

Student collaborative arrangements in high school jazz band

by

Hunter Blankenship

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Major Professor
Dr. Frank C. Tracz

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Abstract

This purpose of this project is to fill the gap in student knowledge of the structure and organization of a big band jazz chart and to give them an opportunity to experience using their aural skills to create their own arrangement. Students compared and contrasted elements of the arrangements of a small group “combo” jazz ensemble to that of a large “big band” jazz ensemble. They then transcribed/harmonized a jazz blues melody, learned to improvise stylistically over the chord changes, and collaborated with their sections to compose rhythmic background figures to accompany the soloists, all without using standard notation. This process resulted in a completed big band jazz arrangement that was arranged solely by the students, which they then performed on their spring concert.

This Masters’ program introduced me to new perspectives and approaches to jazz education, particularly regarding improvisation. The Research in Music Education Class opened my eyes to the current research in improvisation, especially the psychological element of building confidence in beginners. The research proposal project in this class allowed me to create warm-up material for my high school beginning jazz ensemble and learn which of those warm-ups are most effective in building confidence with my beginners. Establishing this warm-up process helped to develop the culture of improvisation of this ensemble, which encouraged me to go one step further and develop the lesson plans for this Masters Report. Similarly, during the Introduction to Graduate Studies class, I was able to discover new materials and methods for teaching improvisation in a large ensemble setting. A common challenge of teaching high school jazz band is that with the quick turnaround time that is expected of the ensemble in rehearsing for adjudication festivals, school concerts, and other community events, there is seldomly enough time to devote to the seemingly daunting task of improvisation. Additionally, the

individual attention necessary for proper improvisation instruction is not exactly practical in an ensemble of 20+ students. Books such as David Berger's (2018) *High School Jazz: A Director's Guide to a Better Band* and David Baker's (1988) *Jazz Pedagogy: A Comprehensive Method of Jazz Education for Teachers and Students* have been invaluable resources for getting ideas to incorporate bite-sized elements of improvisation instruction into the large jazz ensemble setting without sacrificing significant rehearsal time. These resources and experiences throughout my time in the Masters' program have given me the knowledge and tools to craft a unique experience for my high school jazz band that is authentic to the jazz idiom.

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to all of the great music educators that have helped shape me to become the best musician and educator I can possibly be: Mr. Scott Stephens, my childhood guitar teacher who tapped into the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old wannabe rockstar; Mr. Eric Akers, my middle school orchestra teacher who has since become a lifelong friend; Mr. Timothy James, my high school band director who introduced me to the band world and whose program has provided an eager high school student with countless performance opportunities; and Mr. Jeff Wolfe, my undergraduate jazz professor who prepared me for the “real world” of professional musicianship and continues to be an esteemed bandmate. I would also like to thank all of the K-State Music Education faculty for their unrelenting support and encouragement over these past three summers. Each and every professor has pushed me to question everything, challenge any assumptions about our profession, and to become a lifelong student of the profession.

Above all, however, this report is dedicated to my wonderful family. My parents, Darrell and Stephanie Blankenship, have never stopped encouraging me to pursue my dreams and never settle for anything less. It is impossible to tell where I would be today without their never-ending love and wisdom. Last but anything not least, this report is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Samantha Blankenship, who has never stopped believing in me and continues to be a never-ending source of inspiration to become the best husband and human I can be. I hope I have made all of you all proud.

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

In recent years, many have called into question the function and efficacy of public schooling. Even as schools are recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still a percentage of families opting for their children to attend school virtually, switch to traditional homeschooling, or otherwise shifting away from public education altogether. Regardless of their reasoning, it is difficult to ignore the recent shift in public sentiment towards public education.

Anecdotally, I had questioned the role of public education as early as 7th grade. During the dress rehearsal for our winter choir concert, I passed out on the risers and broke my jaw, an injury that put me out of school for three months. For those three months, there was a teacher that would come to our house every week to drop off my assignments and administer any tests that I missed. I quickly found that I was able to complete all of my work for the week in no longer than two hours a day, and when I returned to school, I ended up being two weeks ahead of the rest of the class. With so little time and effort spent on the actual schoolwork, I questioned the purpose of spending eight hours every day in the physical school building.

At the time, I attributed this solely to the social skills learned by attending public school. As a student, school requires frequent social interaction with a diverse group of one's peers. Students are able to interact with and learn from students with dramatically different backgrounds than their own. Even conflicts, when moderated appropriately, are excellent real-world learning opportunities for young students. Schools allow for this heterogeneous social setting that simply cannot be replicated in other methods of schooling.

In more general terms, one of the main purposes of education is to create well-rounded humans. In a society that increasingly values specialization, there is still much value to be had in

a comprehensive education. The core school curriculum requirements determine what the district believes to be prerequisite knowledge of a well-rounded student (Eisner, 2002). Even at the youngest of ages, each student comes to school with a pre-established set of interests and abilities. Conversely, there are certainly content areas in which each individual student either struggles or otherwise would not normally excel. The greatest growth occurs at the edge of one's comfort zone, so it is the job of the school to present and have students engage in content in ways they would not pursue on their own in the interest of creating well-rounded humans.

Comprehensive education is a breeding ground for students to discover new interests. Students will oftentimes develop an interest in a subject that they had previously detested. That idea leads into the next purpose of education, to provide students with an environment for them to discover and explore their passions. As students progress in their secondary education, ample school opportunities should arise outside of the traditional curriculum. Advanced courses, the arts, electives, and athletics all give the student a degree of customization in their academic experience. Every student has something special to contribute, and individualism should be celebrated.

Producing well-rounded yet distinct individuals lends itself to the final and most practical function of education, which is to create productive members of society. At the end of the day, students will graduate and be left to their own devices out in the "real world". Students need a well-rounded education in order to be an independent, functioning adult. At the same time, the specialties that one develops during their education allows them to provide value to society. The true marker of a successful school system is one that prepares its students to pursue their goals and become contributing members of the public.

Music has been at the forefront of just about every great civilization in recorded history. Music brings people of a society together and helps to foster a distinct cultural identity. The function of music is to provide the element of art and culture into a student's comprehensive education. It is no secret that the current educational system generally values STEM classes, test scores, and other quantitative measures above all. This is hardly a modern issue, as music educators were dealing with similar issues dating back to the Cold War and even the Committee of Ten (Mark & Gary, 2007). However, it is imperative that music is a core part of the curriculum if our goal is to educate the whole child and create well-rounded individuals. In 2017, the Every Student Succeeds Act labeled music as a well-rounded subject. Although this label has yet to be tested federally, the ESSA clearly establishes music as a protected subject.

Ideally, music should be taught purely for the sake of music. The intrinsic value and fulfillment associated with a successful musical experience is a sensation that cannot be replicated by any other means. The challenge with advocacy is that communicating that intrinsic value to administrators, community leaders, and policymakers that do not have a strong musical background. When advocating for school music programs, it is imperative to not get tempted into relying on non-musical tactics, such as the "music makes you smarter" arguments. While those statements may be factually accurate, they ultimately diminish the value of music itself in favor of seeing music as a means to an end. Everyone makes and enjoys music in some form, so the challenge with advocacy is being able to communicate our beliefs with those who engage with music differently than us.

Music has been a vital component of practically every culture in recorded history. The study of music allows students to develop a deeper understanding of world cultures as well as their own. This knowledge can then be shared by performance, which has the power to connect

the students and the school to the community. Performance ensembles are typically some of the most publicly visible organizations in the school. Maintaining and promoting a strong performing arts program should be a top priority for any school for not only the cultural education of their students, but to develop community engagement. While they are the most common, performing ensembles are not the only way to connect with the community. A challenge for the modern music educator is discovering ways to become musical ambassadors to the communities they serve in ways that supplement their traditional ensemble performances.

Not only does the product of music education engage with a school's community, but the music classes themselves create a community for the students. School music ensembles are some of the most inclusive organizations that a school could offer. The community created by a musical ensemble often provides a home for many students who feel like they do not belong anywhere else. Having this sense of belonging allows for students to develop their creativity and self-expression in a safe and comfortable environment. Membership in a musical ensemble has the power to save and transform young lives.

Being a member of an organization larger than oneself and having shared goals with like-minded individuals not only provides a social haven for its students but also prepares them for adult life in ways that a traditional classroom simply cannot achieve. The discipline, perseverance, teamwork, and leadership skills learned in a school music ensemble will translate directly into career and family settings as they enter adulthood. While other activities and sports can accomplish a similar goal, participation in music goes one step further. The expressive nature of music, especially the inherently creative nature of composition and improvisation, help to breed individuality in ways that cannot be achieved in other school organizations.

The inclusion of music in the school curriculum helps to achieve the goals of education at large. If our goal as educators is to create productive members of society, the benefits of music cannot be ignored. The leadership skills and social skills developed by participation in a musical ensemble are practical and invaluable skills to develop in every young person entering modern society. The practice of rehearsing and performing music teaches communication skills in ways that are wholly unique to music. Many of the problems that need to be solved in a musical rehearsal are not black and white. The expressive qualities of music allow for a great degree of interpretation, and a major challenge of this ambiguity is in the communication of that interpretation. This unique quality of music making is fully realized in student centered and particularly student led rehearsals. Students that are actively involved in the decision making and rehearsal processes take a tremendous sense of ownership in their ensembles that not only strengthens the ensemble, but of the relationships of those involved in the process. If a major goal of education is to provide social experience to young people, music is essential.

Extramusical benefits aside, the study of music in and of itself fulfills the goal of providing students with a well-rounded and comprehensive education. Participating in music breeds emotional growth, creativity, and self-expression in ways that only the arts can offer. Furthermore, music is inherently multicultural, and the study of music has the opportunity to provide students with brief glimpses into other cultures (Jorgensen, 1997). Even within one's own culture, it is impossible to teach a proper understanding of the culture without participation in its music.

The student-centered and social nature of these points align with David Elliot's praxial view of music education and directly oppose some of the beliefs of Bennett Reimer. As a part of his aesthetic approach to music education, Reimer thought of music as an inward and reflective

practice rather than a social one (Daughetry, 1996). On the other hand, Elliot's praxial approach highly valued the social nature of music, focusing on musical citizenship and multiculturalism (Elliott & Silverman, 2014). This social and multicultural view of music education is further supported by the work of Christopher Small and his idea of "musicking". Small uses the analogy of an ocean of musicking with individual genres being separate lagoons, and individuals can jump between these lagoons to further their understanding of themselves, their communities, and of other cultures (Small, 1998). Music is an inherently social activity, and the works of Elliot and Small, among others, solidify this belief.

The writings of Elliot and Small help to support another belief that has been hinted to throughout this paper, that music should be taught through performance. Elliot strongly valued performance and musicianship as the key pillars of music education (Daughetry, 1996). While Small's definition of "musicking" includes listening, it also includes performance, composition, improvisation, and dancing all as equally important (Small, 1998). On the other hand, Reimer believed that music should be taught primarily through general music, where students can listen to a more diverse range of music to study their formal structures. He did not outright dismiss performance but thought that performance was not a one-stop-shop for music education (Daughetry, 1996). Likewise, Elliot Eisner became concerned about the importance that schools put on the finished product in art education instead of the process itself. Eisner thought of four distinct divisions of art education that should carry equal weight: the performative, the critical, the cultural/historical, and the aesthetic (Eisner, 1987). While there is certainly merit in the concerns presented by Reimer and Eisner, all of these topics can be taught through music performance. A well-programmed ensemble curriculum includes a diverse array of music, and well-planned rehearsals should provide students with all of the background and historical

information they need to know. Performance should be the utmost priority in music education, and any additional, non-performance music courses should be supplemental. Unless students get the opportunity to experience making music themselves, they can never understand nor appreciate it.

Where Reimer and Eisner make some great points are in their writings on music as part of a well-rounded education. Eisner strongly advocated for the arts as part of a comprehensive education and claimed that each of the arts needs to be included in the curriculum to achieve this goal (Eisner, 2002). Reimer went a step further and advocated for not only music as part of a complete curriculum, but that music education itself should be comprehensive (Daugherty, 1996). It is all too common for school music programs to specialize in one particular area and rob its students of the opportunity to become well-rounded musicians. While Reimer believed that a comprehensive music education should be achieved primarily through general music, a well-prepared and intentional educator can communicate all of the same information in a performance-based setting.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

Music plays a crucial role in providing the artistic and cultural component to a well-rounded education. The joy of making music is something that everyone should experience, meaning that music needs to be taught primarily through performance. Relationships are the key component to the success of my ensembles: relationships with my students, relationships between my students, and relationships with the community. As an educator, it is my duty to design my ensemble's curriculum so that they have the most diverse and comprehensive musical experience possible. If I am successful in this task, my ensembles will be well-equipped to pass along this information through performance. As one of the most publicly visible organizations

within the school, my students have a wonderful opportunity to become musical ambassadors to the community. Through these experiences, my students will learn leadership and other crucial life skills that will pay them dividends in future life experiences. There is absolutely no doubt that the inclusion of music in the school curriculum helps to achieve the largest goals of education, to train well-rounded individuals that will become the society's leaders of tomorrow.

The lesson plans in the next chapter will detail a unit that was taught in my high school beginning jazz band where students created their own big band arrangement of a jazz blues standard. This process involved aurally transcribing melodies and harmonies, learning to improvise, and composing background figures to accompany soloists, all without using standard notation. Ear training, improvisation, and composition are all skills that are important to develop a complete musician, but they are all too often overlooked in many high school music programs. If one of the main purposes of public education is to provide students with a comprehensive education, then school music programs should be responsible for providing students with a comprehensive music education.

Just as another purpose of public education is to provide students with an environment to discover and explore their passions, the exposure to this side of the music making experience allows music educators to reach students who otherwise would not be inspired by the traditional curriculum. As for myself, I participated in my high school band simply to stay involved in a music making community, but I was not particularly fulfilled musically with marching band and concert band. Even as a child learning Metallica songs on guitar, my teachers could teach me how to play the music, but I always wanted to know why certain songs or styles of music sounded the way they did so that I can create my own music. It was not until my jazz courses during my undergraduate studies when I was taught the theoretical concepts that my younger self

craved. Many music educators avoid these topics because of their busy performance schedules and the resulting tight rehearsal timelines. My lesson plans introduce basic ear training, improvisation, and composition in a way that is not only time efficient, but results in a tangible product that can be programmed at any performance.

My final purpose for education was to create productive members of society. For music educators, we can interpret that purpose as creating independent musicians. Even though the vast majority of our students will not pursue music as a profession, we should be judging the success of our programs by our student's abilities to continue seeking out music making opportunities once they leave our classrooms. Many of my peers who were former band students express great interest in continuing to play their instrument but do not know how to do so outside of the structure of a school band program. A few students may join their college band and stop there, and even fewer may find community ensembles to join. A well-rounded music program, particularly those who incorporate authentic jazz experiences such as those detailed in my lesson plans, will prepare students for many future opportunities outside of the traditional large ensemble experience.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)

National Music Standards (2014)

- MU:Cr1.1.E.Ia: Compose and improvise ideas for melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements for specific purposes that reflect characteristic(s) of music from a variety of historical periods studied in rehearsal.
- MU:Cr2.1.E.Ia: Select and develop draft melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements for specific purposes that demonstrate understanding of characteristic(s) of music from a variety of historical periods studied in rehearsal.
- MU:Cr2.1.E.IIIa: Preserve draft musical works through standard notation, audio, or video recording
- MU:Cr3.1.E.Ia: Evaluate and refine draft melodies, rhythmic passages, arrangements, and improvisations based on established criteria, including the extent to which they address identified purposes.
- MU:Cr3.2.E.Ia: Share personally developed melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements – individually or as an ensemble – that address identified purposes.
- MU:Pr6.1.E.IIb: Demonstrate an understanding of intent as a means for connecting with an audience through prepared and improvised performances.

Lesson Plan 1

Prior Knowledge/Skills

The Spring Valley High School “Blue Jazz” Ensemble is one of two large jazz ensembles in the band program. The “Blue” group consists of mostly underclassmen students and is many of their first experiences performing in this type of group. Most of these students have zero experience with improvisation and transcription. Many have little understanding and historical context of how a jazz big band chart is organized. However, there are a select few upperclassmen who play in both groups. These students have extensive experience participating in other large jazz ensembles, small group combos, jazz honor bands, and summer jazz camps. They serve as mentors for the younger, less experienced students.

Rehearsal Objective

The objective of this first rehearsal is to get the ensemble comfortable with the idea of transcribing melodic lines by ear and arranging sections of a big band chart with no provided notation. Students will understand how big band charts are organized, how big band charts compare/contrast to small group combo arrangements and use that terminology in reference to our collaborative arrangement.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

Throughout the rehearsal, students will be formatively assessed by their ability to correctly transcribe and recall melodic lines with minimal assistance. Students will also be assessed by their ability to retain details about the arrangement, such as rests, entrances, and melody versus harmony lines.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

- Instrument(s) for instructor to play: trumpet and vibraphone.

Rehearsal Plan

- Activity: Introduction/Discussion of the structure of a jazz arrangement
 - Time: 5 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose is to give students an understanding of how jazz big band and combo charts are structured as well as their similarities and differences.
 - Sequence:
 - Introduce the project, that the band will collaborate to make their own big band arrangement. Students will transcribe and harmonize a jazz blues head, learn to improvise over jazz blues chord changes, and collaborate with their sections to compose background figures to accompany a soloist's improvisations. Students will likely feel uncomfortable at first, as none of them have attempted anything like this before, even those with jazz experience. It may be necessary to calm some nerves during this process.
 - Begin discussion of jazz arrangements. Small group, or combo, arrangements are centered around a specific melody, or head. The form of the head, along with the chord changes, will be repeated over and over during the arrangement. The combo plays the head one (twice for blues heads), take turns improvising over the form, and end with another instance (or two for the blues) of the head. Big band heads generally

follow a similar format but include more through-composed sections, including but not limited to soli sections (often with saxophones) and whisper/shout choruses.

- Activity: Introduction of the blues
 - Time: 5 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose is to introduce students to the single most popular set of chord changes in the jazz idiom, as well as one that is very commonly found in various other styles of music.
 - Sequence:
 - Ask if students have ever heard of the blues. Many might have heard the term “blues” before but have no idea what it means. Clarify that although there is an entire genre of music called blues (which often uses these chord changes), we are specifically talking about the 12-bar blues form itself.
 - The more experienced students in the ensemble will be quite familiar with the blues and will enthusiastically answer all questions presented to the group, often at a higher level of depth than is relevant for a beginner. Because this could possibly intimidate some younger players, explain to the group that the main goal as of now is to feel that 12-bar form, not to understand the music theory behind the changes. Using a phone or laptop connected to the classroom set of speakers, play examples of various blues heads. The focus is to be able to hear and feel three separate 4-bar phrases and to identify the beginning of the form.
- Activity: Learn *Blues in the Closet* head by ear

- Time of Activity: 15-25 minutes
- Purpose of Activity: The purpose is to introduce students to a melody composed by famous jazz bassist Oscar Pettiford. Students will gain ear-training experience by transcribing the melody. For many, this will be their first experience learning by ear.
- Sequence:
 - Ask if anyone has ever played the melody to *Blues in the Closet* by Oscar Pettiford (1953) before. Hopefully, no one will raise their hand. If a student claims to have played it before, change the plan to learn another blues melody, such as *Sonnymoon for Two* by Sonny Rollins (1958), *Blue Monk* by Thelonious Monk (1956), or *Now's the Time* by Charlie Parker (1945).
 - Introduce students to the melody by playing the first line (first four measures) of the head on an instrument such as a trumpet or vibraphone. Explain that the line only has four notes. If students appear to struggle, give them the first pitch, which in the key of Bb will be a concert Bb (this tune is often played in several different keys).
 - Repeat the line as needed. Give students some time to experiment and struggle to find the right rhythm/pattern and allow them to collaborate.
 - Only if a considerable amount of time passes without success, walk around and help struggling students on an individual level. The goal is to balance being efficient with time/pace of rehearsal without blatantly teaching by rote.

- Once students seem to be mostly in agreement about the notes/rhythms, perform the first line of the head as a group until 100% accuracy is achieved.
 - Repeat the process with the second line. Luckily, only one note changes from the previous line.
 - At this point, students may begin to feel tired about this process. Luckily, the final line of the head is the same as the first. Rehearse the entire 12-bar form until 100% accuracy is achieved.
 - Work with the rhythm section as needed, particularly with any bass, guitar, and piano players who have never played with lead sheets/chord charts before.
- Activity: Harmonize and arrange the head to *Blues in the Closet* (1953)
 - Time: 30-40 minutes
 - Purpose of activity: In the process of harmonizing the melody, students will get more ear-training experience, apply their music theory knowledge, or both.
 - Sequence:
 - Choose which students will be playing the melody during the arrangement. Discuss the common practice of jazz arranging when harmonizing a melody line, that the melody is always in the highest voice and can possibly be doubled an octave below. Because of this, lead players of each section will be playing the melody, and students can discuss and decide if they would like to double the melody an octave lower. Because it will exempt a couple of likely younger players from

transcribing/transposing the harmony lines, I expect students to agree to double the melody, which will be assigned to the Trumpet 4, Trombone 4/Bass Trombone, and Baritone Saxophone parts.

- Assign students to play the first of two harmony lines, which will be the Trumpet 2, Trombone 2, and Tenor Saxophone 1 parts. Play the line for the students and give them time to transcribe the line. Students not playing this line are highly encouraged to transcribe the line as well and help their peers as necessary.
- Repeat the previous step with the second of two harmony lines, which will be the Trumpet 3, Trombone 3, Alto Saxophone 2, and Tenor Saxophone 2 parts.
- Once all of the individual parts have been assigned and transcribed, rehearse the head of the tune with all parts combined. Play through the head several times to identify and correct any errors that are still lingering in the ensemble.
- Finally, have students recall that because a blues is only 12 measures, as opposed to the traditional 32-bar AABA jazz standard, blues heads are almost always played through twice. In a big band setting, it is common for the first time through to only be played by a few players before it is played by the whole band the second time through, creating dynamic and harmonic contrast. Ask for volunteers who would like to play the melody the first time, no harmony parts are necessary. The more experienced players are likely to raise their hands, which will work out nicely because

these parts are commonly assigned to lead players. Only one player per section is necessary. Two players, trumpet and saxophone, is most common, but adding the lead trombone will also be acceptable.

- Because there are only a few players playing the melody the first time, discuss the importance of dynamics to the rhythm section. The rhythm section not only controls tempo and feel, but also control dynamics. A rhythm section that is attentive to dynamics has the ability to control the dynamics of the entire ensemble. Many high school rhythm sections are no better than play-along tracks in terms of dynamics and interactivity with the ensemble. To achieve this dynamic contrast, ask the drummer to play a hi-hat groove for the first time through and switch to the traditional ride cymbal groove for the second time. Collaborate with the drummer to create fills and set ups that accentuate the melody.
- Rehearse the completed arrangement of the head as necessary. Thank the students for their patience and cooperation, as this is a potentially slow and repetitive process at first. Stress to the ensemble to not forget their parts for the next rehearsal so that we can be most efficient with our time to learn improvisation and to compose our background parts.

Reflection

This first rehearsal ultimately served to introduce students to this arrangement, lay the foundation for the aural tradition of jazz, and ultimately to ease students into an unfamiliar and uncomfortable way of making music. This rehearsal was intentionally slower paced than the rehearsals that follow in the interest of not overwhelming many of our younger students. The

vast majority of our students have never attempted any sort of transcription before, so an easy blues head with a repetitive lick using only 3-4 notes at a time was an effective introduction.

The biggest challenge that I anticipated going into this rehearsal was pacing the transcription process with such a large group. I am used to teaching improvisation and ear training with the jazz combo groups that we have experimented with in the past. These ensembles only consisted of somewhere between 5-8 of our more experienced upperclassmen. Structuring this lesson to teach similar concepts to a full big band of mostly beginners was the challenge. Many of the experienced students were able to figure out the licks very quickly, some caught onto it with a bit of time, and a few others struggled greatly. In terms of pacing the lesson, I had to strike a balance between giving struggling students time to figure out the correct notes while not dragging down the pace of rehearsal. If a student needed assistance, how many hints should you give them before the activity turns from transcription into learning by rote? How much should I allow the experienced players to assist the beginners? These were questions that I had to keep in mind that I could not account for ahead of time. I had to assess student progress and, more importantly, student morale constantly to ensure a proper balance of learning and enjoyability. I could teach this same lesson plan to countless different ensembles and not teach it the exact same way twice.

As a whole, this first rehearsal was a success. The beginning stages of this process is inherently slower paced than the activities that are planned for the following rehearsals, and students still have their guards up since they are in unfamiliar territory. Students do not see the big picture of the arrangement just yet, but they completed this rehearsal's goals of successfully transcribe the melody and harmonies as well as arrange the entire head in of the tune without too

much resistance. I am confident that they will slowly but surely acclimate to and thrive in this new way of making music.

Lesson Plan 2

Prior Knowledge/Skills

After the previous rehearsal, students should know the melody and appropriate harmony parts for our arrangement of *Blues in the Closet* (1953). Additionally, they should have a baseline understanding of the traditional arrangement for jazz combo and big band arrangements. Aside from the few upperclassmen who have attended jazz camps and/or honor bands, no students in the ensemble have prior experience with jazz improvisation.

Rehearsal Objective

The objective of this rehearsal is to reinforce the melody and harmonies that were learned in the previous rehearsal, as well as giving students a crash course in jazz improvisation over Bb blues chord changes.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

During the review of the previously learned material, students will be assessed through their accurate recollection of the notes and rhythms that they transcribed in the previous rehearsal. If needed, I will play portions of their part for them if they need a reminder, but explicit note names will not be given. Assessment during the improvisation portion of rehearsal will be formative, as I will be observing both the initial skill level and confidence of each student. The amount of time spent on each activity will vary depending on these factors, as some students will need motivation while others will be ready for more specific instruction.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

- Instrument(s) for instructor to play: trumpet and vibraphone.
- Chord charts for students in concert pitch, Bb, and Eb.

Rehearsal Plan

- Activity: Review of previously learned material
 - Time: 10-15 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to reinforce the correct notes and rhythms of the parts that were assigned to each student during the previous rehearsal. Because nothing about this arrangement will be written in standard notation, students are more likely to need to review previously taught material for this tune. Additionally, because this is an after-school ensemble, there is rarely a rehearsal that happens without a handful of absences, making review even more crucial.
 - Sequence:
 - Make a mental observation about today's attendance, particularly regarding who was not here for the previous rehearsal and who will need to review today's material.
 - Ask students who remembers the melody, not the harmony line, for *Blues in the Closet* (1953). Play the line for the ensemble once and give them time to review. Allow upperclassmen/lead players to assist anyone who was not here the previous rehearsal.
 - Play through the melody until mastery is achieved. No harmony parts should be played yet.
 - Repeat the procedure with the harmony lines.
 - Once everyone knows their parts, review the traditional arrangement of playing a blues head twice. Only the lead players will play the melody the

first time, and the full band will play their harmonized parts the second time. The drum part plays a hi-hat groove the first time and switches to a traditional ride cymbal groove the second time. Rehearse the current arrangement until mastery is achieved.

- Activity: Introduction to jazz improvisation
 - Time: 30-40 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to give inexperienced students a baseline understanding of how to improvise over jazz blues chord changes and to demystify what can be an intimidating endeavor.
 - Sequence:
 - Review the form of the 12-bar blues. By this point, students should start being able to feel the form due to their experience of playing the melody to *Blues in the Closet* (1953). However, reinforce their understanding that the blues form consists of three 4-bar phrases. If necessary, play additional examples for the ensemble.
 - Instill in the ensemble that the number one factor that holds students back is confidence. Jazz improvisation gets a reputation of being complex and requiring a high understanding of scales and music theory. While this can be the case at a high level, most students do not make it that far purely out of fear. Scales and theory can be taught, confidence not as much.
 - To begin building confidence, the first exercise will be for everyone to improvise at once, collective improvisation, while only being allowed to play using a Concert Bb. The collective improvisation element serves two

purposes: to allow students to improvise while blending into the crowd and avoiding judgmental ears as well as giving everyone a chance to improvise in the most time-efficient manner possible. Being restricted to one note eliminates the analysis paralysis of not knowing what notes/scales to play and highlights one element of jazz improvisation that many beginning students overlook, syncopation. Playing interesting and syncopated rhythms will serve students much better than being able to run scales for an entire chorus of the blues. It may be necessary to play several choruses of this collective improvisation, as the chaotic nature of the activity may be unusual and/or humorous to students at first.

- Ask for volunteers to improvise by themselves using only a Concert Bb. Assign a solo order and let them improvise, encouraging syncopated rhythms. This activity will give the ensemble practice of hearing the 12-bar blues form, even for those who are not improvising. Encourage students to actively listen, physically move, and even verbally cheer on the soloists, as this is extremely common and important element to the culture of jazz performance.
- Introduce the blues scale to the ensemble. This is one scale that be effective to use during the entire 12-bar blues form. Inform the ensemble that this scale is often overplayed and can act as a crutch for some musicians, and many jazz educators advise against teaching this scale. For a complete beginner, however, this scale is a perfect way to start sounding authentic before they are ready to dive into the depths of chord-scale

theory. Introduce the notes of the scale to the ensemble. Allow them to write the notes down somewhere and give them a couple of minutes to explore the sounds of the scale. Repeat the process of collective improvisation followed by volunteers to improvise on their own.

- Introduce the basics of chord-scale theory to the ensemble. Some students may not be ready to put this information into practice yet, but it is information that is easy to follow along with and can be implemented in due course. Introduce the basic structure of a typical four-note chord often found in jazz: root, third, fifth, seventh. Explain to students how to count these scale degrees using a basic major scale, such as Concert Bb. Ask the ensemble which two of these notes are the most important. Some of the more experienced students will answer that the two most important notes are the third and the seventh. These are what are called guide tones in the jazz world. Because the blues deals almost exclusively with dominant seventh chords, explain that the seventh for these chords is lowered, called a flat seven. Go through the chords in the blues form and have students determine what the guide tones are for each chord. Point out that the guide tones for most of these chords are only a half-step away, allowing for some great voice leading. Repeat the process of collective improvisation followed by individual volunteer improvisation only using the guide tones for each chord.

- Complete one more round of collective improvisation followed by individual volunteer improvisation, except there are no restrictions on the notes that can be used.
- Activity: Creating a rough draft of the arrangement
 - Time: 10-15 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to get an idea of who will be improvising on this tune during the concert and to create a rough sketch of the arrangement that will be elaborated on during the next rehearsal.
 - Sequence:
 - Ask for volunteers of who would like to improvise on this tune. Create a solo order out of the students who raise their hands. This order will not be set in stone, as it is possible (and highly encouraged) that the younger, more inexperienced students will slowly begin to gain confidence and want to solo as time goes on.
 - Explain to students that the ending of a jazz arrangement usually consists of another statement of the melody, called the “head out”. Our head out will be the same as the head in, with the lead players playing the melody once followed by the fully harmonized version being played by the full ensemble.
 - Explain the possible choices for how to end the arrangement. The easiest solution will be for a hard stop on the last note of the head. Another option will be to have the last note followed by a drum fill and a final note with a fermata. If the ensemble chooses the latter option, play a couple of options

for chords on a piano or vibraphone and let students decide which chord they would like to use. Then, determine what notes each student will play for the final fermata. A popular choice in the key of Bb will be a Bb7#11 chord, providing a bit of dissonance and intrigue to the final moments of the arrangement. An easy way to think of this chord is to have a major triad a step above the root, which provides the ninth, sharp eleven, and thirteenth. Assign these notes to the saxophone section, with the lead alto playing the sharp eleven. The brass section will play notes of the standard Bb7 chord. Rehearse the head out until mastery is achieved.

- Play through the entire rough draft arrangement at least twice, or otherwise until mastery is achieved. This will consist of the entire head in, the assigned solo order, and the entire head out with the fermata.

Reflection

An anticipated challenge for this rehearsal was spending too much time on review after so much time was spent last rehearsal only on 24 measures of music total, a 12-bar blues head repeated with harmonies the second time. Due to the after-school nature of this ensemble, attendance is a battle that is constantly fought. The reality is that some students need to split their time between jazz ensemble and other activities such as theater and sports, some students are regularly absent from school due to discipline issues, and others simply skip school on a semi-regular basis. There are several students that had to catch up with what was missed from the previous rehearsal, as they cannot rely on their sight-reading abilities for this particular arrangement. Additionally, because the ensemble only meets twice a week, the rest of the

ensemble appreciated the refresher themselves. Although the review was much needed, we certainly spent more time on it than I had anticipated and was comfortable with.

Luckily, once we began the improvisation activities, the pace of rehearsal dramatically began to increase. I was extremely happy with the results and student attitudes toward these activities. Just like the ear training activities from the previous rehearsal, I am used to dealing with a large dose of skepticism and hesitation towards the beginning stages of improvisation. Similar to learning to speak a new language, learning improvisation is a gradual process and takes a fair amount of time to begin to see progress. Many students who are excellent sight-readers get easily frustrated and quit improvisation altogether because they do not see the immediate results that they see with their classical literature. That is not to say that the results were immediate during this rehearsal, but with the example set by some of our veteran jazz musicians, several underclassmen were beginning to volunteer enthusiastically for some of our improvisation activities.

I can attribute much of this rehearsal's success from the research proposal project during the Research in Music Education class. Following the action research procedures that I designed, I was able to discover the most effective improvisation warm-up activities during rehearsals with last year's version of this ensemble. Because I frequently teach beginning improvisors, I was not necessarily interested in a warm-up's ability to teach theoretical concepts, but to encourage and instill confidence in what is a terrifying activity for many young musicians. Using the knowledge learned from conducting this informal action research, I was able to design an effective sequence for easing younger players into the idea of improvisation. The idea of limiting note choice and simplifying one's options was quite effective, as well as letting students experiment with a specified criteria in the safety of the controlled chaos that is collective improvisation. Within 10-

15 minutes, many underclassmen, particularly freshmen, were actively volunteering to improvise by themselves. I am quite comfortable with teaching the theoretical and technical side of improvisation, but teaching students to overcome that initial fear of the unknown is a mystery that has yet to be fully solved. It is possible that I simply got lucky with the group of students in the ensemble this year, or maybe this rehearsal was on a particularly good day, but I am curious as to if this success could be easily repeated with future students.

Once the improvisation activities concluded, we were ready to make our rough draft of the arrangement. Although the solo order is not finalized and we will compose our background figures in the next rehearsal, one goal of this unit is for students to have an understanding for how a jazz chart is typically arranged. Although the concept of head in, solos, then head out is fairly straightforward, it is important for students to see their arrangement in context and to begin to make connections to literature that they already know. Similarly, students should know several common endings for jazz arrangements and begin to develop an intuition that can decide the most effective ending for any given tune. For example, in a combo setting, many endings for tunes are completely figured out on the fly without any prior discussion. Musicians are required to use their non-verbal communication skills and existing knowledge of the literature to collectively decide on an appropriate ending on the spot. Aside from individual improvisation, the ending to the tune is the ensemble's first major decision to put their own personal stamp on the arrangement. After a slow start, this second rehearsal was a great success. Students who were once skeptical about this unit are now becoming enthusiastic and are taking initiative in the creative decision-making process.

Lesson Plan 3

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students should have mastery over the melody and appropriate harmony parts to *Blues in the Closet* (1953). After the activities in the previous rehearsal, students have a fundamental understanding of several different strategies and approaches to improvising a solo over Bb jazz blues chord changes, such as creating rhythmic intrigue with only one note, using the blues scale, and utilizing guide tones.

Rehearsal Objective

The objective of this rehearsal is primarily for each section to collaborate in order to compose, edit, and rehearse background passages that are appropriate to play under improvised solos in this arrangement of *Blues in the Closet* (1953). Skills taught in the previous rehearsal will also be reinforced through our warm-up activities.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

The primary objective of this rehearsal, composing background passages in sections, will be assessed based on each section's ability to create and rehearse a stylistically appropriate background passage in a timely manner. Lead players and upperclassmen will be responsible for leading these sectional rehearsals and will be expected to collaborate with both their sections and the director in order to successfully accomplish this task. In the review portion of the rehearsal, students will be assessed based off their memory of not only the melody/harmony parts of the melody to *Blues in the Closet* (1953), but in each student's growth in confidence and ability in improvisation.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

- Instrument(s) for instructor to play: trumpet and vibraphone.
- Chord charts for students in concert pitch, Bb, and Eb.

Rehearsal Plan

- Activity: Review of the head in
 - Time: 5 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to reinforce the correct notes, rhythms, and stylistic elements of each student's parts to the head of *Blues in the Closet* (1953). Because nothing is being documented in standard notation, consistent review is necessary to keep these parts fresh in each student's memory.
 - Sequence:
 - Ask the ensemble how well they remember their parts to the head of *Blues in the Closet* (1953). Ask for any student who would like to review their part or have their part played for them again. Play the appropriate melody or harmony part(s) on a trumpet or vibraphone as necessary.
 - Reinforce the arrangement of just the melody being played by the lead players, with a hi-hat groove in the rhythm section, for the first time with the fully harmonized part, with the traditional ride cymbal groove, being played the second time. Play and rehearse this arrangement as necessary.
- Activity: Review of basic blues improvisation
 - Time: 10-15 minutes

- Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to practice and reinforce the skills that were taught in the previous rehearsal regarding basics to improvising over a Bb jazz blues.
- Sequence:
 - Review the activities from the previous rehearsal, such as improvising over a blues using only one note, using the blues scale, and only using the guide tones (third and sevenths) for every chord. For each activity, play at least one chorus of collective improvisation, where everyone improvises at once using the selected criteria. Then, ask for volunteers to improvise using the same criteria by themselves. Encourage everyone in the ensemble to volunteer at least once. Repeat this process for each criterion.
 - Because students often stress about what notes are correct to use while improvising, reinforce that playing appropriate, syncopated rhythms are an easy way to sound more genuine. Create more criteria/restrictions for students to improvise under based on rhythms, such as not playing on beat one of every measure. Repeat the process of collective improvisation followed by volunteer solo improvisations.
- Activity: Composition of background passages in sectionals
 - Time: 30-45 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to provide each section with a workshop to compose, edit, and rehearse background passages that will be played underneath improvised solos in our final arrangement.
 - Sequence:

- Explain to the ensemble that most big band jazz arrangements, and even some combo arrangements, include background passages that are played by the ensemble that accompanies a soloist's improvisations. Provide some examples of passages in the ensemble's repertoire that are considered background passages.
- Discuss with the ensemble that each section will be composing their own background figures that will be played underneath solos in our final arrangement. Each section is responsible for composing and rehearsing one chorus of background figures. Encourage each section to focus on simplicity, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. If a background is overly complex, it will distract from the soloist and may not be stylistically appropriate. Encourage lead players and upperclassmen to focus on syncopated rhythms and repeated rhythmic figures, or riffs.
- Give each section 15 minutes to go off on their own to collaborate and compose their background figures. Designate particular spots in the band room and surrounding hallway/outside area for each section to go for this activity.
- Work with the rhythm section to encourage interactivity during the solo sections. There will likely be several soloists and an extended period of time where they will be repeating the same groove. Explain that the best rhythm sections are ones that actively listen to what a soloist plays and interacts with the soloist. The rhythm section also has the power to control dynamics and style of the entire ensemble. Encourage them to take

chances and try out different ideas during this portion of the arrangement and to not be fearful of ideas that do not work. Rhythm sections that stay the course for an entire arrangement are no more interesting than playing with a play-along backing track.

- Visit each section to observe and answer any questions they may have. Provide encouragement and steer them in the right direction if they are overthinking the background figures or are playing riffs that are stylistically inappropriate.
- Once the initial 15 minutes are over, have the ensemble reconvene to share their creations. Each section will take turns playing their background figures. Give feedback and rehearse as necessary. If a particular section needs extra work, give them five more minutes to go off and edit their background figures with the feedback they were given. Repeat the process until each section's background passages are to a satisfactory level.

- Activity: Determining a solo order and completing the first playthrough of the arrangement
 - Time: 15 minutes
 - Purpose of the Activity: The purpose of this activity is to decide a definitive solo order for the arrangement, give each section a chance to play their background figures in context, and to complete an initial playthrough of the final arrangement.
 - Sequence:
 - Ask for volunteers who would like to solo on this tune during the concert. The way the solo section will be arranged is that there will be alternating

choruses of no backgrounds with a chorus of backgrounds. The order for backgrounds will be trumpet, trombone, then saxophone. Ideally, the total number of choruses for the solo section will either be six or twelve, depending on the number of soloists and their ability/willingness to take multiple choruses. Assign a solo order where any backgrounds that are played will not be from the current soloist's section. Some students might want to write down the solo order for future reference.

- Complete the first playthrough the final, completed arrangement. The fully arranged head in will immediately be followed by the solo section. Once the last soloist has finished, we will immediately go into the head out, complete with the ending that we decided on in the previous rehearsal. This initial playthrough will likely be quite sloppy, but the goal is to make it to the end in one piece. Give plenty of cues, verbally and non-verbally, as necessary. Give all necessary feedback.
- If time allows, give the ensemble another opportunity to play through the complete arrangement.

Reflection

This third rehearsal is easily the densest lesson plan out of the entire unit. Due to us not notating our arrangement in any way, review is much more important than during the average ensemble rehearsal. During this rehearsal, the head was slowly but surely starting to become clean, as it took significantly less time to get everyone to remember their melody or harmony lines. The improvisation portion of rehearsal went even more smoothly than it did during the previous rehearsal, as students knew what to expect with these exercises. The underclassmen

who volunteered to improvise on their own during the previous rehearsal became even more confident during this rehearsal, and their courage inspired even more beginners to give it a shot. This newfound courage gave me the opportunity to spend more time and mental energy towards providing constructive feedback for the upperclassmen who have had previous experience with improvisation. Instead of reusing every exercise from the previous rehearsal, the questions asked by the upperclassmen and the needs I was able to assess from the underclassmen suggested that I should try different sets of exercises. I noticed that upperclassmen started to simply run scales during their solos, and underclassmen were starting to become overwhelmed by the advanced theory questions being asked by the older students. Using the same structure of experimenting with the concept via followed by volunteer solo improvisations, I shifted my focus away from what specific notes/scales should be used in a given context and instead focused on rhythm. Placing arbitrary limitations on students, such as not being able to play on beat one of every measure, almost instantly made the ensemble start to play with a more authentic, syncopated sound. It is truly remarkable as to the progress that these students have made in the past two rehearsals with approximately an hour of total improvisation instructional time.

The main event for this rehearsal was for each section to compose their own background figures to accompany the improvised solos. Each section was to compose and rehearse one chorus (twelve measures) worth of background figures. My suggestions for them were to err on the side of simplicity, that repeated, syncopated figures, often called riffs, were their keys to success. The sections had 15 minutes to find a spot either inside the band room, in the hallway, or at the picnic tables immediately outside the band room garage door to make this happen. After working with the rhythm section for a few moments, I made the rounds to each section to check up on their progress and provide feedback.

I was happily surprised to see the differences in each section's approach. The trumpets took my advice to focus on syncopated rhythms. With my help, they harmonized the outlines to the I, IV, and V chords. Then, they wrote three separate four measure phrases worth of rhythmic figures and assigned pitches in the effort of minimizing note changes. The trombones took a more riff-based approach. After I was able to simplify and trim the fat from their original idea, the result was a highly repeatable four measure lick that is so catchy that I still catch myself humming from time to time. Because the saxophones have two students who have extensive jazz experience, they thought that they would show off their jazz knowledge and use another jazz blues head for their background figure, specifically the tune *Sonnymoon for Two* by Sonny Rollins (1958). Although this does technically go against the purpose of composing their backgrounds themselves, these upperclassmen did go above and beyond to harmonize the entire melody in five parts for their section. The result was a surprisingly powerful sounding saxophone soli figure that would not sound out of place in a Count Basie recording.

After reconvening to share and rehearse everyone's creations, we were finally able to put the entire tune into context. While deciding on the solo order, I ran into a problem of too many students volunteering to improvise. The way that I had envisioned the solo section was that there would be alternating choruses of no backgrounds and with backgrounds. Giving each of the three wind sections an opportunity to play their backgrounds resulted in six choruses, and eight students volunteered to solo. Although this would result in a particularly long arrangement, I asked for some students to take two choruses instead of one, and we stretched it out to 12 total choruses so that every section could play their backgrounds twice. The first complete playthrough was rather rough, as I had to direct and cue everything that happened. The end goal is for me to conduct/cue as little as possible, as is standard practice for jazz big bands. However,

once the ensemble was able to hear everything in context once, the second playthrough was exponentially better. The arrangement still has some work to do in order to become concert-ready, but I am extremely happy with the results that we have had so far. The success of this rehearsal continues to serve as inspiration for other ways to incorporate student creativity, specifically composition, into the framework of the traditional ensemble rehearsal.

Lesson Plan 4

Prior Knowledge/Skills

By this rehearsal, students should have a mastery over the melody and harmonies to the head of *Blues in the Closet* (1953). Students should also be able to identify different strategies to improvise over Bb blues chord changes, and many students should be able to improvise effectively over these chord changes. The ensemble should remember the background passages that they had composed and rehearsed during the previous rehearsal.

Rehearsal Objective

The objective of this rehearsal is to rehearse and refine the content that has been taught in the past three rehearsals. The sequence of activities that will be detailed below can be repeated every time that *Blues in the Closet* (1953) is rehearsed. This lesson plan should be followed at least once a week, if not during every standard rehearsal, leading up to the concert.

Assessment of the Rehearsal

The assessment for this rehearsal will be consistent and formative. Since students will be rehearsing the complete arrangement, all assessment criteria from previous rehearsals will still apply. Students will be assessed on their ability to effectively recall and execute many details about the arrangement that we have crafted over the past several rehearsals. Feedback and suggestions will be detailed and will be given immediately regarding improvised solos.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

- Instrument(s) for instructor to play: trumpet and vibraphone.
- Chord charts for students in concert pitch, Bb, and Eb.

Rehearsal Plan

- Activity: Review of head in/head out

- Time: 5 minutes
- Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to reinforce correct notes, rhythms, style, and other details about the head in and head out of this arrangement. This material has been reviewed the most, as it was taught during the first rehearsal, so this process should be familiar and therefore time efficient.
- Sequence:
 - Ask the ensemble if there are any melody or harmony lines of which students may need reminded. If so, play the line for them so they can remind themselves of the part. Their peers may also assist with this process is necessary.
 - Play through the head in. Remind the rhythm section of the break immediately before the first solo. Fix any mistakes and repeat as necessary.
 - Repeat the process for the head out. Fix any mistakes with the final chord. Repeat as necessary.
- Activity: Review of background passages
 - Time: 5 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to reinforce details regarding the background passages that each section previously composed and rehearsed.
 - Sequence:
 - Begin with the trumpet section. Give them time to remind each other of notes/rhythms if needed. Play through a chorus of their background sections. Fix any mistakes and repeat as necessary.

- Repeat this process with both the trombone and saxophone sections.
- Activity: Review of solo order and rehearsal of the entire piece
 - Time: 15-20 minutes
 - Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to review the solo order that was decided on in the previous rehearsal and to give students more repetitions of performing their completed arrangement in its entirety.
 - Sequence:
 - Review the order of soloists that was discussed in the previous rehearsal. Many students likely have written down the order themselves, but the ensemble likely needs to be reassured and any student who was absent for the previous rehearsal needs to be caught up.
 - Review the order of background passages that will take place during the solo section: alternating choruses of no backgrounds and with backgrounds. Trumpets start, followed by trombones and eventually saxophones.
 - Complete a full playthrough of the arrangement. Cue all soloists, backgrounds, and the transition to the head out.
 - Fix any mistakes or miscommunications that happened during the playthrough. Rehearse any sections that presented issues.
 - Complete a second playthrough of the arrangement. Give fewer cues during this run-through, only as necessary.

Reflection

This fourth lesson plan serves as a catch-all lesson plan to maintain and refine the arrangement in the rehearsals leading up to the concert. The previous three lesson plans ended up taking most, if not all, of the available two hours that are allotted to this ensemble. Once we were able to get to the point of having a complete product, we needed to return to rehearsing the charts that we had already programmed for the concert. I am sure that by this point, although they have had a tremendous amount of success, the students were ready for a change of pace. Once the arrangement was complete, the goal was to rehearse *Blues in the Closet* (1953) at least once every week, if not every single rehearsal (this ensemble meets twice a week). There were about three weeks in between the conclusion of this unit and the concert, and while that seems like plenty of time to iron out the kinks of the arrangement, scheduling issues led to a streak of inconsistency for this ensemble. Spring break, schools being shut down due to severe weather, scheduling conflicts due to concert band adjudication, and our regular attendance problems dramatically ate into our available rehearsal time.

Luckily, we were able to have consistent rehearsals with about a week and a half left before the concert. By the time of the first of these rehearsals, the students have not played *Blues in the Closet* (1953) in at least two weeks, with some students not having played it in three or four weeks. Needless to say, the rehearsal process was tedious with plenty of review. Fortunately, the amount of time rehearsing the tune decreased dramatically everyday leading up to the concert. Another issue came up during the dress rehearsal that a couple of the underclassmen who had volunteered to solo started to become nervous about improvising during the concert. Despite consistent encouragement and reassurance, these students started to show attitude and behavior problems during this rehearsal. For freshmen, these students sounded

excellent during their solos, and this sudden change of attitude certainly took me off guard. A stern conversation had to be had with the ensemble at large due to these issues, as the solo order was already set, and it was too late in the process to change everything around. Maybe I had just caught these students on a bad day, because when they showed up at the concert the next day, they left everything out on the stage and finished the performance of *Blues in the Closet* (1953) with a huge grin on their faces.

Although we faced some challenges during the previous few weeks, this experimental arrangement ended up being a tremendous success. I received plenty of compliments from parents about this arrangement. Some were impressed by how many students were able to solo convincingly, and others appreciated the collaborative nature of the arrangement. This unit was a risk to implement in such a young and inexperienced ensemble, but the students pulled through and had a unique, authentic jazz experience because of it. This unit taught me that non-traditional methods can be successfully implemented in an ensemble setting. Time management, specifically brevity and efficiency with time, was essential in making this experiment succeed. This particular group of students made the process as smooth as it could possibly be, so future versions of these lessons will need to be adjusted to the abilities of the current ensemble in terms of time, depth, and scope. All in all, I hope that this experience has left a lasting impression on these students, and I look forward to my next opportunity to implement and iterate on this concept.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

Over the past three summers, the Masters' Program in Music Education at K-State has given me the necessary resources and experiences to grow substantially as an educator, and in a way, completely transform my perspective on the profession of teaching music. This started as early on in the program as the Introduction to Graduate Studies class, which opened my eyes to the plethora of resources that are available to music educators but are either ignored or unbeknown to so many. This class did a great service to me in demystifying the effectiveness of academic journals in my growth and development as a teacher. Before my graduate studies, I viewed academic journals simply as means to an end to completing coursework. After completing this class, I now regularly read academic journals to either look for solutions to problems that I am facing in my classroom or to discover creative new ideas and methodologies. For example, an article in *Music Education Research* by Hickey, Ankney, Healy, and Gallo (2016) introduced me to the effectiveness of collective improvisation in building confidence in beginning improvisors. I recall participating in a collective improvisation activity once in an introductory course in improvisation during my undergraduate studies, but I had not considered its viability in a large jazz ensemble setting until I read this article. This discovery eventually led to collective improvisation being a prominent activity in the lesson plans detailed in this report.

The Introduction to Graduate Studies course allowed me to discover other resources that have proven to be invaluable in my professional development over these past three years. Examples include David Berger's (2018) *High School Jazz: A Director's Guide to a Better Band* and David Baker's (1988) *Jazz Pedagogy: A Comprehensive Method of Jazz Education for Teachers and Students*. Where the Baker text provides a more traditional and authentic take on jazz pedagogy, the Berger text serves as a comprehensive yet surprisingly succinct encyclopedia

to the everyday questions and challenges of a modern high school band director. These are only brief glimpses at a few of the resources that I discovered during this course, but the true value of Introduction to Graduate Studies was to learn how to find quality resources, how to effectively read and evaluate academic journals, and how to utilize tools such as Zotero in order to maximize the efficiency of my study time.

Just as the Introduction to Graduate studies demystified reading and implementing material found in academic journals, the Research in Music Education course demystified the process of conducting academic research. One of my biggest revelations during this class was regarding action research, specifically that without realizing it, we conduct action research in our classrooms every day. This dramatically made the thought of designing and conducting research more approachable. With only a bit of effort in asking ourselves questions and designing lesson plans to help answer those questions, action research has become one of the easiest ways for me to discover new and effective methods for my students. For example, the final project in the Research in Music Education course was to design our own research proposal, where I designed a set of improvisation warm-up activities for my high school jazz band to discover which activities were the most effective in building confidence in my beginning improvisors. After conducting this trial the following school year, many of the activities that showed success ended up being included in the improvisation lesson that is detailed in this report.

A class that has helped me comprehend my own growth as an educator during my graduate studies was the History and Philosophy of Music Education course. The process of contemplating my current beliefs as a music educator and writing my own philosophy has made me realize my development as a teacher, especially in comparing my current philosophy to the one that I wrote as a sophomore in my undergraduate studies. Aside from the obvious

inexperience and naivety of a sophomore music education student, my original philosophy much more closely mirrors the teaching styles and beliefs of my middle and high school music teachers. After only observing a small handful of local educators throughout my time as a student, it has been fascinating to see the different philosophies and approaches to music education that are entirely different from those that I have grown up with. Although a certain amount of influence from my earliest mentors still remains in my current philosophy, I now have adopted elements from my undergraduate professors, my professors/experiences in the Masters' program at K-State, and as my own experience as a music educator. It will be fascinating to rewrite my philosophy in ten years and compare it to my beliefs today.

Every course in the Music Education Masters' program has been instrumental to my development as a teacher in the past three years, but what has truly been invaluable are the relationships that I have developed with my colleagues in the program. Specifically, the group that started alongside me in the band track of the program have not only been an extraordinary support group during my graduate studies but will ultimately become lifelong resources and friends once we eventually graduate. During my time in the Masters' program, I have been able to grow my professional network to include music educators from all over the United States. Eye-opening would be an understatement to the level of insight that I have gotten by interacting and communicating with colleagues that are extremely diverse in backgrounds and teaching experiences. Comparing and contrasting the operations of different schools, districts, and states has given me a new perspective on my own teaching situation that I have desperately needed.

I do not believe that it is unreasonable to say that I have encountered dramatic personal and professional growth during my studies in the K-State Music Education Masters' program. The thread that has tied all of my coursework and experiences together has been to question

everything. Since the beginning of my graduate studies, I have begun to seek out new and alternative ways of accomplishing the same tasks that I have already been doing. I have become much more willing to take risks with new activities and approaches. I now have a renewed passion to become a leader in my school, community, and profession. I anticipate being in this profession for a long time to come, and I refuse to become stale and repetitive in my teaching methods. The day this happens will be the day that I become ineffective as a music educator. Although my time as a Masters' student is slowly drawing to a close, this is only the beginning in what will be a lifetime of learning, professional development, and self-growth.

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