Pair them up with another student and they can bounce their solos off of each other and give each other feedback…in order to improve their solo and make it more of a one-on-one situation with their peers. I think that they would be more relaxed that way and more open to different ideas.

[13] I use a group of student leaders (Elected President and Vice President, Secretary, & elected representatives for each grade (10,11,&12) and band/choir kids as a focus group to bounce ideas off of and to assist me in understanding the student perspective in my classroom.

This suggestion is supported by part of the MCA[14] process that I used in the Philharmonic orchestra.[15] I mentioned that to the committee and Willow said, "As a freshman…I thought that was like the most helpful part of the MCAs."

The second most popular suggestion from the students related to the performance element. This next student articulated two points for future iterations of this unit.

> I would leave a low stakes performance element to keep some sort of motivation in the groups. I would also have checkpoints in the project to make sure that the groups are still going through the processes like they should in order to truly learn about the experience of creating a small ensemble.

This student's feedback indicates that the performance element should be included in the unit for the future and that there should be built in checkpoints for the students. The audience type for the performance varied in the student answers from public concerts to small groups of peers, to just the teacher.

The remainder of the comments were more diversified with only one or two common answers between participants. These covered a range of coded topics which are listed below by popularity:

1. Adjust the scheduling of the unit,
2. Keep the performance element of the unit intact in some form,
3. Group the solo and small ensemble projects to be ran one at a time over the entire class,

---

[14] Model Cornerstone Assessment. See operational constructs.

[15] The Philharmonic orchestra is an ensemble made up of mostly freshman and is a prerequisite for the primary ensemble.

4. More involvement from the teacher in the form of scaffolding or formal performance checks,
5. Regulate the difficulty of the literature to ensure that each student is properly challenged,
6. Include more social elements into the unit,
7. Better communicate the expectations of the unit ahead of time,
8. No grade for the unit.

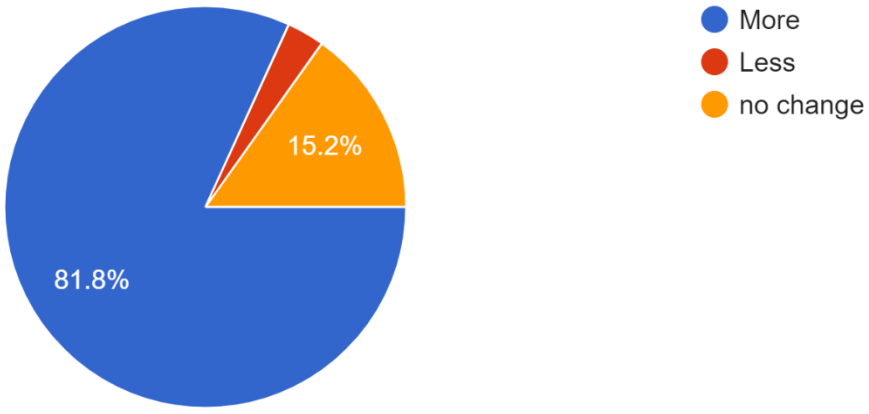
Many of these elements have merit in them, and there will be more discussion about how some of these suggestions could be used in the future.

Students are Better Prepared to be Individual Musicians because of the Unit

The last question on the survey is probably the most important from an evaluative perspective. The question asked students how prepared they were to engage with music on their own. They could answer either more prepared, no change, or less prepared. Figure 4.3 shows how the spread of the answers came out.

Figure 4.3

How Prepared Do You Feel?



Based on the raw data, students responded that they were more prepared to engage in music on their own. The reasons for their answer vary as to whether they were small ensemble students or

solo project students. The most identified reason for why students felt more prepared was that they thought they better understood the process of preparing a piece of music. While I initially thought that this would be more common amongst small ensemble students, it was evenly spread between both small ensemble and solo project students, for which Student Five gave one possible reason, "Having to practice on our own for our small groups success, it prepared me for having to practice on my own for my solo piece and my own personal success." Half of the students indicated that they felt better prepared because of an increase in understanding how to prepare music through their lived experiences and had a better understanding of how to select music.

Selecting music has been listed several times in these findings and is a difficult task for many musicians. Teaching students how to select music divorced from real world application is problematic. By giving students this project, it forced many to confront the challenges of music selection. When left alone for this task I noticed in my observations that many of the students did not know where to start when looking for music. However, Student 16 mentions a few starting points that they used in their answer:

> I definitely feel that I'm more prepared. In the future, I was able to choose my own songs that would interest me to play. I've learned to use google and YouTube to find my pieces and what they're supposed to sound like.

This shows that the students were engaging in creative problem solving as most of the sources I provided were revolving around sheet music.

Looking at the rest of the data, five students indicated that there was no change in how prepared they felt and one student stated that they felt less prepared. Their answers are given in table 4.10. Upon further analysis of these answers, we can see that while they may not feel more

prepared after this unit, it tends to be because they did not feel they learned anything new, or that they were already comfortable with being an independent musician. After analyzing this I wanted to explore the rationale of students who said that they did not learn anything.

I began my investigation of students that stated they did not learn anything, by looking at the responses to a question about their key takeaways from the project. Both the third and sixth respondents gave answers indicating some skill acquisition. The third said "I learned how to work with others and adjust to them." The sixth stated "I learned that each part is important to how well you function as a group, and I also learned that what piece you choose can affect how

Table 4.10

Reasons Students Did Not Indicate that they are Better Prepared

Indicated Response	Small Ensemble or Solo	Answer
No Change	Small Ensemble	"Working on my own has never been a challenge for me. I probably feel a little better about it though."
No Change	Small Ensemble	"I feel more prepared I guess, but not really."
No Change	Small Ensemble	"No, I haven't really learned anything new with music."
No Change	Small Ensemble	"I say this because during school I don't play my own music since I don't have time and during the summer I just replay the music we played during school. I don't care to pay for my own music."
No Change	Solo	"I feel the same, I'm already taking steps outside of school to engage with music."
Less	Small Ensemble	"I don't feel as prepared to engage in music on my own due to the fact that we didn't really learn anything."

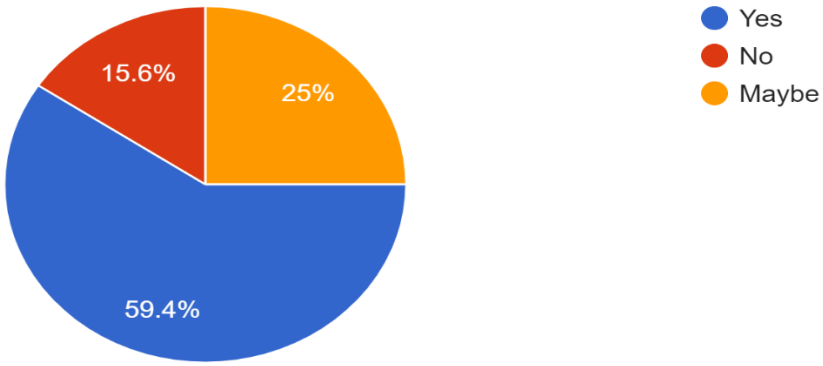
you play together as well." Looking further into the sixth respondent who said they were less prepared, I discovered that their experience was largely hampered by structural challenges. They were the student who had half of their small ensemble in band and complained that the music they chose was boring. It is possible that this experience interfered with their opportunity to find fulfillment in this project and that despite learning valuable musician skills regarding the functionality of a group and the selection of music, their overall perspective of their preparedness was distorted and gave them the feeling that they did not learn anything.

Small Ensemble and Solo Instruction Should be Included in Curricula

The last of the major findings relates to the use of instructional time and inclusion of solo and small ensemble instruction in the implicit curriculum. On the survey the committee asked if participants thought it was a good use of instructional time to do a small ensemble and solo unit. Figure 4.4 is a pie chart of the results.

Figure 4.4

Was This a Good Use of Instructional Time?



Students were a bit split whether the unit was a good use of their instructional time with just over half (59.4%) responding that it was. The other half was split between maybe answers

(25%) and no answers (15.6%). Before we dig into the maybe and no categories let's see what the yes students said.

Students who responded in the affirmative for this instructional time question had answers that split into one of nine codes.

1. It was a good break from traditional rehearsals and DMC music.
2. The unites taught independent musical skills which they found valuable.
3. The unit prepared students for life after high school.
4. The unit allowed the students personal time to explore their own musical tastes and act creatively.
5. The unit relived stress.
6. The unit taught teamwork.
7. The unit forced students to identify their strengths and weaknesses.
8. The unit helped to motivate students to practice more at home.
9. The unit provided students with social learning activities.

The most common answer was how the unit was a break from rehearsing the district music contest music. In large ensemble rehearsals much of the time is spent working sections of music to form a good, cohesive, group sound. This means a lot of repetition for both students who understand and do not understand the parts. Repetition is necessary for rehearsals, but when a student already possesses the ability to play a part, the constant rehearsal of the same parts can be tedious. Having individual music to work on can be a great way to break the monotony or fill time while waiting for another group to finish rehearsing. Two students provided evidence of this benefit. The first student answered "It [the unit] helped to break up some of the more tedious aspects of rehearsal and gave me a way to unwind and just have some fun with friends on our

instruments." A solo student replied "We got to take a break from our rehearsal music to instead enjoy it on our own pieces of music. And the constant switching served as a refreshing break from the other pieces of music."

Another issue during large ensemble classes is that most of the time rehearsal is working on group sound, and there is very little attention given to the individual. Like the previous answers on the acceptable use of class time, one solo student answered yes to the question "because we don't spend as much time on the individual [*sic*] part of playing." This is an important observation because it was part of the reason that I was looking at this issue with the committee. This observation is also the second most common type of answer.

One of the things that the orchestra struggled with after COVID-19 at Millard West High School was getting back into the flow of how to do orchestra. The individual practice component is something that music teachers have always struggled with. Creating the time in class to devote to individual projects allows me as the teacher to observe and correct bad practicing habits in an environment set aside for music alone. A time free from some of the other pressures that students in High School can face outside of school.

One student who seemed to really understand the issue we were working toward was Student Nine. This is their answer regarding the appropriate use of class time.

> Yes, because it encouraged us to find independence with music. We aren't going to have a teacher there for every step of the way as we learn our music, even for our class ensemble, so I think this could help foster that ability to individually work.

Another student observed that by having the time in class to work on individual projects it helped by "giving student(s) the ability to learn how they sound on their own and learn their own abilities [which] is necessary for successfully play[ing] in a large ensemble." This connection

between the solo project and the large ensemble is one worth exploring further and I discuss it in chapter five. After looking at this question I thought it would be a good idea to follow up with a few students regarding if this should be part of the curriculum in schools or if it should stay as a unit.

In a one of the interviews, I was talking to Jake about the inclusion of small ensembles and solo work in the curriculum. He replied,

> I definitely think that it's extremely important to have that dedicated into the curriculum. Especially considering that you're preparing students, not only for college but you're preparing them for outside life continuing with music, and the only ways that they're going to do that is by being in a large group, or by being in a small ensemble, or doing solos. So, teaching them how to pick their music, how to play their music, how it should sound and how to learn from like that music itself on their own. If you don't include that they probably won't [play after school] as the only option that they have left is to play in large symphonies like the Omaha symphony or whatever else.

While this answer does show that my passion for lifelong engagement in orchestra has been received by members of my class, the points he makes are still valid from his perspective. In my time with the students, I have observed this opinion being shared by several other students, but it was not voiced in the survey.

Students who answered 'maybe' on the use of class time question did so mostly because it took time from practicing competition music. "It would've been better if it wasn't during class time because it's easy to get distracted and I would've rather played our competition piece." Another student answered, "In a way I would say no because it took away from practicing for competition." All but one of the maybe answers who thought that the units took away time from

competition music were doing the solo project. Most of the small ensemble students in the maybe category felt it was a more appropriate use of time than the solo students. One student's answer seems to summarize this section well when they said, "I think that it was definitely more beneficial to the small ensemble people since it would be hard to do it outside of class. But for the solo projects, I don't think we needed that much time." This sentiment was also shared by the few people who responded 'no' to the question about class time apart from one student who indicated that "since it's not used for a grade" it was not a good use of class time.

Findings Related to the Empowerment of Participants

Up to this point all the findings have been a combination of two groups of participants based on level of involvement. The first group, referred to as Active Participants in chapter 3, are made up of students, parents, and administrators who served on the PAR committee. This group of students were also enrolled in the class and went through the unit like everyone else. Excluded from unit participation were those parents and administrators who were not part of the class. The second group of participants were referred to as Passive Participants and were made up of the rest of the students who did the unit and answered the surveys and interviews. As there were differing levels of empowerment in each of these groups based on the nature of their roles, it was best these findings were given by the group.

Empowerment of Active Participants

There was a total of 10 student participants classified as active. Each participated not only in the committee work, but also as student musicians. This group of participants came in typically once a month throughout the duration of this study to learn, discuss, develop, and

analyze elements of this study. Each were treated as equals and many, not all[16], were given chairmanship duties at the meetings where they would plan and facilitate the meeting. We had representation of students who identified as either male or female, several different nationalities, and at least one from every high school grade from 9th to 12th. Each participant volunteered for the study and was not coerced to join in any way, shape or form. This element of separation between the power of the teacher/researcher and the student would be blurred significantly during their participation so it was imperative that all Active Participants volunteer without any pressure from me. To protect their anonymity each chose a pseudonym. In addition to supplying answers to the survey questions they also were given exit interviews at the end of the study. When asked if they experience any sensations of empowerment several replied that they had and four elaborated on their answers which were as follows.

A-113:

I definitely got a lot more confident in my public speaking and talking to people. I use to be very tongue tied; like always. But I'm a lot better just stating clearly and formulating a thought, and then turning it into words, and then making those words make sense. A lot smoother now." "I will say at the beginning the power structure was not even. The parents and the adults knew what they're doing there and were more comfortable voicing their opinion, especially because they didn't have to deal with superiors. So, they voiced their opinion and were a lot more confident in what they had to say, but by the end [it] kind of equalized out and kind of met halfway.

[16] In chapter three I provided information about our rotating chairmanship. All active participants were given a spot in the rotation. Some students were not able to serve as a chairman either by absence on the day they were to chair, or lack of time to rotate around to them.

Rex:

I kind of had a little bit of this feeling of being a test subject just because I was in the classroom and was kind of going through this experiment. But I did feel like through being in the committee that kind of did help bring some empowerment. It was nice to…actually kind of get some of the voice within the decisions and the curriculum that we kind of laid out for our class.

Berry:

I felt like I had more [of a] say in what we were doing in class and like, changing things, like when we got rid of the performance requirement, that felt really good to be able to help make that choice. Because I knew many people were kind of stressed about that. It made me feel happy about being able to do that." "At the beginning [of the meetings] everyone was kind of uncomfortable [about] saying something and butting in. But towards the end of it, everyone had become more comfortable with…interjecting in the middle and just like saying 'I don't think that's right.

Sunflower:

I don't know I would use the word empowerment. I definitely felt growth as far as just even being able to sit down and have an educated conversation with adults and with you, my teacher and just be at an equal level and equal playing field, I feel like that. That almost forced the students involved to grow a little bit, and become more comfortable just talking to adults and being not blunt, but straightforward, and just voicing their opinions.

From my own journal of meetings and observations, I was able to corroborate the statements by A-113 and Berry regarding the growth of voice within the group by the students versus the

adults. There were several instances by the end where Leaf was almost aggressively counterarguing, with good results, when the adults would say something that she disagreed with. This discussion prompted many interesting engagements between all the members of the committee as we wrestled with the data during the analysis of the survey. Other evidence of empowerment came in the form of Irene Walton, who was typically quiet and observant during the meetings but stepped up and supplied many of the survey questions. I witnessed an interesting power dynamic between Willow and Jennifer who were daughter and mother. In their case, Willow had more experience than her mother regarding the more musical end of things and Jennifer, who is an active parent in our program, would defer to her on occasion when she did not have the experience to answer a comment or dialogue at the time. One other instance of note came from Mr. Richardson.

Mr. Richardson did not typically voice his opinion in the meetings choosing instead to listen. In the meeting where we were designing the assessment part of the unit, he raised a counterargument to the grade because he thought that having a graded assignment would dilute the affect we were looking for in the project. He preceded his comment by saying "I'm not a teacher, but I just feel like…" The response from the group was very welcoming and encouraging. After his comment the group engaged in a very thoughtful debate on the merits of grades. In this debate Dr. Olson, a district administrator and parent, gave a lot of valued insights on the needs for grades from the district perspective and when grades would be appropriate. Mr. Richardson was able to continue his participation in the debate which certainly demonstrated a newfound empowerment in his voice that we had not seen previously. By the end of this meeting, we had a unit that was going to be graded, however, this discussion continued and eventually lead to the changing of assessment methods from a performance to a reflection survey

that we used as our data collection tool. Without Mr. Richardson's participation I am not sure that would have happened.

Empowerment of Passive Participants

The Passive Participant pool was made up of all the students in the class who consented to having their data used for the study but did not wish to participate in, or were not selected for, the PAR committee. Finding empowerment in this group is a little more difficult since the questions they were supplied in the survey and in interviews were more about collecting their experiences of the unit and less about a sense of empowerment. Upon a close examination of their answers, we can see that there is evidence of personal empowerment, especially among a few members of the small ensemble group who took up leadership positions. Among the solo students it was more difficult to ascertain. From my observations comes one instance of a student who was having difficulty selecting a solo. When I told them they did not have to confine themselves to something for viola only, they perked up and started thinking of more out of the box music that they wanted to play but did not think they could. Eventually, they felt empowered to choose a piece of music that was something they always wanted to play but had not had time or reason to sit down and learn it.

The last piece of evidence is the survey results themselves. At the conclusion of the unit each student was required to supply answers to a reflection survey generated by the PAR committee. The answers of passive and active participants were used then to create the data pool from which most of the findings were compiled. Within this survey there were not only students vocal about the elements of the unit they liked, but also a lot of thoughtful criticism and dissent. With answers like "No, I didn't care either way."; "I only do projects if I have to."; "Sometimes I would want to get better, but my group would not be as motivated to get better."; and "I don't

like people that don't know their part."; we can see evidence of empowerment in the very fact that they were able to voice honest and negative sounding critiques to someone who was in authority[17].

Summary

Through the lived experiences of the members involved in this PAR process and those students who participated in the class we have found that the unit designed and implemented by the committee was effective in producing a positive learning experience for students which also produced noticeable skills sets that students could use throughout their life. The students learned from their experiences and provided meaningful feedback that future studies and iterations of the unit can build from. The students reported that they were more prepared to engage in music on their own which was supported by the life experiences they reported and ultimately found that most students felt that this was a valuable lesson and should either be included in the curriculum or as a stand-alone instructional unit.

There was also evidence that students of both participant groups felt empowered to voice their opinions in praise and critique, knowing that their teacher would read them. That within the PAR committee, through an environment of mutual respect and equality, all members were able to find a voice with student members acknowledging an empowerment of their voice as they became more comfortable. We saw that parents step out of their traditional roles to become voices for research and change within the program. We also saw that the adults deferred to the students' experiences as experts in being orchestra students. All told, I find through the evidence

[17] All the students knew that I would read the answers to their survey question because it was for a grade. However, they were not graded on content aside from the requirement that they answer each question to the best of their ability.

that this intervention unit was overall successful with various levels of success at different times and worth consideration for the future. In the next chapter I will discuss what the findings of this study means within themselves, what they mean within the larger dialogue of research, and supply my recommendations for changes and future research.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This chapter discusses interpretations and conclusions drawn from the qualitative findings in this study and their importance. Answers to this study's research questions and findings will address gaps in the literature. Finally, there will be recommendations for changes to the curriculum/instructional practices and suggestions for future research.

It is important to remember that this study aimed to discover actionable ways of adapting the curriculum and instructional methods to prepare and empower students for lifelong engagement in music. This study posed two research questions:

1. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to provide students with the necessary skills for lifelong engagement with music?
2. How can the curriculum and instructional practices of a traditional high school orchestra program be adapted to empower students to take control of their musical journeys?

Three theories were combined to create a trifocal theoretical lens through which to view the findings and make interpretations. These theories are Kurt Lewin's change theory, David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, and my interpretation of Empowerment Theory based on the writings of Marc Zimmerman. The first part of this chapter will cover interpretations of the findings as they relate to each research question as viewed through these theories. The later part of the chapter will be reserved for the discussion relating to specific literature and my recommendations.

It is important to remember that qualitative research only directly applies to this specific group of students and that other groups may have completely different experiences from those in

this study. However, different contexts should not be used as a rationale to avoid replication of this study in your own contexts or consideration of the recommendations. Before deciding or attempting the study, consider the specific conditions and experiences of the school environment and adapt the process to meet those needs. It is also important to remember that participatory action research (PAR) is community-centric and a process of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, and repeating. Also, PAR studies in general, and this study specifically, are snapshots of an ongoing process that has exceeded the timeframe available for this study. Future iterations will continue to produce new and exciting results. Those results will continue to inform decisions that will evolve and adapt the curriculum and instructional practices. Eventually, a teaching method will materialize that meets the needs of all stakeholders to promote lifelong musicianship.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted at Millard West High School in 2022. Millard West High School is in Millard, Nebraska, an annexed suburb in the Omaha Metropolitan Area. However, it maintains its own school board and is not associated with the Omaha Public School District (OPD). Participants of this study are members of the school's Symphony Orchestra class which consists of students from grades 10-12 who play string instruments. The class meets first block Monday through Friday for 90-minutes. There is a wide range of student abilities in the class, from six All-State level orchestra members to several who are in the class to enjoy playing music with friends. The 2021-2022 school year was the first after COVID-19 protocols limiting the schedule were removed, and a traditional performance schedule was reimplemented. I was the director of this ensemble and am also a participant in this study. Following the procedure outlined in chapter three, I convened a committee of 14 students, parents, and school employees,

referred to as the committee or PAR committee. This group met regularly to follow the PAR process. The findings of this study (presented in chapter four) were the result of committee analysis and my own coded analysis of committee meetings, interviews, surveys, and my observation journal. The key findings this study found are:

1. Community expectations indicated an emphasis on performance skills and a disconnect between expectations and the reality of learning music for lifelong engagement.
2. Students had a decisively positive experience with the solo and small ensemble unit.
3. Students experienced at least one, if not more, identifiable skills that most independent musicians will often use.
4. Student feedback provided several good ideas for future versions of the project, including issues with scheduling, performance, and grouping of units.
5. Based on the committee's data, most members concluded that small ensemble and solo work is a valuable use of class time and should be included in the explicit curriculum of performing ensembles.

A more detailed accounting of the findings from this study can be found in chapter four of this dissertation. For the remainder of this chapter, I will address each research question and discuss the meaning of the findings and the possible implications for current and future research.

Discussion

The following three sections will discuss and interpret the findings from chapter four. The first section will discuss the findings relating to curricular issues and research question one. The second will be focused on the findings as they relate to empowerment and research question

two. Finally, the third section will summarize this discussion and concluding thoughts before moving on to the implications of this study on the literature.

RQ 1: How Curriculum and Instructional Practices can be Adapted to Provide Students with the Necessary Skills for Lifelong Engagement with Music

When a problem is encountered, choices become available. Choices to maintain the status quo, confront the issues head-on and make sweeping changes if necessary, or adapt what is currently being done to include solutions to the problem. This study took the less destructive approach and attempted to amend the curriculum and instructional system to include small ensemble and solo instruction. The first part of our plan was to unfreeze the current system. This process needed to be done with as little intrusion as possible to maintain the integrity of contractually mandated curricula. One subtle way of unfreezing a system is to begin the conversation as "activities such as observations, interviews, and questionnaires are already powerful interventions" (Schein, 1999, p.65). The creation of the PAR committee allowed open dialogue with students, parents, administrators, and the district about the observed problems. Another opportunity for change came from the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically altered the previously implemented educational structure.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Millard Public Schools (MPS) choose to shut down the buildings and teach remotely from March to May 2020. In the orchestra class, this took the form of a solo recording project where students used digital recording programs to produce an independent album of five selected pieces. When classes reconvened the following August, some students attended in person while others joined virtually. Teachers were also required to maintain

a minimum of three feet[18] between students. The space requirement also applied to members of the public and, therefore, severely impacted public performances. Because of these restrictions, the orchestra did not perform during the first three terms of the 2020-2021 school year. With the inability to perform publicly and lacking space to hold all students within the classroom, we chose to work in small groups and solo projects. When classes returned to normalcy around April of 2021, we continued many of the same projects while also bringing back the large ensemble experience. This dual nature of large ensemble and individualized instruction formed a yin and yang relationship. When this study began in September of 2021, we tried to replicate the previous year's instructional model in a traditional calendar year with traditional expectations.

As our dialogue in the PAR committee continued, some ideological changes we discussed began to take hold. The answer by student nine

> Yes, because it encouraged us to find independence with music. We aren't going to have a teacher there for every step of the way as we learn our music, even for our class ensemble, so I think this could help foster that ability to individually work.

illustrates how some of the dialogue was already finding its way into some students' views. This subtle change in thinking was necessary to prepare students to grasp the importance of the study and units they were about to engage with. The fact that student nine's answer was discovered in the reflective survey shows the effectiveness of dialogue as a change agent. Also, this answer shows the importance of ELT in learning.

[18] COVID standard distance was six feet, but because we were masked and did not produce aerosol in the making of our music, unlike choir and band, we could reduce this distance to accommodate the number of students in the program.

When students reflect on their experiences, they can discover important truths. Student nine reflected on what they had learned and discovered a key reason for the unit. They discovered that students needed to learn solo and small ensemble music because it was essential to be adequately prepared for a life without teachers. While this student discovered a key reason in their reflection, other students successfully developed at least one of five important musician skills. Those skills were

- The ability to enjoy independent musical works,
- The ability to discover and select appropriate music to perform,
- The ability to find or create performing groups,
- The ability to practice selected repertoire,
- The ability to engage with other musicians socially in a rehearsal setting without a conductor.

Bergee et al. identified several influential factors that lead a student to continue music after high school. The most important factor he found was a love of music[19]. If a love of music is the key deciding factor, then an ability to enjoy independent music should be significant.

All You Need is Love

The desire to continue playing music is an intrinsic value of all performers. In many ways, the desire to continue playing music guides decisions from what gigs are taken, what jobs and career paths are chosen, how time is organized, and what vehicles are driven[20]. This personal connection to music can help practitioners push through difficult passages and guide what sort of

[19] 98.4% of all respondents identified a love of music as a key factor in their decision-making process.

[20] As a bassist, I have always had to purchase cars or vans that met the minimum requirement of fitting a double bass safely in them. I laugh every time I think of walking into a car dealership with a double bass to make sure it fits.

musician they want to be. I believe that the high school student who enrolls in the class wants to continue their association with music because they enjoy it. If we want them to continue as musicians, we must work to protect and develop the enjoyment of music into a love of music (Bergee et al., 2016). To better understand how to support students' love of music I felt it was important to better understand how to support love generally. I will be relying on Michelle Duda and Raymond Bergner's article *Sustaining Versus Losing Love: Factors Discriminating the Two* (2017) for this exploration.

Duda and Bergner's (2017) article tested a series of relational characteristics commonly used in their field to predict and discriminate between individuals who remain in love or fall out of love with their partners. These characteristics are:

- Investment in the well-being of the beloved for the beloved's own sake,
- Intimacy,
- Sexual desire,
- Exclusiveness,
- Acceptance,
- Respect,
- Trust,
- Enjoyment,
- Understanding,
- Authenticity (p. 171)

While sexual desire and acceptance are not directly applicable to a relationship with music, investment, intimacy, exclusiveness, respect, trust, enjoyment, understanding, and authenticity are. According to Duda and Bergner when one says that they love someone they are stating that

they have a particular kind of relationship with them. A relationship that indicates a special status of "extraordinary honor, value, and centrality" (p.169). As a musician, I can personally testify that music does hold a place of extraordinary honor, value, and centrality because I have dedicated my life to the continuance of it. The joke is sometimes made that musicians marry the music before their spouses. While this is a joke "All comedy is criticism" (2016), so there is an element of truth in it. Musicians of all calibers do by emotional connection, personal identity, and definition, as used by Duda and Bergner, love music. The following list articulates how the musicians I have observed, learned about, and worked with fit the definition given by Duda and Bergner.

- Musicians invest in the well-being of music physically (practicing/rehearsing/performing), emotionally (developing personal connections with pieces of music or writing music), and financially (spending thousands of dollars on instruments, sheet music, transportation, recording software).
- Musicians often develop an intimate relationship with music by giving it a place in their personal and private lives. The term musician often becomes a personal identifier that is intimately attached to how one sees themselves.
- Musicians are not always exclusively musicians as they may also do other activities. However, music majors, performers, and music teachers do place music in a place of near exclusivity through touring or music school.
- Musicians consider music to be "worthy of esteem and high regard" and shouldn't be "discounted, disregarded, or taken lightly" (Duda & Bergner, 2017, p.170).

- Musicians trust music will be there for them when they need it.[21]
- Musicians enjoy making/listening/composing/participating with music.
- "Love implies understanding" (Duda & Bergner, 2017, p.171). Musicians take classes, watch interviews, and learn about music to understand it better.
- Musicians open up and engage with music authentically. Authenticity "implies that the relationship is a case of genuine self-relating to genuine self" (Duda & Bergner, 2017, p.171) Musicians are not pretending to love music.

Making the case for musicians loving music is not hard. Helping students to love music should not be as difficult as it may appear either. Consider this, by the time a student reaches their junior year in school, they have in most cases, invested at least six to eight years of their lives to practice and classes. The students in our classes already love music or it is unlikely that they would have spent this much time in their young lives doing it.[22] What educators need to do at the high school level is help them to deepen their love and understanding of music so that they can continue the journey on their own.

While it can be generally assumed that our students already love playing music, this study did not gather data on it. Despite this oversight, the results indicated that most students experienced joy with the solo and small ensemble unit. Enjoyment is a key characteristic of love (Duda & Bergner, 2017). This enjoyment was felt most easily in the social settings that small ensembles provided. However, solo students also enjoyed the project, although this enjoyment

[21] "Hey you/I gotta tell you my long time friend/I think of all those years you saw me through tears and the good times that we spend. Hey you/You're my constant companion/You always let me explain just what I'm sayin' and we've just begun" (311, 2009)

[22] Some students are forced to continue playing music though in my experience this population is in a minority.

tended to be for other reasons with the agency to select music being the most common experience. Regardless of the project type, it is important to recognize how the positivity of a memory can influence future decisions.

The statement "absence makes the heart grow fonder" is an old and familiar proverb. The proverb has evolved many times over the centuries, but the key element remains the same. When apart from the thing which one desires, it is possible to desire it more. This proverb indicates that we fall in love with something, or someone, primarily in our mind as we reflect on the experiences that occurred. Duda and Bergner agree and state that based “on clinical observations, people fall in love with a perceived someone…and so long as they continue to believe that this individual is the person they originally took them to be they are likely to remain in love.” The last portion of that statement is of particular importance to this study because lifelong engagement with music relies on the musician to continue independently. If our students are in love with music, and we want them to continue participating in music after high school, it is vital not only to prepare them musically, but to help evolve the understanding of their musical relationship so they avoid falling out of love when the context of musical engagement changes. Doing so, will help the students cope with difficulty and discover new, deeper connections with the art.

I have many fond memories of performing in the marching band and often referred to it as my sport through high school. I learned to play the drums, picked up skills on electric bass, and learned how to improvise in popular musical stylings. I also remember sitting outside behind a makeshift shelter of bass drums to hide from the bitter north wind during early morning rehearsals. While the latter experience was not pleasant, the overall experience of being in a band was and made it worth the price of occasional discomfort. The contact with other bandmates also

put me in touch with those who enjoyed the same music I did. These connections lead to the formation of a band. This experience was also positive and was something I attempted to recreate in other bands. As explained through Kolb's theory, I had learned to like performing in bands and, through other experimentations, gradually became better at it. In another related situation, the positive experiences of teaching in a Taekwondo school during my early teens taught me to enjoy teaching. These two experiences coalesced to help me declare music education as a major in college. I did not love standing outside in the freezing cold just to strap a heavy drum on and walk for miles. I did not love getting up early in the morning to play jazz music. I did not love nearly having my head taken off in a tournament. However, looking back, reflecting on my experiences, and learning about them and myself over four years helped me decide what I wanted to do.

We learn to love by first experiencing a positive stimulus and reflecting on it, creating a desire to experience it again. Next, we actively seek opportunities to recreate or renew it. This process is like David Kolb's design in his ELT. While creating love is more complex than following a theoretical model, as teachers, we can use the model created by Kolb to produce positive experiences. Furthermore, these positive experiences may produce intrinsic motivators that could lead to lifelong engagement with music. Kolb calls his process for lifelong learning "The Learning Way" (D. Kolb, 2015).

“Experiential learning theory provides a framework for…the lifelong learner; helping learners understand and adapt…through deliberate experiential learning” (Kolb, 2015, p.335). According to Kolb, the learning way is a way of experiencing, a way of self-creation, a way of humility, and a moral way. In short, the learning way is an epistemological approach where the participant approaches life experiences with a learning attitude. It is based on the concept of

being present in the moment. The learning way participant reflects on the experiences they are going through and, when possible, attempts to create new experiences in the future that will further their learning in a deliberate way. Kolb likens it to the creation of a bead necklace. Each bead is either an experience one has lived or the hope for future experiences they intentionally add.

Suppose we can create a string of experiences for students where they can feel successful. Students can then build off that success through reflection to intentionally create a new experience for themselves or with the teacher. Doing this will allow them to grow musically in a self-directed way where each success or failure informs the next. As the teacher, we must provide space for their individual experimentation into our curriculum and instructional habits. We must also supplement this experimentation with the knowledge and skills they may be lacking. As the students become more knowledgeable, and gain new meaningful experiences, they can deepen their love of music by performing new music that was unattainable without this growth. Doing this will not be easy as it will require sacrificing large ensemble time to allow for personal exploration. The best vehicle for this personal exploration is the small ensemble and solo, depending on the level of intimate interaction we are seeking to develop. If we can successfully generate this type of environment within the rehearsal space, it may be possible to produce students with the desire to participate in music, who love doing so, and have the knowledge and abilities to sustain it independently. All of which, will better the odds of our students leading musical lives, independent of us and the institutions which both support and inhibit their development.

A, B, C, as Simple as 1, 2, 3

Musicians do not need to be able to read music to be successful. However, reading and transposing music is vital in orchestral music. Sight reading is often considered a vital component of professional music making, and this unit did help students develop this skill. Students indicated they were challenged to transpose their music or learn new clefs. While these reading skills could also be developed through focused teaching, a real-world challenge can serve as a successful modus operandi for learning. Approaching the acquisition of new clefs in a performance context without much previous learning may allow students to achieve higher levels of success because of the challenge. This method is similar to how students involved in immersion language programs often score better than those who are not (Fortune, 2012). The challenge of consistently approaching a piece of music written in a foreign clef also forces the student to undergo more ELT cycles. If they reflect more on what they are learning and apply it to their next practice, they can retrain their minds to read the clefs. This process could produce deeper learning than having the answers given to them by the teacher.

Approaching learning through a small ensemble or solo scenarios could also help large ensemble performances. As the orchestra's music becomes more difficult new clefs begin to appear. The teacher can more easily address incorrect learning by having students first experience alternative clefs in small ensembles or solo projects. Learning in smaller numbers could also be less intimidating for students naturally prone to mistakes when challenged with new reading. As students become more comfortable operating in different clefs, the shock of seeing one appear in the large ensemble music could be mitigated. Having experienced students will strengthen the large ensemble because the teacher would be able to spend less time on

reading challenges and more time rehearsing the group. Also, there is a great benefit in teaching reading skills through solo literature for violinists and bassists.

Large ensemble music tends to favor violins and cellos. While large ensemble music may be adequate for these groups to learn new clefs and transposition, violas and bassists rarely get into new clefs the orchestra literature reaches grade five[23]. However, in solo literature, violas and bassists are playing in different clefs and positions before the difficulty level reaches grade five[24]. Exposure to higher positions and alternative clefs is critically important for bassists because, in solo literature, most basses perform not only in bass clef but in tenor clef, treble clef, or both!

Many of the solo pieces that bass students are required to perform at the college level, and many that private teachers push upon high school students, involve using tenor clef. Early concerti such as the *'Dragonetti'/ Nanny Double Bass Concerto* repeatedly switch between bass, tenor, and treble clef! While several bass students will pick up these more advanced skills in college, to be competitive at the audition phase, students should have already been exposed to this literature. The curriculum at the high school level needs to be adjusted to accommodate this neglect. Having students experiencing solo literature will help to address this problem, as the findings of this study indicate.

Along with the ability to read music is the ability to critically choose what literature to perform. This issue was addressed quite extensively in the lived experiences of the participants. Many students found that the opportunity to play the music they chose was a source of

[23] University Interscholastic League (UIL) grade 5.

[24] George Vance's bass books have students in treble clef in book 1. In many methods, violas and cellos are in different clefs by book 3.

enjoyment. Others also found it a source of frustration as they lacked the knowledge of how to find music to perform. Regardless of enjoyment or difficulty, several students mentioned that their key takeaway from this project was the ability to find and learn music. During the analysis, process Leaf suggested that we use scaffolding[25] as a technique to prepare students for the goal of independent performance.

Scaffolding literature selection, coupled with a gradual release of responsibility, could be an effective method of preparing the younger students for the final iterations of the unit in years to come. In this method, the teacher would provide support by giving students good sources for music such as online sheet music stores, free sources of sheet music, and even how to use YouTube to learn by ear. As students become more experienced, they would independently engage in versions of the units. The MCA[26] levels of accomplished and advanced could be used to assess these older students and keep them in line with national standards. At the beginning of the unit planning process, the committee was looking to use a plan I had already implemented for solo literature for the basis of their unit planning. While the final version of this unit was not what was planned, the process had precedent.

In 2020 I had the opportunity to adapt the curriculum to meet the demands of a school year disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The school used an A/B schedule where students would attend one day and zoom in the next. I chose to design an instructional unit focused primarily on individual musicianship. I met with my counterparts at Millard North and Millard South[27] and we used the Suzuki books (of which we all had a set) to create a menu like that used

[25] Scaffolding is a teaching technique that supports students as they undergo a learning process.

[26] Model Cornerstone Assessments

[27] Debbie Martinez was the director at North, and Dr. Brittany Rom was the director at South.

by the ABRSM. The menu contained a list of nine level 3-4 solos. We then used the format given in NAfME's MCA documents to organize a unit. Finally, students completed the following steps.

1. All students would check the menu, study the provided literature, and then select three pieces.
2. The students then analyze all three solos using the MCA worksheet and select one to perform for a grade.
3. The students would prepare the music and perform it for a group of their peers. These peers would provide them with feedback using the MCA worksheet for peer review.
4. Students would use the feedback they received to correct issues in their solos before performing for the instructor. The teacher would use the MCA performance rubric to grade the solo and provide feedback.

This system worked so well that we have kept it in our curriculum in various ways. Millard North uses it more as an instructional unit, Millard South teaches all the solos to all the students during class and then has them select one to perform, and I have followed the above process as my audition tool for students entering Symphony orchestra from Philharmonic[28]. A similar approach could be designed for the small ensembles and more advanced solo literature. Menus could be provided to students without the necessary starting point for their musical selections. As the responsibility is gradually turned over to the students, the menus could provide less specificity and more generalized guidance until students can select music fully on their own recognizance.

[28] Philharmonic is a prerequisite class made up of primarily 9th graders and a few 10-11th graders who had not passed the class yet.

Scaffolding, immersion, and direct instruction are all teaching methods that are very useful for knowledge transference. In this case, scaffolding the literature mixed with an immersive philosophy (perhaps something like 80:20 new to taught knowledge) could significantly impact the student's ability to prepare the music. Approaching the acquisition of reading skills in this manner creates an environment where independent learning is valued and encouraged. An independently-minded learning environment will help to unfreeze the mentality that students only play what the teacher gives them. Also, affording them a choice makes them confront the demands of the literature. Students must struggle with the music, knowing they are on their own, to use skills to understand and prepare it. As long as the experience is not overwhelming and appropriately leveled, the students can move on to the next interventional step; the struggle.

Lev Vygotsky developed a theory known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which he defines as

> "the distance between the actual development level determined by the independent problem solving and the level of potential development determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky & Cole, 1981, p.86).

Essentially, the ZPD lies between what a student can do independently and what they can do with help. When using ZPD to teach, the role of the teacher is to give the student enough information to be successful at the task given them while simultaneously allowing them to struggle on their own. By struggling to use their knowledge in the challenge, the student is forced to reflect on what they are doing so they can create new ways of accomplishing the task, accomplishing ELT cycles in the process. The process of ELT develops new learning that

students can use right away to solve the problems that challenging music can offer. While large ensemble music can also offer challenges, the environment created by a class using small ensembles and solos as a learning tool prepares students for the time when the teacher is no longer around to assist them. At the high school level, the time students have before they are forced to be independent by graduation or quitting the class is minimal. Therefore, students must learn how to read and understand music notation independently. This study supports the idea that students can self-acquire reading skills through small ensemble and solo projects better than what might happen in a large ensemble.

With a Little Help from my Friends

The final attribute is the ability to find or create performing groups. This attribute goes hand in hand with the repertoire selection previously discussed and can only be developed through the creation of small ensembles. While this study did not produce evidence relating specifically to the creation of the small ensembles, those students participating in the small ensembles did have to create them. The students were given few instructions regarding the formation of their small ensembles. Therefore, most students seemed to use similar class schedules[29] or social groups as member selection criteria.

The social elements of being a musician are often the most difficult to manage. Differences in opinions, conflicts with rehearsing, or unprofessional behavior has led to the breakup of many performing groups. The social elements of this unit also were a source of difficulties. For example, some groups could not rehearse easily because part of their group was in another ensemble or friends wanted to socialize more than rehearse. In addition, social

[29] Band/Orchestra students; Choir/Orchestra students; orchestra-only students.

pressures tested members' resolves and, in most cases, compromised the group's decisions to exclude people that did not conform to their ensemble. Another issue that arose was that motivation differed between members of the groups, which caused tensions. However, as students reflected upon their experience, it was suggested in their feedback that if the performance element was part of the unit, motivational issues could be eliminated. Overall, small ensemble creation successfully simulates the conditions students will face once they leave the structured world of institutionalized music.

ELT holds that students will learn as they reflect upon their experiences and actively experiment. Because this was the first attempt, many of the issues experienced might not repeat themselves as students learn from social and structural mistakes. Unfortunately, we will have to wait for future reiterations of the project for that data. However, it is worth noting that the comments from the students did pick up on many of the issues, and if there are issues, then there are solutions.

We can Work it out

It is vital for any performing group, or soloist, to know how to practice effectively and rehearse to prepare a piece of music. Many students expressed that they learned new skills or improved skills in rehearsing and practicing. They learned and developed their skills by overcoming the challenges experienced in their projects. The answers from students on the surveys and interviews indicated that they had to overcome challenges related to:

- Starting and stopping the group,
- Rhythmic difficulties,
- Keeping tempo,
- Listening to each other,

- Producing fingerings and bowings, and
- Understanding or creating appropriate notation.

As students faced these challenges, they could use the skills they had obtained to practice more effectively. For example, students indicated developing leadership skills as they stepped into the power vacuum left by the absence of the conductor/teacher. Some students indicated that they learned pieces by ear. Other students mentioned developing better time management skills. While all these skills can be lectured on, presented, modeled, and described, it is only through the experience of doing them that one can gain the knowledge necessary to develop them into skills. Learning to drive is an excellent example of how theory and practice differ. Many young people understand the basics of how driving works. They may have read about driving, listened to people describe what it is like to drive, watched people drive, or perhaps even practiced driving in a video game. However, their driving knowledge is only complete once they get behind the wheel of a real car and experience driving for themselves.

Experience makes things real instead of theoretical, and through the repeated process of doing, reflecting, and experimenting, these experiences are developed into real knowledge. In *Experiential Learning* (2015), David Kolb states that "the pinnacle of development is integrity" (p.327) and that human beings' conscious and unconscious striving to achieve integrity motivates mastery. Robert White calls this "motivation for competence" (Kolb, 2015, p.327). For Kolb, integrity is not about moral honesty but rather a process of knowing. Regarding practice habits and this study, the motivation for competence can and should propel students toward mastery.

The issue of how to motivate students to practice can be a tricky subject. This study has shown that even without the external pressure of performance, students will learn and practice if they want or need to. This experience can transform their personal practice into something

meaningful and valuable. In theory, meaningful learning could be developed by giving students a musical challenge to overcome without too many instructions on exactly how to do it. The process would be as follows.

1. A student engages in a musical problem where they are forced to use their knowledge creatively and experiment with ways to solve it.
2. Students engage in either group lead or individual reflection. This reflection informs their next decision.
3. The teacher makes guiding suggestions for practice strategies as needed. This process gives students a real-world context within which to operate.

Because the students are learning in the context of the musical problem, the advice they get should be more meaningful to them as a tool. Moreover, because the new information is meant for the students, they may attempt its use in later experimental cycles or with other musical challenges.

Come Together

There are four primary takeaways from this study. The first is that there is no complete answer to this research question, nor should there be. The curriculum should be a living document and a philosophical stance that provides a framework for development rather than a mold. While rigidity in some respects is necessary to allow for meaningful growth and habit formation, it can also stifle creativity and promote out-of-date instruction. With flexibility, the educational system can grow as new information is discovered. The past five years alone have shown the necessity of flexibility in the orchestra curriculum. The rise of the #MeToo movement reminded educators that much of the music performed by orchestras is by men, with women writers being relegated to interesting lists of uncommon music. Black Lives Matter helped

teachers to think critically about how the music we perform is often disconnected from the lived experiences of our students and how ethnic music written by outsiders continues sonic stereotypes instead of truly representative music[30]. The concept of an education system operating outside social and societal contexts is folly. Without the ability to shake up the curriculum and react to new understandings, the danger presented is continued prejudices, elitism, and exclusion. Therefore, while curricula must consider the linear evolution of the learner, at the high school level, musical development should be multifaceted, student-centric, and aimed at teaching the skills students need to engage with music across their lifespan. This approach is essential because not every student will be a music major, but every student is a musician.

Now may be the time to begin thinking about returning the purpose of musicing to the prolonged enjoyment of music rather than one of career pursuit (Kratus, 2019). The data pulled from parent and student expectations support the idea that if the students are putting on good performances, they may be willing to allow for different types of performance. The unfreezing of the class can also unfreeze the expectations of the community. Suppose curricular goals can be shifted away from the large ensemble and semi-professionalism. In that case, it may be possible to develop creative people who can think and act for themselves without the need for institutionalized educational support. As a framework, Kolb's Learning Way may be helpful as metacognition, recursive thinking, and active learning are all elements of ELT. Suppose a curriculum based on experience and centered around student independence in music can be created. In that case, it may be possible to create a future where musical expression is a lifestyle

[30] Traditional Chinese music is deeply meaningful, steeped in tradition, and often misrepresented as one type of sound, even though roughly 56 unique ethnic groups have their own musical stylings and instrumentations. Composers who attempt to write Chinese music often get it wrong, favoring Westernized pentatonic music instead of truly representative music.

and not just an activity. In this future, students could contribute meaningfully through constructive collaborative criticism of the curriculum and choice to participate in music on their terms rather than being stuck in an ever-narrowing tunnel of orchestral opportunity (Kratus, 2007). A future where the benefits associated with music are not only available to the student but to the person, that person's children, and that person's community.

This study has provided a foundation to develop new ideas, adapt old ones, and create musical experiences that educate and entertain students. The units in this study were not perfect or even complete. They were designed primarily by students and community members with limited experience in music education aside from a desire to help. However, the foundation of community involvement that has sprung from the genesis of the PAR committee has already opened avenues of communication on core curricular questions that did not exist before. Students continue asking me if we can continue the PAR committee to explore how to improve things in the orchestra. These conversations are helping to continue the change that started in September of 2021 and produce more adjustments as we continue to include more small ensemble and solo literature in our classes. By opening this door and moving forward collaboratively, better versions of the units can be produced.

My third point is that this study has demonstrated evidence supporting that living through the experience of being an independent musician can develop skills strongly associated with independent musicianship. Sight reading, transposition, reading new clefs, development of small ensembles, rehearsal strategies, practice habits, literature selection, and meaningful social interactions are all byproducts of the experiment we conducted. Student enjoyment in the class was overwhelmingly positive, with negatives that can be managed by utilizing the suggestions made by students, PAR committee members, and my own adjustments. The positive experiences

students had motivated many to continue making music independently. This musical independence has had an impact on my teaching and the students. I ask students to reflect critically on their performances, have stand partners work together to improve each other, and encourage student leadership and musical autonomy. The students have since started getting together more often to play music independently. There have been more requests for music with properly referenced literature locations to make it possible. Students have also started purchasing their books and learning music during their off time[31]. These things would not have happened if the students had not first learned it through the unit.

Lastly, this study has shown that the orchestra classroom can support the development of solo and small ensemble skills while simultaneously sustaining community and curricular pressures for large ensemble productions. While students did complain about having instructional time taken away from the large ensemble, this study had no impact on the preparation of large ensemble music. Evidence for this is the superior ratings in two orchestra competitions, including our district music contest. In addition to the large ensemble success, we had more solo and small ensemble participation at the district music contest after the unit was concluded. The number of students auditioning for all-state orchestra has also increased from 4 to 10. A foundation has been poured on a possible way forward that includes curricular goals, instructional practices, and avenues for collaborative changes. Experiential learning theory provides the curriculum with a framework from which to develop, and change theory gives us the means to make impactful changes to a system in its lived context. Now, we educators must come together to see if this works in other contexts and seriously consider the recommendations

[31] This development is something I have also seen at the Elementary level as an effect of my experience and encouragement.

for changes at the end of this chapter. In the next section, I will explore what the study's findings tell us about participant empowerment.

RQ 2:How Curriculum and Instructional Practices can be Adapted to Empower Students to Take Control of Their Own Musical Journeys

A key area of interest in this study was the empowerment of students. In chapter one, I provided an overview of empowerment theory and gave some definitions which would be helpful to review. This study used empowerment theory to create an inclusive, student-centered, emancipatory experience. The hope was that participants would be empowered to have a voice and experience what it was like to be genuinely musically independent. Ultimately, the aim was to provide roots from which a student could grow musical activity apart from the context of the school environment. This goal was, at least in part, achieved. However, it is essential to remember that "empowerment is context and population specific" (Zimmerman, 2000, p.45). Therefore, it would be best to approach the two different groups of participants directly. The first group is the active participants who took part in the committee, and the second is the passive participant group made up of the rest of the students in the class.

Active Participants

Active participants[32] experienced varying levels of empowerment throughout the study. The primary experience of active members involved power leveling and the ability to voice opinions from students to adults. From the beginning, I worked hard to have an open and power-neutral environment. The committee developed a rule at the first meeting to have a rotating chairman with authority to set agendas and facilitate discussions. By equally disseminating

[32] Students who volunteered to participate in the study and on the PAR committee.

power and through discussions the committee had over seven months, the students grew in confidence. By the December 20th meeting, I noted in my journal, "I feel like the group is coming together more as a team and that everyone is seeming to become comfortable with voicing their opinions." This development was also evident in the responses of Rex, A-113, Berry, and Sunflower (see chapter 4, page 102), where they noticed that the power dynamic was shifting. By the end, Leaf was empowered enough to stand up and argue analytical points with the other members of the committee. What was impressive about this exchange was not that a teenager could argue but that they could argue so well with the data and the powers of the room. Leaf in that meeting essentially took charge, and the rest of the group followed. All these experiences combined to demonstrate sufficiently that members, especially student members, experienced growth and empowerment through their work.

Throughout the study, an exciting power-leveling event occurred where the students became more empowered, and the adults took a more passive role. For our committee, the power dynamic was usually well-balanced, but it is worth noting that when working in PAR, where power is taken, others must relent. However, an effective power dynamic may be achieved when the give-and-take remains even. Therefore it is crucial to have a facilitator who can feel comfortable navigating the shifting powers. Without a confident facilitator, others may be overpowered. In this context, I want to discuss the power dynamic between the committee, Dr. Olson, and myself.

My role in the committee was as the lead researcher. However, I was first the teacher and represented the authority in music education to the committee and my students. I mentioned in chapter one that it would be essential to ensure I appropriately act as a researcher and strive to disassociate myself from the teacher role. There were times when my opinion was asked as the

teaching expert. However, I was successful in remaining true to my identity as a researcher, but this was challenging. I often reminded members that our decisions needed to be democratic. Also, I actively promoted the facilitator as the authority because every time I spoke, it shifted the operation of the meeting to me. Lastly, I had to work hard at getting out of the way conversationally. It was difficult because of my passion for the project and my natural inclination to lecture.

Dr. Olson was a district-level administrator, orchestra parent, and doctoral graduate. Having her on the committee was something I was excited about because of the different perspectives that she would be able to bring. I saw her as an authority figure, making me conscious of my actions as a district representative. I also saw her as an authority figure because she is a doctor and went through her dissertation and research processes. This perspective helped me to be mindful of my role as a researcher. In the committee meetings, there were times when Dr. Olsen was asked to voice her opinion as a district administrator, especially in the debate about the offering of grades and assessments. However, overall, she took a more reserved position and participated well as an equal committee member.

Dr. Olson and I had to wear different hats throughout the process because of the power we typically had and were cautious not to abuse. In this sense, we both experienced diminished empowerment because the school district had already empowered us to act with authority. For the PAR process to work, we relinquished some authority to those who did not have it so they might be empowered. I felt empowered to be a researcher and guide the group through PAR. Dr. Olson told me this was the first time doing a PAR committee, and while she is an expert in her field, she was new to this one. In this sense, she was able to experience a form of empowerment in this new role.

Passive Participants

As mentioned in chapter four, the amount of empowerment experienced by the passive participant group took more work to ascertain. This group of students participated in the unit but not in any planning. Their answers were collected in the form of surveys and interviews. Their answers exhibited elements of empowerment in the areas that they were working. Small ensemble students felt empowered to take on leadership positions, select music as a team, and negotiate the often-turbulent social issues surrounding an ensemble without official leadership. Solo students were empowered to discover new music; a few even felt empowered to teach themselves new clefs and notation. One participant felt empowered to learn a song by ear when no sheet music was available. Personal ownership is a type of empowerment that is essential for independent musicians. There will be times in the post-graduate lives of students when they want to do something but will not know where to go for information. Taking control of their success and searching out the answers to literature and notation questions is a form of empowerment directly transferable to the out-of-school context.

Empowerment in Two Spheres

Zimmerman (2000) describes how the understanding of empowerment outcomes depends on how empowerment works at differing levels of analysis. These levels are the individual, organization, and community levels. This study focused primarily on two interconnected spheres of empowerment: the individual and the organization. Empowerment in each sphere is different. Individual outcomes, also called psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000), tend to focus on situational-specific controls, skills, or proactive behaviors. Organizational outcomes examine how power is shifted in various systems and networks.

The psychological empowerment of the individuals involved in this study was most closely associated with active participants. Here it was possible to see on a month-to-month basis how individuals dealt with the changing power dynamics of the PAR committee. As previously mentioned, there was a give and take regarding the individual power any one individual had. To form a cohesive team, members decided at the beginning not to appoint a specific group leader but to share the control of the agenda with a different person at each meeting. I relinquished as much control as possible, relegated myself to the role of researcher, and refrained from commenting otherwise unless directly asked for my opinion as a teacher. Dr. Olson likewise restrained herself as a district-level administrator except when necessary, choosing instead to participate as a parent. The students seemed to take turns, but the more often a student attended, the more they tended to speak out. Other parents, such as Jenny and Mr. Richardson, spoke up when they felt it was important but otherwise deferred to the students.

Amongst the passive participants, power was not so uniformly shared. Individuals leading small ensembles were usually the more invested in the group's success. These individuals also voiced their concerns regarding their teammates' lack of participation. Empowerment amongst the solo students was observed to be higher as necessity required that they advocate for themselves and take charge of their own preparation. The passive participants generally experienced less empowerment as this study was mostly something that happened to them not entirely because they wanted it to but because the teacher required it[33]. In this situation, the power dynamic remained unchanged.

At the organizational level, the systems created opened new avenues of communication between students, teachers, parents, and the district. Here I saw that the students were generally

[33] It is important to note that passive participants were still fully informed and agreed to participate in that role.

more empowered because they were allowed to voice their concerns and criticisms. These were addressed by the PAR committee or reported in the survey, where they could not be changed but were nonetheless valuable and demonstrated empowerment. At the district level, discussing the problem and how the study unfolded was an intervention (Schein, 1999). The conversations between parents, peers at other schools, and I revealed empowerment as some concerns were addressed during our Singleton PLCs. At the district level, discussion regarding lifelong participation in music prompted adjustments to the course guide and, most importantly, the wording in the philosophy statement:

> Music is an essential element of the human experience. Music education in Millard Public Schools guarantees each student demonstrates the skills, knowledge, and character necessary to be lifelong musicians and responsible citizens. (MPS, 2022, p.4)

This philosophy statement and the framework it is attached to will guide the Millard Public Schools music curriculum for the next 10-15 years.

Both the individual and organizational spheres influenced each other. The organizational sphere affected how much power an individual could have, while the individual sphere altered the organization. Overall, the answer to the question regarding empowering students to take control of their own musical lives is that such empowerment can be possible when the following conditions are met.

1. The number of people in a group is small enough that individuals must take responsibility for their own success.
2. Lines of communication between the teacher, students, and parents are opened and utilized, penalty-free, in a democratic exchange of mutually respective dialogue.

3. Organizational supports and systems are in place to continue changes and support the individual concerns raised during the democratic dialogues.

Overall, this study has been successful to various degrees in each sphere. The role of the teacher is vital as politically, they maintain the most power to open dialogues, make classroom-level decisions, and open dialogues with those in more influential positions. Without the teacher's willingness to complete their role, the empowerment observed could easily be thwarted.

Final Thoughts about the Findings

This study has produced findings that show that changes to the curriculum can produce experiences where students can develop skills that should be transferable to an out-of-school context. These experiences, when scheduled correctly and with appropriate support from the teacher, can be enjoyable, worthwhile, and empowering. Giving students a voice when it comes to curriculum matters may seem to be a poor decision as the students are not experts in education. However, as this study has demonstrated, they are experts in being students. Therefore, their perspectives can be invaluable in understanding the curriculum-in-use, what knowledge is absorbed, and what experiences are valued.

The most significant insights from this study are that class time focused on individual preparation will;

produce

1. experiences that would not have been possible in a large ensemble setting were lived.
2. Providing students with a safe space to experiment with music in class is a worthwhile use of instructional time.
3. Individual and organizational empowerment was observed, which supported students in their effort to take responsibility for their own learning and their own success.

4. The processes set up give future versions of a place from which to develop.
5. Solo and Small ensemble instruction can be successfully folded into the classroom experience without jeopardizing the large ensemble curriculum or district goals.

Implications

In Chapter two of this dissertation, I presented the pertinent literature as it related to the field of lifelong music, social justice & equity, the high school to college gap, as well as PAR and YPAR as a methodology. I stated that this study would continue the discussion begun by Abramo, Bailey, Bates, Bernard, Kruse, Meyer, and others by adding to the field of knowledge in the form of a tested solution. By using PAR as a methodology, a plan would develop that had input from all major orchestra stakeholders and this would add to the field of action research by providing another example of how PAR could be used in a high school. What will follow here is a discussion of this study as it relates to this field.

The genesis of this study came from the inequity I had experienced as a student in high school. Once I entered the field of teaching and better understood what was going on I worked diligently throughout my career to make sure my students were more prepared for their next steps than I had been as a student. Once I became a high school teacher, I was confronted with the problem that many of my students would be leaving musical performance behind. While some of this is a choice, some of it was due to factors beyond the control of the student. I wanted to know more about these barriers and if it was possible to teach in a way that eliminated them.

Abramo and Benard found that there were several barriers that stopped students from being able to enter college and continue making music there. I will be focusing on their first three.

1. Values of the university audition process do not alight with the values of the community music programs.
2. Unofficial prerequisites, such as private lessons, have not been completed by auditionees.
3. Students are not aware of the unspoken rules of auditioning (Abramo & Bernard, 2020).

While their study was bounded in an urban setting with students of color, the barriers they found are also applicable to many others regardless of race, socioeconomic status, and geographical location. Many of these barriers affect auditioning for colleges and the conditions of that process. One of the barriers was that "private tutelage and participation in honors ensembles are unspoken prerequisites" (p. 20) and that "in addition to this…the audition requirements of classical music repertoire, individual performance, and notation-based performance" (p.20) did not reflect the music experiences being taught to the students at the studied schools. To correct the barriers discovered in their research they made several recommendations.

The first recommendation was that colleges reveal their audition requirements with more specificity. As a high school teacher, I have found this issue as one of annoyance. When searching for audition requirements many times the only thing posted on a school's website is two pieces of contrasting style. There is nothing regarding a style. There is nothing regarding difficulty level. There is nothing about sight reading, scales, or arpeggios which are also often elements of the college audition process. Some schools even require excerpts of orchestral literature. By not clearly communicating with potential applicants the nature of the audition requirements it sets auditionees up for failure because the types of music accepted in most auditions are not taught in the schools. If audition music is addressed, it is usually only because the teacher plays the same instrument and has time. For most of the teachers I know, this is done outside of the classroom and typically outside of the contracted time. Working outside of

contract time means that these teachers are often preparing students for auditions in private lesson formats without compensation.[34]

In concert with their recommendation that colleges include specific audition requirements, Abramo and Bernard recommend the audition selection process consider that not all students will have the same understanding of repertoire. Music selections showcase different skills and understanding of music which is then used to assess a student's suitability for the college's program. It is a decided disadvantage for an untutored student to select audition pieces blindly without understanding what skills and knowledge they need to showcase. For a tutored student, being asked to choose two different styles of music for their orchestra audition might result in selection of a mazurka, sonata, or two movements of a concerto. An untutored student might choose music from a Suzuki book and Taylor Swift's newest hit. Another of the recommendations made by Abramo & Benard is to factor into the audition selection process an understanding that some students would not hold background knowledge typically developed in private lessons. In many ways this is associated with the first recommendation about specific audition requirements. It is an important recommendation because the private lesson is the primary location where traditional audition repertoire is developed. Also, the implications found here for the rest of audition population are shared across the country and in all backgrounds. Not everyone has access to private teachers who know the literature well enough to prepare students for college auditions. Many students in rural areas are skilled musicians and have highly dedicated and proficient teachers, but do not have easy access to private teachers on their

[34] In every district I have worked in, it was always a commonly understood ethical stance that one does not charge their own students for private lessons. While this means the students get helped free of cost, it also means that the teacher may not be inclined to offer it.

instrument. For orchestral instruments, the teachers are typically localized in larger cities where jobs are more plentiful and opportunities to perform abundant. This disparity means that for those students, who are either geographically or socioeconomically isolated from the population of private tutors, are at a significant disadvantage when compared to other students.

Abramo and Bernard's research identifies that colleges and high schools have a shared responsibility for bridging the gap between preparation and acceptance of college auditions. However, they place all the responsibility on the university to correct its application and audition processes without offering many recommendations for high schools to adjust curriculum. While it is important for colleges to align expectations with high schools, it may be easier to adapt high school curricula to the expectations of colleges which draw from a larger pool of applicants. My study served in part to test the flexibility of the high school orchestra curriculum and close some gaps between college and high school.

Once the PAR committee started planning, we decided it was important to have a solo literature component to the unit we delivered. Solos are not only important on their own merit, but we wanted to explore whether a workable path toward filling the gap, identified by Abramo and Bernard, would present itself. When we looked at survey and interview answers from students who did the solo part of the unit, we found that some of the skills identified by students grouped around the selection of music, reading music, and practicing their music. For solo projects, many students picked more popular music to perform, while others discovered new music to enjoy. Some students worked on solos that they would later take to district music contest after the study was concluded. The instructional time spent on solos for contest was specifically beneficial to those students. Aside from the benefit of time for solo students, this study has demonstrated that if the curriculum was properly adjusted around the solo literature,

students will be better prepared for auditions. The added preparation would come from the time to work on solos, the exposure to solo repertoire, and access to the teacher during their contract hours.

Solo literature is often more universally challenging than large ensemble music. Students who work on solo literature would have to work on their own personal skill sets to meet the challenges posed by their solo literature. The individual work should be an added benefit to the large ensemble as students who understand how to read, prepare, and perform on their own will bring these same skill sets to the music of the large ensemble. As a result, students should be more engaged students, and students who can handle the demand of the music quicker. A quicker understanding of the music means the students will have more time to listen, intonate, and emote as a group.

If the performance component remains in place for future versions of this unit, the students may also develop more confidence in their performance abilities. The confidence gained by repeated successes, and from performing individually for small groups of students, may also help students overcome performance anxieties. With fewer anxieties, students may feel empowered to try for harder solos. With continued cycles of successful experience throughout high school, students could prepare for college auditions by having their music selected, prepared, and practiced without the need of a private teacher. While a private teacher is usually worth the investment, the process outlined herein should help to close the inequity gap identified by Abramo and Bernard.

When I started teaching high school I was hit by a revelation. Not everyone wanted to be a music major or even play in college. While this may seem like a miniscule observation, to me it was of great importance as I wanted my orchestras to perform at a high caliber. I am a trained

orchestra teacher and professional musician. I know what it takes to perform at a high standard, but for my students the expectation was too much, and the curriculum too fast paced. For those students who love to perform orchestral music, the college and classical education of the traditional curriculum provides a good fit. For students who want to do something else with their skills, or those taking the class simply as an escape from the doldrums of the school day, the current curricular philosophy is inadequate. All students deserve to be taught. When the curriculum fails to meet the student's needs then it is the teacher's responsibility to amend it in a way that is meaningful for them. Solos literature can challenge students in a fun and musical way that promotes skill development. Gradually, students will be able to choose what solos to perform and be given safe opportunities to demonstrate their selections. This process will give students the tools they need to be the musician they want to be once they leave our programs.

Keeping the individual at the center of the curriculum better aligns the school experience with how students use music in their daily lives. In the article *Music Education at the Tipping Point* John Kratus (2007) looked at the curriculum that we have traditionally taught and noticed that it seemed incongruent with the lives of the students we teach. He states, "The experience of music is also becoming much more individualized. By contrast, school music emphasizes large-group performance, in which everyone plays or sings the same piece at the same time" (p.45). The most streamed musical styles in the United States are R&B/hip-hop (29.9%), Rock (17%), Pop (13.3%), and Country (7.9%) with classical music only accounting for .9% of all streams in 2021 (Gotting, 2022). With 67.2% of music in the top five styles there is a good chance that students are listening to bands made up of one to five musicians. The music produced in those genres relies heavily on guitar, drums, piano, bass, electronic sampling equipment, and voice. The most popular music in the United States are small ensembles, yet the curriculum does not

required school to teach small ensembles. At best, jazz ensembles are offered in many band programs, but this completely excludes orchestra musicians. If our wish is for students to engage musically throughout their life, then they have a better chance of being in a small ensemble than a large orchestra. Also, based upon the popular genres, students have a better chance to perform after high school if they understand how to improvise, compose, and jam. At the very least students should understand how to put together their own groups, choose music, make set lists, and practice/rehearse on their own. This study has demonstrated that these minimal requirements have been met by the participants of the study. This is critical because of the real-world experience gained. The next point John Kratus (2019) made was that while we train more students to become highly proficient in orchestral playing, their opportunities to perform in either professional or community groups is diminishing.

In 2014 there were only 1,224 orchestras in the United States (Voss et al., 2016) compared to an unnumberable amount of popular music bands. The chief difference between performance in these types of ensembles is largely their approach to performance,[35] and the way that they learn their music.[36] The orchestra class curriculum is only designed to support the orchestral route of performance despite the scarcity of orchestras jobs (Kratus, 2007) and the ever-widening acceptance of orchestral instruments in popular musical groups.[37] It is imperative that orchestra students learn how to function in other musical settings to have a chance of playing

[35] Orchestras have many musicians on a part in the string sections while bands typically only have one musician on a part. Orchestras will use sheet music to play long extended works while bands typically learn by ear and perform many short songs by memory.

[36] Orchestras rehearse formally and rely on sheet music, scales, and a 'classical' education while bands largely rehearse informally, learn by ear, can be self-taught, and often rely on informal teaching to acquire skills.

[37] In recent years it was common to see a cello, violin, or even electrified versions of all the strings instruments in a variety of styles from country, jazz, pop rock, punk, and so on.

their instrument after high school (Krause et al., 2020). By changing the curricular focus from semi-professional ensembles to amateur music making,[38] more students can benefit from learning how to enjoy music on their own and for themselves. In some ways this study has helped to support the idea that a curriculum centered on the individual experience as a solo or small group can develop these skills; a concept not supported in the current curriculum.

This study created a group-designed, student-centered, instructional unit. A unit that allowed all students to learn what it was like to be a working musician during class. By affording students the freedom to choose their own musical experience, music, and ensemble members, they were able to engage more individualistically with music in the same way that they would outside of the school day, but within the safety and experience of a trained music teacher to guide them. The experience this unit provided is an important part of their learning because it can serve as a steppingstone to participate in community groups later in life (Kuntz, 2011).

In chapter two I referenced Krause et al (2020) *From Dropping out to Dropping in: Exploring Why Individuals Cease Participation in Musical Activities and the Support Needed to Reengage Them.* This article provides many reasons why students drop out of musical activities. However, the article did not make many suggestions on how to address them. In many ways, my study was aimed at addressing the three big reasons students stop participating after graduation provided in the Krause et al. article.

1. Musical involvement is often associated with a particular context such as school where it is supported, and opportunities are easily available.

[38] I adopt here the definition of amateur that Kratus used meaning someone who engages in music for the love of it (Kratus, 2019) and not as some who use it as a synonym for underdeveloped or subpar.

2. Music programs may not "equip students with the necessary skills to continue their musical participation outside of the structured institutional environment to which they associate musical activity" (p.402).
3. Preconceptions and misinformation about the many musical opportunities outside of the school are poorly communicated (Krause et al., 2020).

While the aim of this study was not focused exclusively on these three points, in the PAR committee literature review these three points were emphasized as being important for members. Unfortunately, it was not possible to divorce the experiences students had in this study from the context of the orchestra classroom or this school. That task may be something for future consideration but falls outside the bounds of what was possible. Instead, much of the PAR committees' time and energies were focused on providing an experience that would allow them to address the second and third points.

The skills one needs to be an independent musician are not the same as the skills needed to play an instrument. Some of the skills include the ability to form a performing group, find venues to perform at, select music, prepare music independently, market yourself as a performer, and record music. These skills are not typically taught in the music classroom. Some of the skills such as marketing, finding venues, and forming musical groups are not entirely necessary for a musical life. The key is to find skills that will encourage the students to participate in music outside of the institution. I view the selection of music, the enjoyment of playing music independently, and the ability to prepare music independently to be the best chances for transference. This study found that students successfully experienced some of these abilities. Despite these initial successes, more revisions will be required to make the unit work optimally.

However, this unit was a good start and can provide the foundation of a new curricular paradigm which may help to alleviate some of the concerns around the issue of skill development.

The third reason provided by Krause et al. dealt with preconceptions and misinformation about opportunities outside of the school. This reason was not addressed sufficiently in this study. However, the conversation was initiated, and students began to subtly understand that their instruments can be used for more than orchestral music. In my interactions with the students, I will often discuss what they will do with their music outside of school. Some of these conversations allow me to educate them on their misconceptions on continuing their musical experiences throughout their lifetime. While studying student misconceptions was not a part of the data sets collected, these conversations should have a cumulative effect of getting students thinking about a musical life outside of high school.

In summary, there is no one path to lifelong learning. Each individual student will have to make decisions for themselves about the role of music in their lives. Where the curriculum can help is create learning objectives and goals centered on what students need to achieve their lifelong musical goals. This study has provided a means of addressing some of the known issues surrounding barriers to lifelong participation in music. The focus on solo literature and reading skills can help students better understand the types of music they will need to perform for auditions. Solo literature will allow students to challenge themselves in meaningful ways. This will benefit not only the individual students but the large ensemble as well. This study has shown that it is possible to develop important musician skills, such as independence in reading, preparing, selecting, and creating performing groups. These important musician skills can help bridge the environment of the classroom and the world outside of school. A bridge that is vital to create if lifelong participation in music is the aim of the program.

By focusing on individual musicianship this study has continued the conversation started by John Kratus regarding the way we teach music in our schools. The study has continued this conversation by providing an example of how the traditional large ensemble curriculum can be adapted to include skill development that would be more useful to students in the long run. Focusing on small ensemble instruction, solo literature, and developing musical independence provides avenues of music participation that the standard curriculum does not.

There is still a lot of work to be done. In many ways we were unable to properly answer the research questions because of time limitations and location. It will be up to future researchers and future versions of this experiment to evaluate and further the unit developed here. Over time, the foundation that this study has provided will assist:

1. The program, school, and district to meet the mission of Millard Public Schools.
2. Others by identifying ways to use PAR as a methodology for future problems in other programs.
3. Future students by expanding upon the principles and suggestions made by other researchers in individual musicianship, bridging the gap between college and high school, and attempting to move music out of the context of the school.
4. The discussion surrounding lifelong participation in music, by seeing how one program changed, and the effects that change had on the minds of its participants.

It is my hope that as others take what started in this study, and expand upon it, new observations and learning will be generated. With that new knowledge, future students will benefit and live the musical lives they want without barriers.

Limitations and Possibilities

One of the fundamental limitations of PAR is also one of its greatest strengths. PAR is customized to the specific population in which it was working. What this means is that PAR, like many forms of qualitative research, is not easily generalizable. In fact, many advocates of PAR are quite adamant that to generalize too greatly from PAR would be potentially dangerous for other populations, if those populations are not consulted in a participatory way (Lawson, 2015a). Therefore, when you read the results of this study in Chapter Four you should do so with the idea that what occurred here is not immediately transferable to your situation. Instead, you should observe how a population of students was able to work together to generate solutions to their own problems in a way that worked for them. This is not to say that this is worthless research. Indeed, the research may prove to be very valuable. It just depends on how one uses it. In this way, this study is limited in reach because the results will vary as each population is different and the data is difficult to transfer without careful consideration to its use.

This study is looking at how students of a specific population addressed their problems and may not be applicable in other situations. Millard West High School is in a suburban area of Omaha which has remarkably high standards for student participation and excellence. Students are routinely involved in taking two or three AP classes at a time and the school boasts between 85% and 95% graduating rates year-to-year. Classes are arranged in 90-minute periods and considerable resources are used to prepare students for ACT and SAT testing. These standards are brought in by the community who demands their schools function in a specific way, and who hire teachers and administrators to teach toward the community's expectations. As each school population and community will differ as to its expectations of involvement and what it deems as acceptable, replicating this PAR study's results in their environment is unlikely. However, this

does not negate the process or good possibilities the study indicated for better preparing our students for music involvement over their lifetimes.

This study clearly showed how an orchestra program can utilize PAR methodologies to work on fixing a perceived problem with the curriculum. The principle of 'two heads is better than one' applies here. Teenagers often responded positively when they were entrusted with the possibility of making meaningful change. This collaborative effort produced results that are evident of a successful starting point in addressing curricular problems. Likewise, the recommendations for action provided in Chapter Five could be considered and discussed in school and districts looking to address similar problems. The completion of this process has opened new avenues of research. Future iterations of the interventions created by this committee are directly useable as instructional tools and units. As you read through Chapter Four you may find many ideas will be of use to you, and to other programs even if they are not suitable for our situation.

Another possibility for this study was finding a workable solution to addressing the need to teach each student individually and assist students to become independent musicians who can discover, prepare, and perform music on their own. Being able to provide individual learning within the confines of the public-school classroom is exciting and it may provide a reasonable way to help those students who cannot afford private lessons gain those skills needed to continue their music. This possibility would plug the null curriculum and increase opportunities for all students in the program. In this way, the study could also provide an example by which other programs with the same problem and similar student population could develop solutions to their problems.

The last possibility was the chance to teach action research methods to students well enough that they will be empowered enough to find solutions to problems for themselves. That by engaging in research they will also be learning how to be proactively thinking adults is an educational benefit worth investing time and energy. The possibility of yielding results that matter to the young participant researchers may also produce new avenues of research on problems imperceptible to the adult eye thereby creating a cycle of improvement that may become self-sufficient with time.

Now that we can see what limitations and possibilities were possible with this study, it is time to make recommendations based upon the data, findings, and conclusions drawn earlier. The next section will provide recommendations in two categories. First, I will address curricular and instructional changes. The second section will provide my recommendations for future research based on this study.

Recommendations for Curricular or Instructional Changes

Many of the students provided valuable feedback about how these units should be run in the future. Based on their feedback and the findings of this study I suggest that the following changes be considered for future curricula.

1. A skills-based curriculum should be the focus of high school instruction instead of an ensemble-based curriculum that relies too heavily on semi-professional large ensemble performances. This includes a reduction in the number of large ensemble performances in a year to make room for other forms of study.
2. Curriculum officials and Orchestra teachers should consider either amending the curriculum, or incorporating focused instructional units, to make space for solo and small ensemble study in the classroom for orchestra students in grades 10-12.

3. When possible, students should be grouped together (even in solo projects) so that they may learn socially from each other and increase their potential enjoyment.
4. The creation or use of a student advisory board of some kind would be very useful to any band, choir, or orchestra director as the insights from the students, regarding instruction, has been invaluable.

Explanation of Recommendations and Additional Suggestions

The next sections will further detail the recommendations made including, commentary, justification, possible benefits, and advice. Please review the rationale for each recommendation prior to making any decisions regarding their adoption.

Recommendation One

Recommendation One addresses one of the key areas of deficiency, and one of the key contributors to the stress of the participants; the continued emphasis in the class on the preparation for large ensemble concerts and contests. It takes our orchestra about a month and a half to properly prepare a concert. It takes us about 3 months to prepare for a contest due to the societal demands for semi-professional performances. These processes and skills are important learning for future performers. However, I agree with Kratus that as music educators we have allowed ourselves to become too focused on semi-professionalism (Kratus, 2019) instead of focusing on the development of skill acquisition. In Kenneth Raessler's book on leadership he explains that "The pressures for public performance simply overshadow the true educational mission of the band, choir, and orchestra directors" (Raessler & Kimpton, 2003, p.99). A curriculum with fewer large ensemble performances, and more time for students and teacher to explore making music, and developing the skills necessary for post class transference, could yield a population of students more adequately prepared to handle themselves as musicians. This

idea is supported by the data of this study which showed that most students felt more prepared to engage in music on their own (see figure 4.3) after going through the small ensemble and solo units. This idea is also supported by the writings of John Kratus (2019), Tammy Kuntz (2011), and Krause et al. (2020).

Recommendation Two

Recommendation Two comes from the data supporting the idea that the experiences students had were not easily teachable except through experience. When coupled with a recursive discussion based around Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT) students will be able to develop practice and rehearsal methods that will give them a deeper understanding of the process of making music. As metacognition is a key element of the Learning Way, students will be able to develop healthy music-making habits in the classroom environment where bad habits can be adjusted. When supported by the released pressures of doing large ensemble performances students will have more time in class to master technical skills, develop musician skills, and be challenged musically through targeted solo and small ensemble performance opportunities.

Recommendation Two shifts the class paradigm away from teacher-led public performances to student-led private performances. Smaller performances, held in a more intimate setting than a concert hall, could create an environment where small ensembles and solo projects could be performed. Performing in this way could help students overcome performance anxieties as well as allow parents a better view of their children performing. This method is already used in private studios to provide those students the opportunity to learn performance skills.[39] This

[39] This statement is based on my personal experience working at private studios in Las Vegas and in Elkhorn Nebraska. Also from the statements from ASTA private studio members in our monthly chat sessions.

instructional method could also work for schools with different schedules such as AB block that might not have as much class time in the week to devote to this type of work while maintaining community expectations for large ensemble performances throughout the year.

One observable benefit that has manifested itself is the automatic creation of substitute lessons. Often, when a music teacher is absent it is difficult to find an available substitute teacher, who is also a musician. When a music teacher is not present, it is common to have students do filler work because they cannot rehearse. The solo and small ensemble projects do not need a teacher other than to maintain classroom and school behavior. The students know what they are working on and what they are working towards. The projects are student-focused and give them something to do that is musical, personal, and measurable. When followed up by a reflection assignment, meaningful learning can be provided for the student, and meaningful feedback given to the teacher.

I feel it is important to mention now that balance is important. If I were to only teach with the small ensemble or solo projects, it would leave a great deal of experiential learning neglected. This neglect would be potentially detrimental to the development of good musicianship. In an eye-opening article called *A Holistic Approach to Music Education* (1996), Ruth Wright investigates the music education system of Great Britain. During the time of the article there were new national standards coming out in the United Kingdom (UK) that emphasized a holistic approach to learning. At the time, most ensemble experiences were held as an extra-curricular activity.[40] During their school day they were taught in small groups or given lessons. This form of teaching would be like teaching small ensembles or solos exclusively. Students would participate through the ABRSM program which would develop their individual

[40] The orchestra rehearsed over the lunchtime at the investigated schools!

abilities, but the students lacked a holistic experience in music. The key point for me from this article is "Pupils' musical skills, knowledge and understanding cannot be fully developed by classroom music making in isolation" (p.1). It is important to have a wholistic curriculum in place.[41] Where the schools in the UK for lacked the large ensemble experience for their students, we lack the solo and small ensemble experience. A wholistic curriculum should teach all three forms of music making and attempt to teach the entire student. In this sense, the optimum curriculum would be both wholistic and holistic.

In the second recommendation I leave the flexibility for an instructional unit, but I must strenuously advocate that this should be part of the explicit curriculum of schools. Without sanctifying the concept into the curriculum, it may become too easy for teachers and building administrators to brush off the change in favor of the status quo. A status which for over 60 years has been shown to be inadequate to the needs of learners and relegates students in the second violins, violas, and basses to diminished skill development. The status quo curriculum will block them from continuing their participation in music unless they pay for private teachers to give them the knowledge that they need. With the acceptance of solo and small ensemble work, then the explicit curriculum will provide the support needed to make sure community and program change occurs. That support means changing the public's understanding of what is taught in high school orchestra classes.

There is strong support for the orchestra at Millard West High School and we did not experience any pushback from either the students or the parents. However, giving teachers the tool to explain that a change is mandated through the curriculum and therefore must be taught can be a powerful change agent. When the expectations of the community change from being

[41] I use the term holistic here to mean complete.

performance minded to educationally minded, teachers will feel more freedom to teach the art and craft of music. Currently there is a lot of pressure on music teachers to produce competitive orchestra programs (Raessler & Kimpton, 2003). The large ensemble is an effective tool to meet these needs. However, the push for semi-competitive musical groups often distracts from the primary goal of music education; teaching students to love and enjoy music (Bailey Birge, 1937; Kratus, 2019; Mark & Madura, 2013). Once the community understands that there will be small ensembles as well as large ensembles at concerts, small ensembles should be expected. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a byproduct of having students participate in small ensembles and solos is that they are more willing to take those units to contests. This could also have the effect of bringing more prestige to the school if these small ensembles and solos are of a high quality.[42] Overall, it is the second recommendation that holds the most importance because without the acceptance of solo and small ensembles into the explicit curriculum the refreezing process in Lewin's change theory would be difficult to maintain.

According to Edgar Schein (1999) there are two elements to consider when refreezing a change. The first element is the personality of the learners and the second is the personality of the community in which that learner resides. For change to occur, the person involved in the change must be willing to change. Once the unfreezing and shaping parts are completed and the change has occurred, the next step is to make sure it endures. A change cannot continue if the community resists the change or does not support the change. This is sometimes seen in the release of prisoners after their sentence is completed. According to a web article by the US

[42] More opportunities to perform means more opportunities to bring high marks back to the school. The school could also then make the reasonable claim that the students taught are well rounded and producing good music at all levels of competition.

Department of Justice (2022) nearly two-thirds of released inmates will be rearrested within three years. The article continues to state that the challenges faced by newly released inmates are often the same that landed them in prison the first time. In this scenario, the person might have changed, but the community did not. The result seems to be that if a person is subjected to the same circumstances as before the change, the change will undo itself and the individual will revert to their old ways again. We have a good community in the orchestra program at Millard West High School. If we can meet the community expectations and the children are learning, we can make concrete changes, especially in the mindset of the students. Changing mindsets is the most important aspect of this process, especially as most students have decided what they will do after high school by their junior year (Bergee et al., 2016). Misconceptions abound regarding the use of music outside of school and these misconceptions play a large role in why many students drop out of musical involvement (Krause et al., 2020). The first two lines of the Dhammapada has always resonated with me. Both lines begin "all that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts" (The Dhammapada eBook, 2013). If we can place into the minds of our students from the onset of high school that what they are learning will allow them to continue making music outside school, then encourage the practice of independent performance, we can successfully freeze that change. This might not result in having more music majors, but it will result in more people being open to continue making music for themselves and their communities.

Recommendation Three

Recommendation Three relates to the finding that students enjoy themselves more when they learn socially. By allowing students to construct their understandings of music together, as this recommendation states, the experiences they have will lead to lasting understanding. To

effectively simulate the experiences of being an independent musician, the context will eventually have to be divorced from both the social elements of the unit and the classroom. This could be done using a scaffolded technique that gradually releases responsibility to the students. Such an approach could look like this:

1. Sophomores are divided into groups based on instrument or type of solo. They work together on their pieces, performing and critiquing each other, until they have a final performance piece practiced and ready.
2. Juniors who have done this project already would be asked to prepare the solos during the appointed class time but would still be grouped together to give each other feedback once a week until the performance.
3. Seniors should prepare the music on their own outside of class time and devote their class time to researching their music, assisting juniors or sophomores, or forming independently structured social groups to perform for each other.

It might seem strange to push the juniors into a more independent position instead of waiting until their senior year, however, research shows that most students decide if they will continue in music by the end of their Junior year (Bergee et al., 2016). Therefore, by following a systematic approach to this unit it should build the confidence needed for each student to properly prepare themselves for their Senior recital assignments which could be either public or private in nature.

Another idea for a social learning method is to hold an open mic night somewhere outside of the school building for students to come together and perform their independently prepared music for each other. The focus would be on their experience in performing the music, and not necessarily on the quality of the performance along the lines of gaining experience through open rehearsals or coffee shop gigs. Students should be given ample time to prepare for

their performances, but the pressure is removed somewhat by playing in a well-lit friendly environment for their friends. Snacks should be provided for the event, and the teacher(s) should be prepared to lighten up the mood with some musical entertainment of their own. Students could also help in the organization of the event. In John Kratus's article, *A Return to Amateurism in Music Education* (2019), he recounts a similar event proposed and organized by a student.

> Throughout the night, some people left, and new people arrived. The songs never stopped. When one person finished, somebody else would jump up in an informal, unscripted sequence. Friends and strangers cheered each other on. The music was good, but nobody cared if a line was forgotten, or a chord was muffed. They supported each other and (literally) hung on to each other. There was love in the room. Everybody was happy. As I sat in wonder…it struck me. This is what a world of musical amateurs looks like. It is natural, and effortless, and joyful (p.37)

This is the end goal of a lifelong participation in music, and what this study is attempting to create. By giving the students the opportunity to experience a musical life, it may happen. School can provide the structure and society can allow it to happen. If students are taught how to do it themselves in the process, they can apply this on their own when they want.

Recommendation Four

My last recommendation is regarding the creation of a student council or advisory board. This stems from the data and my experience with the PAR committee. By the time students reach high school they have been conditioned by the system to be submissive to authority. However, at this age students often are trying to assert themselves and become their own people. Giving them a voice in decision-making through a structured council can produce many rewards for the group. In addition to allowing select members of the orchestra to develop leadership skills under

the mentorship of their orchestra teacher, the creative ideas that these students can bring to the program could develop ownership and responsibility in ways that an authoritarian conductor cannot. As seen in the data from this study, students are insightful and understanding. Many of the criticisms of the unit were well founded and well argued. If it is the aim to truly prepare them for life outside of the school, then they must be given the chance to assert themselves in the safety of our classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research based on the Findings of this Study

In many ways the limitations of this study supply avenues of potential research. For one thing, this school used a 90-minute block which meet every day. This is not the most common form of school schedule, and many teachers are not afforded this much time to work with their students each day. Replication of this study under different types of schedules (AB block, traditional schedule, eight period day, modified block) would be very beneficial to the literature by showing how the experiences change or remain similar.

Another area of potential research regards the effectiveness of this instructional method on students outside the school day or after graduation. Do students who participate in a unit designed in this manner continue to play after graduation? For how long do they continue, if they do? Do students begin to practice more or select music to play for themselves without the direction of the teacher? Questions such as these should be asked and studied so we can get a better understanding of the effectiveness of this program.

Socioeconomic context is another avenue of research that could be very valuable. The SES of students at Millard West is very affluent with only 1% of students eligible for free or reduced lunch in the 2020-2021 school year (NCES, 2021). Seeing if this process is applicable to students in less affluent communities in either rural or urban areas could tremendously assist in

the testing of this method. I was personally very interested in this avenue of research as a child of low SES myself. Music could be a very big bridge of opportunity for students of low-SES as it may be able to open doors to higher education, vocational outlets, or ways to mitigate the stress of everyday life.

My final recommendation for future research regards the development of musical skills in a student-centered classroom. As noted, this unit served as a great way for developing skills necessary for lifelong engagement in music, but not for playing the instrument itself. I was curious if there are methods that could be used in conjunction with the solo and small ensemble unit that would facilitate an increase or acquisition of instrument techniques and skills. Are there any web-based supplemental curricula that could be incorporated into the unit? Do ASTACAP, ABRSM, RCM, or Suzuki methods provide more advantage if done in conjunction with a classroom teacher for the development of instrumental skills? Are certain method books effective for the independent learner? Any or all these questions could yield interesting results based upon this study and the available literature.

There is a plethora of possibilities in this vein of research. Some of which I may not have been able to articulate or see. The bounds of this study to one school in a suburban, affluent district with strong community support open the possibility of many other types of schools and districts to experiment with this method. When it comes to qualitative research, there are no limitations, only boundaries (Marvette Lacy, 2021) so pick something or try it yourself in your own school; all of it helps.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter we discussed the importance of the findings as they relate to the curriculum and to empowerment. Student experiences indicated that lifelong music skills

including abilities related to discovering and selecting appropriate music, creating performing groups, and rehearsing/practicing music were developed. Other skills related to overcoming social difficulties associated with solo and small ensemble practice were also experienced by all participants in various degrees of intensity. The development of these skills empowered many of the students to take charge of their own learning and develop their voice. Additionally, active participants experienced further growth and empowerment as they engaged in the work of creating the instructional unit. Having a voice for the students was an important part of their experiences, especially when those voices lead to real change.

In a near serendipitous discovery, the committee found that the expectations of parents were not entirely aligned with the realities of orchestral education and that the number of performances in a school year vastly exceeded the expectations for what a reasonable number of performances were. This shows that there may be room in the expectations of parents to change the way that the program is run to make room for more individualized instruction and performance opportunities.

We explored how this study could continue the conversation started by previous researchers, such as Joseph Abramo, Martin Bergee, Cara Faith Bernard, Jane Davidson, Samantha Dieckmann, John Kratus, Amanda Krause, Melissa Kirby, Tammy Kuntz, and David Myers, to find ways of bridging the high school to post-secondary gap. This study has added to the body of knowledge by identifying and testing a method for teaching solo and small ensemble literature in the high school orchestra classroom. The results thereof indicate that it may provide avenues of learning useful to students by preparing them early for the expectations in auditions. This study supports the idea that it may be possible to develop the important skills that all independent musicians need to be able to move beyond the confines of the school, thereby

addressing one of the key indicators that Krause et. al (2020) cited as reason why people drop out of musical activity. These skills are more focused on the individual who may seek to become an amateur musician instead of a professional. Allowing students, the freedom to choose their experiences may be able to unlock their potential for a more lifelong engagement with music because it was musicking on their terms. Giving students the tools, they need to do it on their own will support them as they go about their lives after school regardless of musical affiliation in colleges or post-secondary institutions.

This study was unable to address technical development through solo or small ensemble experiences as we had not designed the unit or data methods to measure for this. It was also unable to prove that student experiences were transferable a different context than the school, although evidence does support that it might do so. Future research is necessary to better understand how far the results of this study will be able to extend beyond the boundaries of this study. Out of school context, different scheduling issues, and feasibility with less affluent populations in either rural or urban areas are all areas of potential research that could be expand this study.

This study provided a good demonstration of how PAR could be used to make meaningful change to a traditional orchestra curriculum. The results showed how the power dynamics worked and what happened when students and parents are included in the decision-making processes. Various levels of empowerment were also created, and this has opened lanes of communication between students, community, school, and district levels.

In addition to the lanes of communication, the study demonstrated that in the current context solo and small ensemble instruction could be folded into the large ensemble classroom experience without jeopardizing the district goals or previously agreed upon curricula. Using this

as a model could save other schools with similar demographics a way to proceed, what to avoid, and what to change before implementing something similar. Hopefully this example will allow the music education community a chance to look critically at what they are doing in their classrooms. Further benefits from the study include, the possibility of open conversations, avenues of change that could unfreeze the systems, the chance to make meaningful changes, and change the way we serve our students.

Finally, four recommendations were given based on the findings and the experiences of active participants on the PAR committee. These were adjustments to the curriculum, instructional practices of school districts and music departments, as well as having student input. These changes would allow for a paradigm shift away from the large-ensemble and toward the individual.

Music education is a complex and complicated field of study with as many unique and diverse programs as there are schools. What works for one may not work for another. At this school we had some remarkable moments, and we had some remarkable challenges. By working together and relying on each other's input, we were able to envision a future for our program which looks similar to our current practice but is fundamentally different. Removing the large ensemble from the center of the curriculum and replacing it with the goal of individual empowerment and musical enjoyment can shift the way we work in orchestra classes. However, individual instruction alone is not enough. We also need the large ensemble, but in a smaller role.

The power and majesty that can be invoked by a symphony can be overwhelming and to be a participant is among my cherished memories. Yet, many students will never be able to play in a symphony orchestra due to job competition, lack of community ensembles, and audition

issues. By focusing on the individual needs of the students and developing their ability to become musicians, and not just orchestra students, we may be able to unlock new experiences for them. We can prepare them better to pass the challenges of auditions and, when necessary, assist them in creating their own musical groups. Also, there is nothing in music that requires one to be a virtuoso to enjoy making music, yet this misconception is sometimes thrust upon our students in orchestra classes thanks to semi-professional expectations. If the school exists for the students, and not only for teachers, music directors, and school administrators, we should be able to set aside the demands for competitions. Instead of public glory, the reward for good teaching should be the personal satisfaction of watching students meet challenges, grow on their own, and begin taking the responsibility for creating their own musical worlds.

One of my favorite quotes comes from a TED talk by Benjamin Zander. In it he states, "The conductor of an orchestra doesn't make a sound. He depends, for his power, on his ability to make other people powerful" (Zander, 2008). This is my ultimate hope. That by doing the work, by doing the research, by sharing the results, I may be able to make others powerful so that this line of inquiry may continue. While doing so, I hope to give my students the joy of music I feel every day, regardless of their future professions. Because in the end, music is not what we do, it is part of who we are, and that need not die because of graduation.

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Appendix A

NAfME 1994 National Standards

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specific guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performance.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture. ("National Standards Archives," n.d.)

This information can be accessed at the following URL for as long as it was still available to the public. https://nafme.org/my-classroom/standards/national-standards-archives/

Appendix B

NafME 2014 National Music Standards based off the NCAS Standards

These standards have 3 domains.

1. Creating,
2. Performing, and
3. Responding.

Most of the state standards also include another category/domain called Connecting.

In addition to being based around artistic literacy, they are also more specific with standard categories of:

1. PK-8 General Music
2. Composition/Theory
3. Music Technology
4. Guitar/Keyboard/Harmonizing Instruments
5. Ensemble.

Each category comes with their own ranking systems. For my interests I was using the ensemble standards which also include Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs) in the Proficient, Accomplished, and Advanced placements for performance. There are also MCAs for the Creating and Responding domains.

When states or organizations say that they are following the NAfME 2014 national standards, they mean they are using the three, sometimes four, domains.

Appendix C

ABRSM, RCM, ASTA, and Suzuki Correlation

This appendix represents the work of Lora from RedDesertViolin.com. The pedagogy world in music ed., especially in the string world, is very blog based. Many outstanding teachers and composers put their work up for free or for a small fee for aspiring string students and fellow teachers to utilize. After studying the ABRSM, RCM, and ASTA curriculums personally I find that this chart is quite accurate.

Table C.1

ABRSM, RCM, ASTA, & Suzuki Correlation

Suzuki Book	ABRSM Grade	RCM Level	ASTA Level
Book 1	Prep and 1	1	1
Book 2	2	2	2
Book 3	2-3	3	3
Book 4	3-4	3-4	4
Book 5	5-6	4-5	4
Book 6	6	5-6	4-5
Book 7	6-7	6	5
Book 8	7-8	6-7	5
Book 9	8	7-8	5-6
Book 10	8	9	6

ABRSM Grade Requirements:

Each Grade is defined by the passage of a graded skills test. Each grade is a little different than the others but follows this pattern:

1. Repertoire – Two to Three pieces selected from the ABRSM book for that grade.
2. Technical Requirements – A technical etude, scale tests, arpeggio tests.
3. Ear Tests – Some kind of ear training.

If a student performs the test accurately, they are rewarded by going to the next grade.

RCM and ASTA follow a similar pattern but with slight variations to the testing requirements which is why the correlation chart may be useful to understand these slight differences in difficulties.

Appendix D

Comparison of State Standards

Table D.2

List of State Standards for Comparison

State	Type of Curriculum	State	Type of Curriculum
Alabama	NAfME 2014	Montana	NAfME 2014
Alaska	NAfME 2014	Nebraska	NAfME 2014
Arizona	NAfME 2014	Nevada	NAfME 2014
Arkansas	NAfME 2014	New Hampshire	NAfME 1994
California	NAfME 2014	New Jersey	NAfME 2014
Colorado	Unique State Standards	New Mexico	NAfME 2014
Connecticut	NAfME 2014	New York	NAfME 2014
Delaware	NAfME 2014	North Carolina	Unique State Standards
Florida	Unique State Standards	North Dakota	NAfME 2014
Georgia	NAfME 2014	Ohio	NAfME 2014
Hawaii	Unique State Standards	Oklahoma	NAfME 2014
Idaho	NAfME 2014	Oregon	NAfME 2014
Illinois	NAfME 2014	Pennsylvania	Unique State Standards
Indiana	Other Non-Specified Standard	Rhode Island	NAfME 2014
Iowa	NAfME 2014	South Carolina	Unique State Standards
Kansas	NAfME 2014	South Dakota	NAfME 2014
Kentucky	NAfME 2014	Tennessee	NAfME 2014
Louisiana	NAfME 2014	Texas	Unique State Standards
Maine	Unique State Standards	Utah	NAfME 1994
Maryland	NAfME 2014	Vermont	NAfME 2014
Massachusetts	NAfME 2014	Virginia	Unique State Standards
Michigan	Unique State Standards	Washington	NAfME 2014
Minnesota	NAfME 2014	West Virginia	Unique State Standards
Mississippi	NAfME 2014	Wisconsin	NAfME 2014
Missouri	NAfME 2014	Wyoming	Unique State Standards

Appendix E

Description of State Standards for States with Unique Standards

Table E.3

States that Came Up with Their Own Standards and What Those Standards Are

State	Description of Standards
Colorado	Express, Create, Theory, Aesthetic Valuation of music
Florida	Critical Thinking, Skills/Tech/Processes, Organizational Structure, Historical and Global Connections, Innovation/tech/and the future
Hawaii	Standards are based around understanding of music and how it communicates "ideas, feelings, and experiences across cultures" (Department of Education, State of Hawaii, 2018)
Maine	Last developed in 2007 (Pre NAfME 2014) they are 1) Disciplinary Literacy, 2) Creation/performance/Expression, 3) Problem-solving, 4) Aesthetics and Criticism, 5) Arts Connections
Michigan	Based off NCAS with Perform & Create like NAfME 2014. Also has Analyze, Analyze in Context, & Analyze and make connections.
North Carolina	Loosely based on NCAS they use 3 categories; 1) Musical Literacy, 2) Music Response, 3) Contextual Relevancy.
Pennsylvania	An unusual document to work through, but it was aligned with NCAS/NAfME 2014. Also includes aesthetic & critical responses.
South Carolina	Based off the 1998 NAfME standards they have combined categories to create their own system.
Texas	Extremely complicated to navigate. Many of the regulations seem to pertain more to how music fits in the school than any standards. What I have seen seems to align with NAfME 1994
Virginia	5 strands 1) Creative Process, 2) Critical Thinking and Communication, 3) History, Culture, and Citizenship, 4) Innovation in the Arts, 5) Technique and Application.
West Virginia	Based off the NCAS/NAfME 2014 Standards it has 6 "domains". 1) Create, 2) Connect, 3) Explore, 4) Perform, 5) Relate, 6) Respond
Wyoming	4 categories. 1) Creating or performing, 2) Aesthetic perception, 3) Historical and cultural context, 4) Artistic connections.