BACK OF THE ORCHESTRA: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH ALTERNATIVE SEATING PRACTICES

by

Tammy Sue Yi

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Lori Custodero, Sponsor
Professor Randall Allsup

Approved by the Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Education

Date May 16, 2018

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Teachers College, Columbia University

2018
ABSTRACT

BACK OF THE ORCHESTRA: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH ALTERNATIVE SEATING PRACTICES

Tammy Sue Yi

In this study I investigate alternative seating practices (ASP) within a public school orchestra. Traditionally, orchestras have employed hierarchical seating structures through the use of chair challenges and seating auditions in efforts to motivate students to practice. However, minimal research is available on the outcomes of hierarchical seating structures within an orchestra. Acknowledging that teachers are at the forefront of our curricular decisions for the orchestra, I explored these challenges from an autobiographical point of view, also sharing the experiences of my students who participated in the orchestra program for three years during the time in which ASP was first integrated. Twenty-five student participants volunteered to partake in this study and parents and administrators were interviewed, to share their perspectives of ASP. Data collection includes; individual and group interviews, letters/essays/journals, and archival collection. Participants were 10th-grade orchestra students in a public school setting 20 miles outside of a major U.S. city. ASP demonstrates how it can act as a practice of social
justice within a community of practice. Students reported that ASP influenced their awareness of self and others and through their perceived experiences; they were able to transfer their awareness to the outside world. Students attributed their musical success to their unique musical-making experience formed through motivation, peer modeling and discovery of others’ musical capacity. This study asserts that using ASP in an orchestra can satisfy measures of musical performance and promote an equitable classroom in which students can form socially just principles to use as members of society.
DEDICATION

To my stand partners, the 10th-grade class
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With Gratitude:

God,
for always giving me guidance and challenging me to experience the world differently every day.

To my family,
for always praying for me during difficult times and failures. For believing in me and loving the person I am.

Lori,
I am forever thankful for all your care and support. Your patience in working with me. Your research, writing and your work with children is inspiring and every day I feel so privileged to be called your student.

Randall,
for being my first mentor, teacher and friend as I began my journey in New York City. You encouraged me to expand my creativity, opened my eyes and encouraged me to challenge social injustices.
Hal,
for your continuous support and guidance, especially during my times of doubt and for guiding me as I commenced my career in higher education.

Jeanne,
for inspiring me to love the violin again and attending my speech at the Grace Dodge Society Luncheon. I will never forget that.

To my boys, Matt, Mike and Brandon,
who always hear my voice and listen to my perspective, yet challenge me to think. The work we do together with our students is incredible.

Winze,
for being such a great friend, esteemed colleague and listener. I love our collaborations.

My friends at TC,
for sharing your unique perspectives and feedback throughout my dissertation journey.

Karen and Susan,
for always being my cheerleaders throughout my bicoastal journey as a music educator and your supportive friendship, especially during difficult times.
Dr. Felicia Mensah and Dr. Amra Sabic El-Rayess,

this dissertation could have not been completed without your expertise and experiences in social justice. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Audrey and Katy (TCCS First Children’s Orchestra of Harlem) and Dean Kelly Sawatsky (Manhattan School of Music Precollege Orchestras),

for believing in me and the work of ASP within the ensembles.

My friends in New York,

thank you for being so supportive, taking me out to dinners and always buying my first drink.

To all musicians, young and old,

thank you for your dedication to the arts and inspiring future generations of artists.

T. S. Y.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I – INTRODUCTION

1. The Practice of Random Seating: Challenges and Potential .......................... 1
   - Musical Success in a Diverse Society ..................................................... 1
2. History of the Orchestra in American Public Schools .................................. 2
3. Getting Ahead ............................................................................................. 4
4. Problem Statement ...................................................................................... 6
5. My Background .......................................................................................... 8
6. My Story ...................................................................................................... 9
7. Purpose of the Study .................................................................................. 13
8. Theoretical Framework .............................................................................. 13
9. Communities of Practice .......................................................................... 14
10. Practice of Social Justice ......................................................................... 16
11. Research Plan .......................................................................................... 19
    - Research Questions .............................................................................. 19
12. Overview of Methodology ....................................................................... 20

## II - LITERATURE REVIEW

13. Overview .................................................................................................. 21
14. Group Work .............................................................................................. 21
15. Classroom Seating .................................................................................. 26
16. Orchestra Seating .................................................................................... 30
17. Student Motivation .................................................................................. 35

## III – METHODOLOGY

18. Overview .................................................................................................. 39
19. Role of the Researcher ............................................................................. 39
20. Pilot Study ................................................................................................ 41
21. Participants and Setting .......................................................................... 43
22. Research Design ...................................................................................... 46
23. Data Collection ........................................................................................ 47
    - Online Community Discussion ......................................................... 47
    - Student Journals ............................................................................... 47
    - Teacher Journals and Evaluation ..................................................... 48
    - Administrator Interviews ............................................................... 48
    - Students Interviews ....................................................................... 48
    - Parent Interviews ............................................................................ 49
    - Essays/Letters ............................................................................... 49
    - Archival Data: Competition Results and Letters ............................. 49
    - Archival Data: Pilot Study ................................................................. 50
24. Analysis ..................................................................................................... 50
IV – THE ASP JOURNEY ............................................................................................... 52
  Hierarchical Seating Climate: The Years before ASP Integration .................... 52
    First Impressions ....................................................................................... 53
    Half Split ................................................................................................... 54
    Awareness of Injustices ............................................................................ 56
  Eighth-Grade Social Experiences ......................................................................... 58
    The Catalyst .............................................................................................. 60
    Awareness ................................................................................................. 63
    Diverse Friendships .................................................................................. 70
  Ninth-Grade Social Experiences ........................................................................... 75
    Breaking Barriers ...................................................................................... 76
    Building Community ................................................................................ 79
    Fostering Diversity .................................................................................... 82
  10th-Grade Social Experiences .......................................................................... 84
    Advocacy and Awareness ......................................................................... 84
    Social Equity ............................................................................................ 88
    Pride .......................................................................................................... 89
    Inside Awareness to “Outside Practice” ................................................... 91
  Summary ............................................................................................................... 94
  Eighth-Grade Musical Experiences ................................................................. 95
    Motivation in Seating Practices ................................................................ 95
    Musical Chairs .......................................................................................... 98
    Musical Awards ........................................................................................ 101
  Ninth-Grade Musical Experiences ...................................................................... 103
    Musical Discovery .................................................................................... 103
    Musical Partners ...................................................................................... 105
    Musical Rewards ....................................................................................... 106
  10th-Grade Musical Experiences ......................................................................... 109
    Fostering Musical Capacity .................................................................... 109
    Cohesiveness ........................................................................................... 112
    Musical Accomplishments ...................................................................... 113
  Summary ............................................................................................................. 115

V – DISCUSSION OF THE ASP JOURNEY ................................................................. 116
  Research Question 1: How do ASPs affect musical capacity for both the individual and the orchestra? ........................................................................ 117
  Research Question 2: How do Alternative Seating Practices (ASPs) influence social relationships and community awareness for students participating in an orchestra? .................................................. 121
  Research Question 3: How has the experience changed over the course of 3 years? ................................................................. 123
  Summary ......................................................................................................... 125

VI – SUMMARY .............................................................................................................. 127
  Key Findings ..................................................................................................... 127
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Demographics of Students in the Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research Questions and Response Media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure | Page
-------|-------
1  Traditional European seating. | 42
2  Data collection roadmap | 50
3  Codes for data analysis. | 51
4  Timeline summary | 124
I – INTRODUCTION

The Practice of Random Seating: Challenges and Potential

Musical Success in a Diverse Society

“Are you crazy?” This is the first response I often get from orchestra teachers who hear that I randomize my seating for concerts and competitions. This practice has revolutionized my teaching, empowered my students, and after many challenges and obstacles, has led to unexpected success in the various dimensions of the social and musical experience for my orchestra students. In fact, today, there is no enforced student hierarchy nor is there permanently assigned seating in my ensembles. This dissertation will examine the narrative of a particular set of students and their support communities, and will present qualitative data as well as a body of research into pedagogy and practice around seating schemes. Some have expressed skepticism about this teaching practice, but I believe many orchestra teachers can relate to the motivations behind my pedagogical decisions, and I will present a case that addresses the concerns of many music educators around equitable treatment, the social health of ensembles, the great potential in diverse classrooms, and issues of proficiency. To understand how we got to this point in the development of music education pedagogy, it is necessary to briefly survey the history of the profession.
History of the Orchestra in American Public Schools

Orchestras, bands and choirs in school settings have evolved throughout American history and much of the early influence came from the iterations of military, professional, town, jazz bands, church choirs, and choral societies (Humphreys, 2012, p. 786). The adoption of string education in American schools began with singing schoolmasters who also taught musical instruments in the 1850s (Gokturk, 2009). These early developments in string education began with the interest in private lesson instruction, but were still not a standard part of school curricula until after the Civil War.

The first introduction of string education in public schools was adopted in the Midwestern and Northwestern sections of America, and began in school orchestra programs as extracurricular activities. In 1898, a high school in Richmond, Indiana made the orchestra part of their regular school curriculum. In 1911, the assistant director of music at Boston Public Schools, Albert Mitchell established the first string education program in a school district in America. Inspired by European methodology in string education, Albert Mitchell began to write his own method books and that influenced other schools throughout America to adopt string education as part of the regular school day curriculum (Gokturk, 2009).

In the 1920s, state and national orchestra competitions began to develop. School districts became increasingly involved in string education and that led to the creation of music organizations, such as American String Teachers Association (ASTA), for string educators. After the Depression of the 1930s and increasing economic disparity in the 1960s, the, “United States Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 to strengthen the education of culturally disadvantage children in the
cities” (Gokturk, 2009, p. 700). The 1970s and 80s saw a decline of string education in public schools. Due to the rise of the middle class and upper class, string education was eventually reestablished in schools again in the 1990s; however, not all public schools were able to adopt string education. The instability of music education in schools is still very vulnerable to economic conditions. This limits string education available for certain school districts and provides access to string education for communities of affluence. Although the motivations behind the creation of string education in schools in Europe and America began with free tuition and participation for students, a systemic problem has evolved within the social constructs of students participating in string orchestras.

The orchestra is ideally a cohesive community made up of a diverse group of skilled musicians. They contribute their performance expertise and are led by the conductor who influences musical direction, but the question is whether the orchestra has evolved along with the idea of a diverse and more equitable society. In today’s society, many organizations value teamwork and expect quality performance outcomes. These teams often bring together different cohorts and include members at varying positions of power, but orchestras remain more rigidly hierarchical. This is reflected in its seating assignments, which are determined by traditional methods of selection. The resulting seating chart shapes the ensemble’s hierarchy and salary distribution. Some amateur orchestras model professional seating practices and encourage chair challenges or seating auditions in the hopes of increasing the overall proficiency. Blanchard and Acree (2007), for instance, argue that, “preparations for auditions, seating tests, and concerts are great motivators because they encourage serious practice” (Blanchard & Acree, 2007, p. 92). This may be justifiable in strictly competitive settings, but public schools have a more
democratic mandate, and they prepare young people for a range of experiences in society, and thus such practices have to be questioned.

**Getting Ahead**

“Education in the United States is inextricably tied up with the idea of getting ahead” (Nygreen, 2013, p. 3). This mentality and system creates a hierarchy in school settings, and further stratifies the social environment within the school. It can be argued that the intentions behind legislation such as “No Child Left Behind Act” are to promote equitable achievement levels for students and to increase school accountability. However, there are some negative consequences of this legislation, such as teachers being rewarded for their students’ success on state testing scores, which can only harm the practice and create competition among teachers and among students (Dee & Jacob, 2010, p. 149). Moreover the demands of the legislation create pressure for schools and with limits to funding, schools become vulnerable and left with the decision on how to maintain their programs. The result then becomes music programs being cut to help satisfy the mandated requirements for the state and legislation.

In spite of the fact that the NCLB Act recognizes and looks for ways to close the achievement gap, it does not address the systemic barriers that students confront issues with poverty and oppression. NCLB does not take differences in community, diversity and multiculturalism into account (Isaac, 2015). The issue with legislation aimed at increasing student achievement levels in the public school systems is the rise of negative competition, hierarchy and ultimately humiliation. I am not saying that competition and hierarchy in schools began with the NCLB but there are many policy demands in education that create fear for teachers and students in public schools. These include test
preparations for new standardized exams, state-mandated, and district-mandated tests. This enormous amount of pressure and meeting demands makes teachers vulnerable and fear losing their jobs, and focus primarily on getting students to meet the educational requirements. This mindset loses focus on student’s development as human beings and the social experiences that help them learn about each other, something that is a great advantage of music ensembles.

Good education means getting ahead in life (Baron, Cobb-Clark, & Erkal, 2008, p. 10). Along with the competition brought on by NCLB, what is currently an issue in our education system today is the competition created by the culture of parent/guardian dependency. This idea of how parents and guardians invest in their child’s academic progress creates a competition among students in various settings. This myth of meritocracy encourages parents from the middle or upper class to believe that their children will have equal economic opportunities and will advance further than their parents (Adams, Hopkins, & Shlasko, 2016, p. 218). Not only is this an issue in academic settings, parents have also strategically planned the choice of sport and musical instrument to decide which might look most distinctive on their child’s resume (Heffernan, 2014). Further on that notion, the issue then becomes competition in extra-curricular activities such as the orchestras. More money means access to private lessons, which brings more opportunities to get ahead in the performance ensemble such as sitting first chair of the orchestra. However, if a child is not sitting first chair in their school orchestra, some parents over personalize the decision and place the blame on the decision maker (White & Tieghem, 2015, p. 161). These are some of the issues that surround the
notion of hierarchy in a public school system and among those challenges; the teachers and students are affected by these practices where competition becomes the priority.

Ultimately, an unhealthy form of competition contradicts the principles and ideology of the public school system, which ought to promote equity, diversity and inclusion. “This winner-take-all sensibility is at one with today’s capitalist meritocracy” (Allsup, 2016 p. 39). Is it fair that a music student who qualifies for free or reduced price meals at their public school be challenged by a student who has the financial support for private lessons? Extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs and musical ensembles are examples of active social contexts that can provide students with a wealth of opportunities for growth and experience; however, within these settings, are all students being appropriately taught and provided with equal opportunities?

**Problem Statement**

Given the history of string education in America, the culture of competition and the lack of equity in public schools, we might begin to look for solutions in the current teaching practices in hierarchical seating structures for the public school orchestra programs. The fundamental issue in the public school orchestras is a ranking system that was established to promote student musicians’ motivation to practice. Competition among instrumentalists, such as chair challenges and seating auditions, is encouraged in hopes of increasing the ensemble’s capabilities and in turn refining orchestral performances. The mechanism of the chair challenges is for students to “move up” in his section by performing the challenged music better than the person challenged (Steiner, 2016). This practice, which is currently used in traditional orchestras, can benefit specific groups while creating a disadvantage for others. It potentially becomes a hidden practice
that tends to favor the culturally privileged while supporting a hierarchical system that proves unfair and unjust for certain students that hail from diverse socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. This apparent meritocracy in fact perpetuates divisions and does not adequately expand the fund of knowledge, skills, and insights across the group. This uneven playing field, built upon a myth of meritocracy, then exacerbates class inequity.

An orchestra works as an organization—almost as a cohesive community—in its efforts to create meaningful musical experiences. It is a, “microcosm of society” (Cheah & Barenboim, 2009, p. 1). What needs to be addressed is the question of teaching the orchestra with equity without diminishing the quality of the music. Is it possible to teach students to be full participants in society but also acquire musical skills? Specifically, how can experiences in alternative seating practices develop students socially while still satisfying traditional measures of musical performance? The social element to students participating in an orchestra in a public school is crucial. Stewart (1944) says,

We cannot take student’s social life for granted. Through the orchestra rehearsals and performances the student continually meets new people and forms deep-rooted friendships that affect his outlook on life. This is a direct character-building influence. (p. 31)

This emphasis on the social benefits of the ensemble prompts us to look for ways to enhance these effects. Alternative Seating Practices is one of these ways, and its effect on social well-being will be explored here. In addition, there is evidence that practices such as these extend to a broader civic education. Although music learning can be deepened through attention to social justice, orchestral pedagogy practices in most cases remain traditional. This is not to say that public school orchestra teachers intentionally teach
injustice, but prioritizing of competition over group learning within the ensemble could be counterproductive.

**My Background**

My early teaching experiences as an orchestra teacher included learning how to create orchestra programs for elementary schools that did not have a music program. I gained valuable experience on how to lead music programs and create a methodology of ensemble performance guided by my experiences as a professional musician. The military had taught me the importance of teamwork and I have been able to transfer my knowledge and skills to the performance classroom. My lessons have encouraged student motivation through peer modeling, mentorship and teamwork all aimed towards developing the orchestra’s quality performance. My children’s orchestras have won competitions and awards, and have been recognized internationally for their musical achievements. I have been commended and recognized for my teacher effectiveness. As I transitioned to different schools that did not have music programs in California and in New York, I have carried with me the tools and the ideas I have developed from past teaching experiences and have used them to create orchestra programs in various settings. It was when I began working in a public school that had a string orchestra program for over 20 years that I found myself in a situation that I did not understand. This was the first time that I was working in a school that already had a music program in place and it was from that experience that I discovered hierarchy seating.

As a public school orchestra teacher, I am faced with many challenges in the area of orchestra seating. I am sure many orchestra teachers can relate to this extraordinary challenge. Some situations may include parent complaints, competitions, teacher
evaluations, and even politics. I spent most of my nights responding to parent emails, defending my teaching practice and educating parents on what is fair and educational for their child. I learned very quickly that there is a lack of understanding of what it means to be in an orchestra and what is most important for the children to learn. The importance of true sensitivity to each other, the respect for diverse unique aesthetic identities, working as a team, building a community before building a unique sound, using skills and talent not only for solos and self-improvement, but in the service of stand partners and thus making knowledge communal – these are priorities of a music classroom that educates the whole person. I went through this experience when I began teaching at a middle school in New York. Here is my story

**My Story**

On the first day of school, I was excited to meet all my students. When the bell rang, they scrambled into my classroom with all their instruments banging on the doors loudly as they walked in. They were excited to meet the new teacher, and were probably as nervous as I was. I wasn’t sure if they were going to like me. These thoughts ran through my head as I observed the students walking in. I stood in front of my conductor's stand watching them come in one by one and they started to sit in the orchestra chairs that I had set up in a horseshoe-shaped setup. They started to move the chairs around so that they were comfortable positioning their bodies as if they were ready to play their instruments. They took their instruments out of the cases and sat quietly, waiting for instructions. I looked up and saw twenty eighth graders looking nervously into my eyes. As I looked around the classroom, I noticed very quickly that there was something odd
about where the students were sitting. Those who happened to be from Haiti were all sitting in the back of the orchestra.

This was the first time I realized that there was a common expectation embedded in the students’ minds about who gets to sit in the front of the orchestra. The students who sat close to me were very motivated to participate, very attentive and focused on my instruction. It was obvious that they took private lessons because they understood how to shift, use vibrato and knew where to place their bows. The students in the back acted as if they were participating but I couldn’t fully see or hear them play to make a full assessment of their ability so I walked behind the orchestra only to discover they lacked string performance skills and their body language seemed to communicate a lack of confidence. After seeing that there was a clear difference between the front and the back of the orchestra, I decided to scramble the seating at every rehearsal and rotate chairs.

I felt this was an important strings teaching approach to help fine-tune the ability of the orchestra so that the students would learn to develop technique through peer modeling while creating musical experiences together. It was going to be a learning curve for them and for me as their teacher, because students needed to adjust their playing ability with the person they sat next to that day and I had to trust that the outcomes would be successful. Little did I know that the sound was going to be fuller and much more alive as a result. From my observation, every one of those students was contributing a diverse skill set, while blending sound together which led them to create their own unique orchestra sound. After many rehearsals and practicing the seating rotation on a daily basis, all the students were performing really well. The rotation helped not just the orchestra's ability, but it also created new friendships.
In December, we had our first concert together. The students were excited, dressed professionally and they knew that their orchestra sounded really great. They were very confident about their performance and I was excited for them. Since we had practiced seating rotations and scrambled seating assignments already, I felt it was best to use a randomizer app on my phone to determine the seating assignment for the concert. This was going to be a big challenge for them and for me. At this point, a random seating might completely change the sound of the orchestra but I trusted my practice. What was more important to me was that the seating assignment at the concert is fair and the focus should be on the sound of the orchestra instead of where they were sitting. After the performance, the students received a standing ovation. Teachers, parents, and administrators were completely shocked to see such a diverse group of students perform at such a high skill level, creating beautiful music. After receiving many praises from the audience, I felt great walking back to my car. My students had done a great job, and I knew that the rotation and scrambled seating had worked. I felt a sense of accomplishment and was so happy to be their teacher. It felt amazing. But as I neared my car, I saw a few parents standing nearby ready to approach me. It was obvious that they were upset and I knew immediately something was wrong. I rushed back to the auditorium and waited for them to leave.

The next day, I opened my email and received countless messages from parents who were upset by the concert seating. They wanted me to explain how I determined the seating and demanded I implement, “chair challenges” or seating auditions. Although I tried to explain that the seating was scrambled and it was the best pedagogical approach for this orchestra, they wanted me to create a rubric system or an assessment that would
allow their child to sit first chair. After many emails and parent-teacher conferences and also having a newspaper article appear that misrepresented my orchestra rotation, these parents did whatever it took to argue with me on a daily basis. I was confused and also hurt. What had I done wrong? I thought I was being fair.

Since we’ve been practicing the rotation in class daily, the students seemed to care less about where they sat because they witnessed how the new seating practices worked for them and made the orchestra sound amazing. They’d also discovered something new by sitting with someone different every day. When we competed at a local competition, the orchestra won first place. I used the same exact approach by randomizing their seating. Orchestra teachers thought that was an insane idea, and the adjudicators called me brave, but I took the risk for my own students and I also wanted to prove to them and to myself that a cohesive community that is equitable can succeed.

My journey continued the following year when I became the high school orchestra teacher. I was excited for this change and the opportunity to continue the seating rotation and scrambled seating practices with the high school ensembles. The ninth graders, who had been the eighth-grade students I’d taught the year before, were excited to have me as a teacher again and decided to all enroll into one of the two ensembles I was conducting; Chamber Orchestra and String Orchestra. The Chamber Orchestra, an auditioned ensemble, was a smaller group of ninth through 12th graders and performed at a high level of performance while the String Orchestra, a non-auditioned ensemble, that also included ninth through 12th graders, was the largest ensemble at the high school. I felt resistance from some of the students when the seating methods were first introduced, but as they continued to practice the rotation, they soon realized the
seating was not just providing students an equal chance to sit in the front of the orchestra; they were practicing social justice.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of students who have participated in alternative seating practices (ASP), such as seating rotation, randomized seating or scrambled seating, in a public school string orchestra program. This research examined the social and musical experiences of 10th-grade orchestra students when they first experienced ASP as eighth graders and continued the practice in ninth and 10th grade.

**Theoretical Framework**

Various practices and theories have been discussed as ways to address the imbalances in the orchestra. Campbell (2018) has defined music education as, “its own community of practice” (p. 136), a key term in the literature on education and social justice. The theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) supports how groups can work together through their voluntary participation and efforts to achieve a common goal. ASP is a concrete practice that empowers the CoP and brings about measurable changes in relationships and individual feelings about self-worth, direction, and motivation. Vaugeois’ (2009) theory of the practice of social justice within music education speaks to how we as educators should reconstruct the music classroom with the principles of equity by finding ways for students to develop an awareness of social justice in the classroom and that the awareness is then transferred to the outside world. This research includes two supportive theories on the social and musical aspects of students participating in an
orchestra. The theory of the practice of social justice and the musical understanding of how orchestras work together in collaborative efforts through communities of practice (CoP) influenced by ASP for the orchestra.

**Communities of Practice**

Wenger and Trayner’s (2015) social learning theory, which involves Communities of Practice, or CoP, provides a rich context within which to understand the role of groups and small communities. According to Wenger and Trayner, “communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (p. 1). In the context of music ensembles, a community of practice is enacted through the shared music-making and musical interests that occur in a community. This theory correlates with students participating in the performance classroom. The orchestra works as an example of CoP in that the ensemble meets regularly to work on their musical development in preparation for a performance. Wenger-Trayner (2015) developed three characteristics that are crucial in part of the development of a community and I have defined them in relation to ASP, which I will outline in the following passages.

1. The domain is defined by a shared interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence. They value their collective competence and learn from each other, even though few people outside the group may value or even recognize their expertise.

2. The community: In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other; they care about their standing with each other.

3. The practice: Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice. This takes time and
sustained interaction. The development of a shared practice may be more or less self-conscious. In the course of all these conversations, they have developed a set of stories and cases that have become a shared repertoire for their practice. (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2)

In the orchestra, the performance acts as the, “domain,” in which students share the same interest and commitment to the participation of an outstanding musical performance. There is an unspoken positive that comes from the mutual feeling of satisfaction after a high level performance (Gaunt & Dobson, 2014). Students exercise this commitment to the domain during rehearsals that occur both in community and individually. It is through this mutual engagement that students are able to increase individual levels of expertise within the orchestra. The orchestra has a shared sense of purpose in performing orchestral repertoire and a mutual understanding of the interdependence between musicians, creating a dynamic entity on the stage. Through participation in the ensemble, students develop a “community” that is continually learning and establishing trust in oneself and one’s colleagues (Gaunt & Dobson, 2014). ASP naturally enforces peer modeling by fostering mentorships amongst students, expanding their social and musical skills through group learning. It is through the exchange of knowledge in these mentorships that the development of the collective orchestra and individual student occur. The, “practice” is the approach in which the students interact with one another. This approach is based on a mutual respect and acceptance for each other’s varied perspectives, strengths, and weaknesses; creating an environment that is socially just to all students in the ensemble. ASP encourages orchestra students to share and embrace their diversity, which creates a unique music making experiences for the individual and ensemble. This practice further strengthens the commitment to the domain.
Practice of Social Justice

This research is grounded in my deeply held convictions of the practice of social justice in music education. “There is no teaching for social justice without an awareness of the inequities that surround us, and a sense of indignation or even outrage at the ‘normal’ state of affairs” (Allsup & Shieh, 2012, p. 48). Social justice is about reestablishing and reconstructing society in a manner of conforming to the principles of equity, inclusion and recognition by eliminating the injustices that caused hierarchy (Bell, 2016). The system of hierarchy creates various constructs of power, social, economic advantage, and institutional and cultural validity to social groups.

Vaugeois (2009) has brought social theory into debates about educational practices. In her work, she begins with the recognition of the forms of social oppression not only in the obvious legalistic forms we have become familiar with in the public sphere, but also those in the workings of discourse, “inside and outside music education,” which, in effect, “normalize oppressive social relations” (p. 3). Public schools permit substantial economic disparities among students and families, creating divisions between the rich and the poor (Alexander & Salmon, 2007). Therefore, Vaugeois (2009) suggests that we should investigate the reasons for injustice and diminish the impacts of race, class and sexual orientation and how they impose chains of importance inside our classroom; and to investigate how we may utilize the new information to develop a socially empowering pedagogy (p. 3).

With regard to the music classroom, Vaugeois (2009) believes that students should develop a, “critical awareness of issues in social justice and explore different possibilities for living and working together with others in and through music education”
Students can begin to understand social justice through the music making experiences of each individual. Vaugeois argues that music is created for one’s pleasure; therefore, when music making occurs in the cohesive communities, such as in orchestras, it should be encouraged with respect towards the musical experiences for each individual. A student’s prior experiences shape their music making, how they engage with music and their interpretations (Palmer, 2017, p. 27), either through the collaborative effort of performance or music making experiences together. This understanding of diverse musical experiences demonstrates how social justice is represented in the music classroom. This is an anti-hierarchical principle, and music classes can offer different ways for students to develop a further understanding of an individual’s musical differences but also provide them with the opportunity to practice equity in the classroom and bring their awareness of each other into the outside world.

What is educationally good for students has to be rooted in their interests, strengths and their needs, and embedded in the socially desired practices (Dewey, 1956). Orchestra performance serves as the “domain” that provides students a chance to take part in more democratic forms of music learning and thus might help develop social assets equitably over other student populations. It may result in extensive social inclusion in music and can lead to wider social change (Wright, 2010b, p. 241). The music ensemble works as a community and although music curriculum content is a valuable tool in discovering social justice, practicing social justice in the music classroom creates a safe space for students to discover music together and to interact socially from a purposeful, musical platform. The interpersonal bonds that develop out of the shared
musical events are compelling results of engagements with music (Vaugeois, 2009, p. 15), and can create change for society in the future.

What are the ways that students can embody social justice in the performance classroom, while making connections to music and still contribute to the needs of society? “Our bodily encounters with the physical environment shape and reshape our understanding of the world” (Johnson, 2017, p. 1). The social justice environment allows students to meet different people and learn about their differences, therefore, Vaugeois’s social commitment of concrete practices such as, “different spaces” that bring results resonates so well with me.

If public school education is to provide learning opportunities and experiences for all students in attendance, then social justice education must be practiced while eliminating that hierarchy – in all programs and spaces. By understanding the legacy behind the traditional practices, we can educate ourselves about social justice in music. We as music educators have learned that music is powerful and influential to our student’s lives; as our country has become more economically, musically and culturally diverse, it is important for us teachers to be socially aware of our own practices in the spaces we teach to create music. Teachers who teach social justice can begin to reconstruct a viable and sensitive pedagogy by attending to the importance of students’ voices, their different perspectives, and emphasize the importance of reflective practice (Campbell, 2018, p. 75).

Thus, Alternative Seating Practice is a way of addressing pressing modern social challenges. The orchestra empowered by ASP works as an example of CoP and with the combination of social justice practice for the ensemble, the integration of ASP can be
influential. Both of these concepts work well in this research study, as they provide a lens to student experiences participating in an orchestra program in a diverse public school.

Social justice as a theory supports education as equitable means of practice, and essentially the practice is implemented in the orchestra, in which CoP is the orchestra that works together as a team.

**Research Plan**

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided this research study:

1. How does ASP affect musical capacity for both the individual and the orchestra?
   a. What are the students’ perspectives?
   b. What are the teachers’ perspectives?
   c. What are the parents’ and administrators’ perspectives?

2. How does ASP influence social relationships and community awareness for students participating in an orchestra?
   a. What are the students’ perspectives?
   b. What are the teachers’ perspectives?
   c. What are the parents’ and administrators’ perspectives?

3. How does this change over time?
   a. What are the students’ perspectives?
   b. What are the teachers’ perspectives?
   c. What are the parents’ and administrators’ perspectives?
Overview of Methodology

I conducted my research by using a qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews with students, parents and administrators to learn about their past and present experiences and what they remember during the phases of implementation of ASP. Student participants journaled their experiences in ASP, and shared their experiences in orchestra class in a discussion online. As the teacher-observer, I documented my experiences in a teacher journal and collected additional resources such as artifacts from student past letters, emails and competition results from when I was their teacher in eighth grade, and transferred to the high school the following year.
II - LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Related literature on orchestra seating arrangements, classroom seating practices, and group work and student motivation is discussed in this literature review.

Group Work

In this section, I will explore the literature on the dynamics of peer grouping with adolescents, and in orchestras. Dobson and Gaunt (2013) investigated professional orchestra musicians’ experiences in a major London orchestra. They conducted semi-structured interviews pertaining to the skills and qualities that were essential for a musician working in an orchestra.

The three most frequently cited of these skills and qualities - musical ‘radar’, interpersonal and social skills, and working within a team - together indicate an importance of communication, responsiveness and adaptability within orchestral work. (p. 29)

Dobson and Gaunt’s study is an essential examination of group work and teamwork collaboration in music ensembles. The authors insist on, “the importance of effective social interaction between colleagues outside of the strict confines of rehearsal and performance,” and argue that, “these interactions can influence musical communication.” In addition, they found that when, “colleagues spend the vast majority of their working hours actively engaged in collaborative activity,” there was enhancement in, “overall musical product” (p. 43).

Further research is presented by another study by Gaunt and Dobson (2014), which examines how professional musicians in the U.K. Symphony Orchestras perceive
themselves and their interactions as Communities of Practice (CoP). Twenty LSO players were interviewed for the study and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Gaunt and Dobson coded major themes that support CoP and they were: (a) shared purpose and mutual engagement, (b) characteristics of the community as a learning environment, (c) challenges in working together, and (d) the relationship between individual and collective development. The study produced a set of principles:

1. A clear shared purpose among the musicians, and mutual engagement as a collective that was highly motivating and enabled them to perform at their best. Engagement included an element of risk taking that was perceived by some to be critical to the artistic outcomes.

2. The orchestras as a learning environment that provided a powerful foundation for the ongoing search for higher artistic achievement; within this environment both peer support and peer pressure impacted individuals.

3. Tension between individual and collective development. Respondent perceived that navigating their individual development alongside development through the orchestra collective was important. Alongside opportunities for career progression within the orchestra, some perceived that sustained engagement in the orchestra was deepened by opportunities to move in and out of the orchestra in order to continue developing artistically or personally. Where musicians were able to take such opportunities, porosity in the CoP increased. (Gaunt & Dobson, 2014, p. 305)

Gaunt and Dobson say that compelling symphony playing is subordinate to collaboration and community, which demand fine-tuned coordination between musicians, and between musicians and the conductor. This also includes responsiveness in the moment through the process of collaboration, where indirect changes musicians make in the development of sound, tempo and phrasing help them accomplish peak performance (p. 299). Gaunt and Dobson’s study reveal professional musicians’ perspectives on what is most important for the orchestra.
I began to explore what community and collaboration brings to an orchestra and discovered that cooperative learning can be a way for orchestra musicians to acquire skills through peer learning. This can be applied to a pedagogy of orchestral teaching at the middle school and high school levels. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2014) define cooperative learning as, “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning” (p. 3). Johnson et al. confirm that cooperative learning encourages interpersonal skills, motivation, empathy, self-esteem, and academic achievement while creating lasting personal relationships. The authors of the study build upon the social interdependence theory presented by Kurt Koffka from the Gestalt school of psychology:

1. The essence of a group is the interdependence among members (created by common goals) which results in the group being a, “dynamic whole” so that a change in the state of any member or subgroup changes the state of any other member or subgroup.

2. An intrinsic state of tension within group members motivates movement toward the accomplishment of the desired common goals. (p. 4)

Social Interdependence theory promotes teamwork but also can be an effective practice for young adolescents participating in an orchestra: “In cooperative situations, collaborators actions tend to substitute for each other, collaborators invest positive emotions in each other, and collaborators are open to being influenced by each other” (p. 4). Johnson et al. further explain the benefits of cooperation work. They define cooperation work as a combination of five essential elements:

1. Positive interdependence – The perception that you are linked with others in a way so that you cannot succeed unless they do and that groupmates’ work benefits you and your work benefits them.

2. Individual accountability – Performance of each individual student is assessed and the results given back to the group and the individual.
3. Promotive interaction – Students promote each other’s success by helping, assisting, supporting, encouraging, and praising each other’s efforts to learn.

4. Appropriation use of social skills – Contributing to the success of a cooperative effort requires interpersonal and small group skills.

5. Group processing – the examination of the process members are using to maximize their own and each other’s learning so that ways to improve the process may be identified. (pp. 5-6)

Ryan (2001) investigates how peer groups influence the achievement-related results in young adolescents. The participants in this study were seventh graders from a diverse middle school in an urban setting. Three hundred and thirty-one students participated in fall term and 321 participated in the spring. Data collection was conducted through student surveys in each term. The conclusions of the study reveal that, “peer group context affects the development of young adolescents’ achievement beliefs and behaviors” (p. 1145). Furthermore, “high achievers tended to belong to a peer group with other high achievers, and low achievers tended to belong to a peer group with other low achievers” (p. 1146). The results of Ryan’s study show that peer groups had influenced students and separated themselves based on the groups they identified with motivationally. I began to explore how peers influence student learning and discovered peer tutoring in orchestra programs. Webb (2012) argues for social and cognitive advantages in peer tutoring. For example, Webb says, “peer tutoring is more effective over the long term rather than shorter periods, something that consistent private lessons can provide.” Cognitive benefits for the peer tutor include, “reorganization of thinking,” and this is a beneficial part of, “ones’ self-assessment.” Not only does the peer tutor develop self-esteem and self-confidence, especially if the tutor is a young student, the peer tutor also develops a, “sense of responsibility for others’ learning.” In an expansion
of a 2012 study, Webb (2015) conducted a case study that investigated the choices, thought process and the development of string players as peer tutors. The participants in the study were three high school string orchestra musicians who taught three 30-minute lessons to a younger peer. Webb discovered three important elements:

1. The peer tutors used direct verbal instruction, nonverbal modeling and demonstration, unison modeling, and combinations of techniques.

2. They communicated concepts in the role of a teacher

3. Student participants enjoyed teaching because it was a learning experience.

Students’ perceptions of their roles as tutors were not those of a teacher, professional or adult. Instead, they felt that the role was more like a “peer” and was a less serious form of instruction than a teacher.

In a study conducted by Schmidt (2005), 300 band students from four different school districts in grades 7-12 were surveyed on a 5-point Likert scale. The results of his study indicated that students, “learned the most or did their best when working with other students” (p. 144). Schmidt also says that, “students may respond best to the intrinsic or cooperative aspects of instrumental music, rather than its extrinsic or competitive aspects.” Hruska (2011) supports Schmidt’s study and says that ensembles require each member of the ensemble to actively work through musical mistakes and challenges to achieve the final product of a fine performance. Success is realized through the overall effort of the group, with an understanding that increased effort from individuals will raise the overall musical ability and talent of the ensembles. (p. 7)

Hruska also states that, “students often connect with their peers in ways teachers cannot. Adolescents spend many hours each day with each other in school and often find understanding, support, and encouragement from those who share similar interests.
Hruska’s study relates to Webb’s peer tutoring philosophy and how students learn through peer motivation. Hruska also asserts,

Students become more invested and involved in cooperative learning situations through the interpersonal communication of working with others. In cooperative learning, the learning process is shared, and all involved learn from the knowledge and experiences other group members bring to the table with them. (p. 7)

This section of the literature review presents studies that demonstrate the effects of peer groups and peer learning. I have explored music ensembles and how peer groups influence student learning and the outer contexts of how adolescents form relationships with others.

**Classroom Seating**

There is little research on seating structures for the orchestra; however, in recent studies, the practice of classroom seating in academic classes provides a lens into student achievement levels, social learning and behaviors. Ngware, Ciera, Musyoka and Oketch (2013) examined the outcomes of classroom seating in primary schools in Kenya, a study that has important repercussions for ASP. The results of their research reveal that students who sit in the front had higher learning gains between 5 percent and 27 percent compared to seating in other areas that are more distant from the chalkboard (p. 705). The impact upon student achievement levels of seating patterns is also presented in Perkins and Wieman (2005). At the beginning of the semester, Perkins and Wieman randomly selected students attending a physics course. Their study revealed that seat location during the first half of the semester had a discernible effect on student’s success in the course. Students sitting in the back of the room for the beginning half of the term were about six times as likely to get an F as students who begun in the front of the room (p. 2).
To further understand achievement and seating, I began to explore comfort seating, where students choose their seat location. Benedict and Hoag (2004) investigated if seating preferences made by students relate to success in the classroom. They studied two different economics classes at Bowling Green State, which consisted of an average of 150 students. They discovered that the students who sit in the back seats had a strong association with lower grades, poor performance and lack of motivation. The authors suggest that, “forcing students further forward in the room tends to override the negative effect of a back preference,” and, “seat location may be reflective of underlying individual characteristics, such as motivation to succeed” (p. 228). Benedict and Hoag’s outcomes implied that the teacher should force students towards the front in order to increase their motivation in the classroom.

I began to explore student engagement in classroom settings and became increasingly interested in how students participated in various seating structures. Parker, Hoopes, and Eggett (2011) conducted a study in a nutritional biochemistry class that measured student engagement levels in alternating and non-alternating seats in a classroom. This class was held twice a week with 51 student participants. There were two study groups; the move group and the stay group. All students were randomly selected and placed in one of the groups. The move group students would move every class, and the stay group would stay in their location. The data revealed that students who were part of the move group showed an increase in participation with no marked difference whether they sat in front or the back. For the stay group, students who sat in the front made significantly more comments than students who sat in the back. This study revealed
that alternating seating in a classroom is effective in student engagement and academic achievement.

In a similar study that investigates the outcomes between a focus group and a move group for seating in a middle school classroom, Szparagowski (2014) created a, “student seating methodology” to measure if strategically placing students in a classroom has an impact on academic performance. Szparagowski assessed this strategy with two classes, one class of 20 and another class of 23 student participants. Both classes were eighth-grade math classes and the study was conducted during a geometry unit that lasted seven weeks. For the class of 20 students, students were ranked in a hierarchy, based on their score on an exam and then placed in alternating seats. For example, students who were placed in the front were ranked 6-10 and were sitting with students who were ranked 16-20. In the second row, students who ranked 1-5 were alternated with students who were 11-15. For the eighth-grade math class of 23 students, students were randomized with a computer software program. The results of the study revealed that the class that was in randomized seating performed an average of 10.8% better than the class that had structured seating.

Burda and Brook measured the effects of student achievement motivation in freshman college students. Their study revealed that students who sit towards the front third of the classroom have a higher motivation and achievement score compared to students sitting in the back two-thirds of the classroom. Marshall and Losonczy-Marshall (2010) collected data from 70 classes with 1,829 students over 15 years. The course that was examined was an Introduction to Financial Accounting and Introduction to Managerial Accounting. Marshall and Losonczy-Marshall studied student attendance
behavior and performance level between students sitting in the center of the lecture room versus students who sat along the perimeter of the room. The authors state that students sitting in the, “central parts of the class had higher percentage grades and higher percentage attendance.” Marshall and Losonczy-Marshall suggest that, “seat location itself may influence students’ attitudes” as well as, “students’ beliefs about the subject matter” (p. 575).

Juhary (2012) studied the outcomes of students’ acceptance of and perceptions about their seating in an English for Oral Communication class. Five students were selected to partake in the pilot study and each of the participants had to respond to a questionnaire about seating. From the data collected, the researcher opines that,

Students will be afraid of sitting in front because they are not confident to answer questions or maybe they are not comfortable because they are so near the instructor. Some other students will take the advantage to ask more questions and to focus on their learning. (p. 14)

On the contrary, Juhary’s study also revealed that the students in the back, “will take the surrounding environment as a support to study better knowing that the friends seated next to them are able to share knowledge” (p. 14). This may be the case in school settings that allow comfort seating for the students in the classroom. It applies well to orchestra classrooms when the teachers allow students to sit with their friends.

The research findings in this literature review reveal the achievement and behavioral outcomes of students when seated in different seating positions: comfort seating, alternative seating, back versus the front and the center versus the outer layers of the classroom.
Orchestra Seating

Currently, orchestras adopted seating auditions as a method of student accountability in music performance: “The best player is seated in the first chair and the others are seated after him or her in descending order of perceived ability” (Bjork, 2008, p. 28). Seating auditions are often evaluated by the conductor or music teacher who is considered the person with the most experience and knowledge to assess a musician’s ability. The motivations behind the seating varies, but some teachers believe that chair auditions remind students of the need for accountability. For example, chair auditions are practiced at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A rotation of seating is ultimately what sets a group up for long-term success. However, there are those moments when you know you need a strong leader in the principal positions…chair auditions become an important part of the process, and remind students of the need for accountability. (Glawe, 2017, p. 68)

Principal positions, such as section leaders, are usually students who sit in the front seats of the orchestra and take on additional leadership responsibilities. Usually, these players are musicians who are very skilled on their instrument and can help lead the ensemble from where they are sitting and make suggestions for their section to improve:

The responsibilities of the principal players include playing the orchestral solos that are written for their instrument, setting the style and tone for their sections, and leading their section by setting high standards of beauty, accuracy, and rhythmic reliability. (Hoffman, 1997, p. 166)

A chair assignment has numerous purposes, organizing players, leadership roles, and tasks that include page-turning and conveyance of divisi parts.

Although section leaders may receive valuable experiences by gaining leadership roles, there is an issue with this practice for the students who do not have those responsibilities; the students who sit behind the section leaders. To begin with, “first
chair” implies being at the head of the section and seating next to the conductor and closest to the stage (Nardolillo, p. 26). Students who are seated as section leaders, principal leaders, are accountable for their section and this creates a hierarchical seating structure that is unfair to the rest of the students participating in the ensemble. These systems of hierarchy have been in discussions and debates early as the 1970s. For example, Von Wrochem (1971) brought attention to the present social situation in an orchestra society and implies that hierarchy has become the most important factor in a musician's professional orchestra career. At a time when thoughts concerning the improvement of social awareness and balance among human beings are recognizable to most of the civilized world, and individuals are getting to be more mindful of their creative processes and values, the orchestra was increasingly solidifying itself into an inflexible and inactive structure (p. 48). Von Wrochem goes on to make several suggestions for a new organizational approach to seating arrangements for string players in the symphony orchestra. He believes that rotating, “desks” in an orchestra gives every member an opportunity to, “find real value” and a, “true sense of self-confidence” which focuses on social and musical inclusions and performance aptitude that is much less restrained rationally.

Von Wrochem also believes that the orchestra auditions should only be undertaken if the musician is capable of performing the symphony pieces and that the musician should utilize his abilities to the fullest extent-that is, by giving him as much duty as conceivable (p. 52). Von Wrochem suggests that the first violins should exchange parts with the second violins because it would motivate them to improve. The audience will not be able to notice any misfortune in musical or technical quality in performance if
this exchange was integrated (p. 52). String players are already at a disadvantage given
their initial set up in the orchestra on the stage floor. Wind players are often seated higher
and placed on podiums so they can see the conductor better. Although there may be a less
hierarchical situation for wind players in the symphony orchestra since they often have
solo parts, these parts can also be arranged for different players in the wind section.

In an educational text on teaching methods generally used for college music
majors, Littrell (2003) explains his seating preferences for school orchestras. Similar to
Von Wrochem’s seating model in a professional orchestra, Littrell does not seat students
based on hierarchy; instead, he ranks the students and creates a peer-modeled structure.
He uses an, “Advanced Placement Seating” model:

For any rehearsal period, “first desk” players can be placed anywhere in the
section – note the label is “first desk” not “front desk.” If more than nine players
show themselves to be fully capable at the parts, different section leaders can be
assigned to each piece of music, each concert program, or part of the academic
term. Similarly, violinists can be rotated between first and second violin parts.
The physical location of each pair of students can be rotated front to back across
rehearsals to provide students a variety of listening perspectives and ensemble
experiences. (p. 31)

Littrell’s lesson on exchanging musical parts among the first violin and second violins is
providing all students to gain an understanding of each other’s parts and how their parts
fit with the music, it also creates less of a hierarchy among the first violin and second
violin players. This is a similar belief to Von Wrochem’s theory about exchanging the
violin 1 and 2 parts in the orchestra. My concern is the ranking system that he created for
the players and although the motivation behind this model has become more focus on
performance development through peer modeling structures, the students are situated in
the same pairs. However, the good thing about this model is that the, “desks” are rotated
throughout the orchestra.
From a constructivist’s standpoint, Scruggs (2009) discusses how to integrate a variety of techniques in the orchestra classroom. In her article, she discusses how to engage students during rehearsals by providing a variety of seating structures for the ensembles. Scruggs makes a case that the more students are seated in the positions of hierarchy based on ability in the orchestra, the less students will be engaged during rehearsals. Regardless of whether the more capable players are playing from different sections of the orchestra and rotated, they will still play well in any location. When the students who sit in the back are rotated, it will require them to remain focused since the director would see them (pp. 55-56). Scruggs then proceeds to share that the seat rotation may engage the students and increase rehearsal enhancement: “Directors could incorporate varied seating layouts on a regular basis.” Scruggs supports student engagement, and distributing student leadership, and provides examples of non-hierarchical seating structures for the orchestra. Scruggs advises,

A further modification would call for the orchestra to set up either in a circle or in parallel lines, with the director in the middle and the students facing each other. Each of these rehearsal placement adaptations would allow students to hear their ensembles from an entirely different vantage point. Rehearsal engagement and musical maturity should improve through the heightened level of watching, listening, and adjusting that a new seating perspective requires from performers. (p. 56)

This system works well in a public school orchestra program because constructivism in education provides students an opportunity to construct their own understanding of the world through various experiences in school settings.

Some orchestra programs are not part of the school day curriculum, but are part of elective study in high schools. I became increasingly interested in learning why students participate in orchestra programs in the first place so further studies that include student’s
experiences in youth ensembles were investigated. Love (1971) shares student musicians’ perceptions of seating auditions based on their experiences with the Montgomery County Youth Orchestra in Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Maryland. Some students reacted: “I feel many people are in this organization with the goal of the status of a good seat. There are some very aggressive people, so the competition is keen. Perhaps this attitude improves the quality of the orchestra” (p. 45). This student’s response demonstrated that competition for seating in the orchestra was a motivating factor for some in the orchestra. It also increased the quality of the orchestra’s performance.

Another student said, “seating can be used as a threat ‘If you don’t pay attention I’ll move you back!’ This does produce results, but the motivation is doubtful to me” (p. 45). In this response, there may be an outside motivator such as the conductor/teacher who embedded this idea into the student musician’s minds about doing well in the orchestra.

Some of the students shared that the seating hierarchy is also political. For example,

I love playing in the orchestra, and if I can pull it off with the right people, I may move up in the section. Who can tell? This orchestra is like a professional orchestra in that there are a lot of politics, but trying to use situations to one’s advantage is good practice if one intends to be a professional musician.

Other student musicians shared that they should be able to have chair challenges. Love says, “some players think they should be able to challenge individual players to improve their seating” (p. 45).

Love’s qualitative research study revealed the hidden strategies and motivations in seating for youth orchestra musicians. Although a youth orchestra setting is more competitive, and the expectation of the quality of the performance may be higher than a public school orchestra, this data revealed that seating was competitive;
conductors/teachers instilled fear and made seating an important factor for the young musicians.

**Student Motivation**

Many studies reveal that musicians and students are motivated to practice in different ways. In this section, I will look into the experiences of students and what motivates them to practice and motivates them to be part of an ensemble.

I was curious about what motivated students to have higher achievement levels in academic classrooms, so I explored the experiences of students who were highly motivated already, such as honor students. Siegel, Rubenstein, and Mitchell (2014) conducted a qualitative research study on students’ perspectives of their academic motivation when they were in high school, working with a group of 28 university honors freshmen in a focus group session over a two-week period. The authors of the study concluded that, “students overwhelmingly attributed their interest and motivation to their experience with their teachers” (p. 40). The researchers discovered that when teachers developed meaningful relationships with students, it was valued and students used their time more efficiently (pp. 41-2). In addition, they found that,

Students valued courses in which they develop self-efficacy. This self-efficacy was cultivated through their recognition of personal growth and satisfaction as well as their development of competencies through hard work (p. 41).

The students also believed that the teachers could, “empower” them: “The teachers instilled a sense of pride in doing quality work and increased students’ confidence in students’ ability by helping students become competent in the subject content” (p. 44). Lastly, according to the Achievement Orientation Model, teachers of this kind were passionate, hard working and were able to deliver instruction effectively.
By exploring reasons why students choose to participate in elective music classes, Hewitt and Allan (2012) studied the outcomes of students’ experiences and reasons for participating in an advanced youth music ensemble in Scotland. The researchers surveyed 72 adolescent musicians from two advanced youth music ensembles, the West of Scotland Schools Symphony Orchestra and the West of Scotland Schools Concert Band. Respondents replied to questions relating to their past experiences of each measurement and assessed the significance of each dimension for future participation. The results of their study indicated that students enjoyed meeting new people, enjoyed performing and had musical satisfaction in participating. There were other advantages in addition to learning more challenging music repertoire and being around other students who are motivated in advanced repertoire:

Social aspects are also important, with participation being linked strongly to making friends, socializing with existing friends, and developing strong relationships with adults such as the conductor. Positive personal outcomes are realized through increased confidence and a sense of belonging. (p. 268)

Hewitt and Allan also discovered that the students’ “role in ongoing participation was effective only if the ensemble was found to match existing desires and an emerging sense of control as a musician” (p. 268). This study revealed that students’ motivation to participate in youth orchestra ensembles occurred because they really enjoyed the social and musical aspects of the orchestra. Not only did the students enjoy playing music, they really enjoyed creating friendships with like-minded musicians.

I became increasingly curious to learn the outcomes of adolescent motivational experiences participating in music programs at various grade levels, including what their motivations of performing in an ensemble were and how they differed from each other. Asmus (1986) conducted a study on this motivation with music students from grades 4
through 12 enrolled in a music course in eight different schools. A total of 589 students participated in a questionnaire about failure and success in music class. Among the student participant responses, Asmus discovered that the older students assessed their success or failure based on ability while younger students cited effort as the primary criterion. This research demonstrates how young adolescents, especially students in the middle school and high school settings could have identified their experiences in more of a competitive nature with ability.

Since the research is looking into the student and teacher experiences of one high school, I have become interested in learning about orchestra teachers who were known for student motivation and musical excellence. Parker (2001) conducted a qualitative case study to document a teacher named E. Daniel Long, and his interactions with his seventh-grade orchestra class at Slauson Middle School. Data was collected through teacher interviews, student interviews and classroom observations. Parker discovered, “the absence of competition emerged as being distinguishing characteristic” and that Dan had a humor that was motivating for students because it made the students feel, “valued and respected by him” (p. 22). Dan shared his previous experiences as a competitive band director and when he surveyed his students about their experience in band, there were no responses to the music; rather students were more focused upon the results of competition. Dan had a method of non-competitive seating structure, however, allowing his own students to choose their seating. At the beginning of the school year, Dan would explain that the students who sat in the front would lead the orchestra. He also shared the differences between the first violin and second violin musical parts. Dan did not believe in competition for his students and does not think it will motivate them: “The students
agreed that the lack of competition allowed them to focus more clearly on the music without having bad feelings towards another person based on the comparison of ability.”

Besides seating, Dan was a humorous teacher who motivated students: His, “unique personality and genuine care for his students are the ingredients of the underlying formula for his success in motivating his students” (p. 35).

Since my research study looks into the lives of a diverse student population, I reviewed the relevant literature on motivation in diverse settings. Ginsberg (2005) provides a theory and a set of practices of how to motivate students in a culturally diverse classroom. Ginsberg says that engaging,

the hearts and minds of diverse students is essential to transformational notions about differentiated instruction, curriculum, assessment, advisory relationships, scheduling options, governance, and family and community partnerships. (p. 219)

The four basic conditions in the motivational framework are establishing inclusion, developing a positive attitude, enhancing meaning, and engendering competence:

“Especially those in high poverty communities, designing lessons that help elicit students’ stories, opinions, values, and interests as a catalyst for learning is fundamental to encouraging intrinsic motivation across student groups” (p. 220).

Grouping the literature on student motivation, I discerned combinations of multiple theories that had to do with student achievement, peer-motivation, and self-motivation. This section has explored the differences in how students are motivated in a class either in academic classrooms or performance ensembles.
III – METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of students who have participated in alternative seating practices (ASP), such as seating rotation, randomized seating or scrambled seating, in a public school string orchestra program. This research examined the social and musical experiences of 10th grade orchestra students when they first experienced ASP as eighth graders and continued the practice in ninth and 10th grade.

In order to answer the questions that guided the study, I conducted my research by using a qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews with students, parents and administrators to learn about their past and present experiences and what they remember during the changes of ASP. Student participants will also be journaling their experiences in ASP, and share their experiences in orchestra class in an online discussion. As the teacher-observer, I shared my experiences in a teacher journal and collected additional resources such as artifacts from student past letters, emails and competition results.

Role of the Researcher

My experiences as an orchestra teacher for diverse students were limited to what I understood as their teacher. Postholm and Skrøvset (2013) comment on this role: “At the same time as the researcher is influencing the research process and their interpretation of
the data material that is being collected, she is also part of the social world being studied”
(p. 508). I have been observing my students through a teacher lens and the facilitator of
ASP. I understood more of the musical outcomes of my ensemble and only because I had
 taught them how to achieve them. I am aware of all my students’ abilities, and what they
were capable of, but I noticed a change in the social and musical dynamics of the group
as they progressed into 10th grade. Things I’ve never taught them they soon began to
perform in their playing. It only made me more curious to explore how they were able to
acquire these additional skills that included shifting into 5th position, vibrato and more
advanced knowledge in music theory. Students began talking to each other, and maybe
sometimes a little too much, but they were engaging in conversation so I sought to find
out if ASP had any effect on students collaboration.

At the beginning of rehearsals, I allow my students to conduct the orchestra and I
sit in ASP with them. Sitting in ASP allowed me to hear my students more clearly and
identify issues that they were dealing with musically. As we practiced ASP daily, I
realized that my story was important to share with others. After all, I hear other music
teachers’ reactions when they learn that I randomize the seating for concerts and
competitions. They’re curious as to how I was able to facilitate ASP and be so confident
in the musical outcomes. I have struggled finding orchestras who would be open to the
challenge and allow me to conduct my research; when they discovered they had to
randomize the seating for their competition, they felt it was too risky and that it would set
their kids up for failure. It has inspired me to conduct further research on the social and
musical experiences for my orchestra students because I think ASP had worked for them.
Developing from my understanding as the teacher, my researcher roles for this study
were participant, observer and interpreter. In order to understand how research can help teachers acquire these competencies, we need to have a more complete picture of the factors that may affect the development of such competencies (Butler, Lind, & McKoy, 2007, p. 244). I came to understand that being the teacher, I had to be careful about the ways I invited students to share their experiences because of my personal relationships with them. With this awareness, I conducted interviews with open-ended answers and used additional methods to produce more objective sourcing, such as online class discussions and student journals, essays, and letters.

**Pilot Study**

As part of a qualitative research methods class at Teachers College, Columbia University, I conducted a short pilot study with my students in the String Orchestra ensemble. This was my first year as the high school orchestra teacher in this school district and during that year, I employed ASP regularly in all the orchestra classes. I had already practiced ASP when I was the eighth-grade orchestra teacher the year before so I was curious to find out and learn the social and musical effects of ASP with high school students who were used to a hierarchical seating structure.

In my previous experiences as the orchestra teacher at the middle school, I discovered that ASP provided opportunities for students to practice social justice. Were alternative seating practices also providing equal opportunities for students to learn in an orchestra program? Were the students building confidence levels because they were being treated fairly and given equitable opportunities? Was this in fact a practice for social justice?
The student population of the String Orchestra ensemble is culturally and economically diverse. Out of the 80 students participating in String Orchestra, 40 students receive free and reduced lunch. The ensemble is comprised of ninth- through 12th-grade orchestra students and due to the large amount of students participating in the String Orchestra ensemble, the class was split into two sections, 40 in each class. I chose to study one of the String Orchestra sections. Out of the 40 students from one of the class periods, eight student participants were selected from the violin sections (Violin 1 and Violin 2). I chose to study these two instrumentations in terms of ensemble layout, European traditional seating (Figure 1), and number of players in each section.

![Figure 1. Traditional European seating.](image)

Four students from each of the violin sections were selected to partake in the study (see Appendix A). Each of the participants were provided a journal to record their reflections on the daily practices in ASP and responded to questions online on Google Classroom (see Appendix A).
The purpose of this pilot study was to learn the effects in both musical and social development for the String Orchestra when ASP (seating rotation or scrambled seating) is practiced.

The following research questions guided this pilot study:

1. What are the student experiences of participating in seating rotation/scrambled seating in a high school string orchestra?

2. What ways does social justice challenge students in a high school string orchestra?

This pilot study gave me a wealth of research experience and I developed a design I eventually used to conduct and plan out the data collection process for this dissertation. Since the pilot study was conducted from mid-April to May, there was sufficient time to receive valuable information since the students were preparing for competition and each student participant was able to rotate chairs twice. After conducting the pilot study and reading student journals, I discovered that input from me as teacher-researcher was missing. I decided I needed to include my own personal journal entries during the ASP practices in class. Finally, I’ve used one data source to answer some of the research questions. Since I transitioned to the high school, I felt that I needed more adequate data collection to learn about the experiences of the high school students, particularly the upperclassmen, who have been practicing hierarchical seating for many years.

**Participants and Setting**

The student participants in this study were the 25 10th graders who were part of the eighth-grade orchestra class when I was their teacher and have continued in high school orchestra programs. The high school is located 20 miles outside of a major US city.
and reflects a diverse population of 1,001 students. The school district consists of one middle school and one high school and three elementary schools. Within the school district, there were 46% white students, 25% Latino students, 17% Black students, 7% Asian students, 5% Multi-Racial and .1% American Indian/Alaskan Native students. In the orchestra programs, there are 25% White, 10% Latino, 30% Black, 20% Asian and 15% Multi-Racial.

There are two separate orchestra ensembles at the high school, Chamber Orchestra and String Orchestra. Chamber Orchestra is considered an advanced ensemble that is auditioned based and performs music repertoire at State School Music Association (SSMA) level 6. A significant portion of the 24 members of this ensemble take private lessons and compete in solo and ensemble competitions throughout the school year. There were six 10th graders enrolled in the Chamber Orchestra the year the study was conducted; the remaining students were in 11th and 12th grade. The String Orchestra is a non-auditioned ensemble that consists of eighty 9th to 12th graders. This orchestra also participates at SSMA but at level 4 or 5. The total numbers of 10th graders participating in String Orchestra is 24. Due to the large number of students enrolled in this ensemble, the class was divided into two sections (40 in each class). All ensemble classes met four times a week for 55 minutes.

I asked all thirty 10th graders if they wished to participate in the study and among the thirty 10th graders, 25 students volunteered. Each of the participants was provided an assent form for minors (see Appendix B). Each student also received an informed consent form for parent interviews (see Appendix C).
## Table 1

**Demographics of Students in the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>F/R Lunch</th>
<th>Experience (in years)</th>
<th>Private Lessons</th>
<th>IEP/504</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>BASS/CELLO</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>VIOLA</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>VIOLA</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>VIOLA</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>VIOLA</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>BASS/CELLO</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>BASS/CELLO</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>BASS/CELLO</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>VIOLIN</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>IEP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note 1:** IEP – the Individualized Educational Plan – is a document developed for each public school child who needs special education.

**Note 2:** F/R Lunch – Free and Reduced Lunch Plan – Students from households with an income at or below 130% of the poverty income threshold are eligible for free lunch. A student from a household with an income between 130% and up to 185% of the poverty threshold is eligible for reduced price lunch.
Six parents volunteered to be interviewed for the study. The middle school Principal and the high school Principal were also interviewed and signed an informed consent (see Appendix D).

The 25 student participants are of various backgrounds. In Table 1, I have provided demographics and background information based on instrument, race, economic status, and accommodations, if any, to the students’ individual learning plan. In order to protect the identities of the students, I do not include names or gender. Due to the low number of student participants playing the double bass and cello, I have labeled their instrument sections Bass/Cello to ensure their identities cannot be revealed. They are listed in random order.

**Research Design**

This dissertation is written from an autobiographical stance, based on my personal experiences as an orchestra teacher at a public school. Data were gathered using qualitative interviews and archival collection from the time I was an orchestra teacher at a middle school in 2015 and transferred to the high school a year later. I conducted semi-structured interviews and online discussions with 25 student participants, six parents in a group discussion and separate interviews with the middle school principal and the high school principal.

The students participated in online group discussions from October 2017 to January 2018, and interviews were conducted in pairs from December to January. Students were asked to share their experiences in orchestra before eighth grade and their experiences with ASP both socially and musically in eighth grade, ninth grade and
journaled their experiences in 10th grade. Students had the option to write a letter or an essay if they felt more comfortable about sharing their experiences in that way. Parents were interviewed together in a group discussion and were asked to share their experiences about their child’s participation in orchestra. Administrators were interviewed separately and were asked to share their perspectives and experiences with the ASP changes. As the teacher-researcher, I shared my experiences in a teacher journal and gathered archival data from students past letters, essays, pilot study results, and conversations with students and the community.

**Data Collection**

**Online Community Discussion**

Questions on student participants’ past and present experiences and their perception on hierarchical seating structure were posted on the Google Classroom page for four weeks and student participants answered questions after every post. They also responded to each other’s responses (see Appendix E). By learning the students’ past experiences, I was able to learn what changes that transpired for them socially and musically.

**Student Journals**

Student participants journaled their experiences throughout the study. They wrote in their journals for 5 minutes after class (see examples in Appendix F). The journal provided students the opportunity to share their experiences sitting with their stand partners. They also had the freedom to share anything that they felt was important for me
to learn. For example, some students shared their overall experiences in ASP from eighth to 10th grade.

**Teacher Journals and Evaluation**

Throughout the data collection process, I journaled my teaching experiences and what I observed in the student’s social and musical behaviors as we engage with ASP. In the journal, I included informal evaluations of the orchestra’s member’s ability and what I witnessed among the students while sitting in ASP with them, and what I witnessed in the student dynamics for the concerts.

**Administrator Interviews**

Both the high school and middle school principals were interviewed about their experience when ASP was introduced at their school. Questions addressing parent-teacher conferences, informal and formal teacher evaluations, concert evaluations and changes in school climate were asked. Conducting these interviews became an important part of the study, since the Principals observed the struggles of ASP at the middle school and the high school at that time. They shared their experiences with parents and students who were resistant towards the changes (see Appendix G).

**Students Interviews**

I included interviews from all the student participants who volunteered and asked them about their experiences in orchestra during their eighth-grade and ninth-grade years. These interviews took place at the high school and were recorded for transcription. Two student participants were interviewed at the same time by the researcher/teacher. Each interview session lasted 15 minutes (see Appendix H).
**Parent Interviews**

The parent perspective is valuable, especially if the children explicitly discussed the changes in orchestra seating at home. I asked those parents who consented to their child participating in the study if they wanted to volunteer to be interviewed (see Appendix I). Among the 25 student participants’ parents, six parents volunteered to be interviewed. Parents were interviewed together in a focus group (see Appendix J).

**Essays/Letters**

In another part of the data collection process, the 10th-grade student participants were asked to reflect on their experiences when they were in orchestra in eighth grade and ninth grade. This data collection was in a form of an essay or a letter to me. Students were asked to write about their experiences when ASP was first introduced and how it had changed over time (see examples in Appendix K).

**Archival Data: Competition Results and Letters**

Since I studied the experiences of ASP when the students were in eighth grade, ninth grade and 10th grade, I also used archival data such as competition results, email conversations and letters that students wrote in order to gather more information about the experience and to help recall situations that they experienced. Competition results included past state affiliate competitions and festival competitions (see examples in Appendix L). Included in the archive are email conversations between the teacher and her advisor at Teachers College and lastly, icebreaker letters, which were letters that students wrote at the beginning of the year to tell me about them.
Archival Data: Pilot Study

When the students were in ninth grade, I conducted a short pilot study that included some of the upperclassman’s experiences in ASP at the high school. I used the pilot study results, as well as the focus group and student journal entries as components of the archival data collection. I’ve used these results to share the social and musical experiences from the upperclassman and how their experiences were with the ninth grade class (see examples in Appendix M).

Figure 2. Data collection roadmap

Analysis

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded after all interviews have been conducted. After reading all the transcripts, I reread the transcripts and highlighted sentences and words that related to my research questions. Analysis was conducted by identifying the major themes that emerged from all the data sources. I divided each of the data sources by social and musical and by grade level, and placed them into their
respective categories. The online discussion, parent interviews, principal interviews, pilot study and archival results were also spread among the categories. In the following chapters, I describe the ASP journey and discuss it in terms of the related literature.

**Coding Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8th Grade</th>
<th>9th Grade</th>
<th>10th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musical</strong></td>
<td><strong>Musical</strong></td>
<td><strong>Musical</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>Cohesiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Helping Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>Extrinsic Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Self</td>
<td>Respecting Differences</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>Pride</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.* Codes for data analysis.
The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the experiences of students who have participated in alternative seating practices (ASP), such as seating rotation, randomized seating or scrambled seating, in a public school string orchestra program. This research examined the social and musical experiences of 10th-grade orchestra students when they first experienced ASP as eighth graders and continued the practice in ninth and 10th grade. To learn the effectiveness of ASP, I conducted semi-structured interviews and online discussions and collected student journals from 25 student participants. I have also included archival data such as competition results and documented conversations and interview transcripts from parents, students and administrators about their experiences with ASP. Parent interviews were conducted in a group interview session. Administrators, such as a middle school principal and high school principal, have shared what they recall during the changes that occurred and lastly, I have provided my own experiences as the student participants’ teacher, and the outcomes in both social and musical experiences through my lens as an instructor who facilitates ASP in the classroom. In fact, tracking changes over time is a significant part of the study and my data is organized to show the effect of ASP as the study tracks students through eighth, ninth, and 10th grade.

**Hierarchical Seating Climate: The Years before ASP Integration**

Throughout the data collection process, students began to share their experiences prior to ASP. This experience was an important part of the transition that occurred from
hierarchical to non-hierarchical seating structures for the orchestra and constitutes the observable measures of the effectiveness of ASP. Through online discussions, student interviews and student journaling, there were three common themes in students’ musical and social experiences prior to ASP. I began to explore what these experiences were for those students and the social reasons to why students and teachers made these choices. According to the students, hierarchical seating structures began when the students were in the sixth grade and practiced into their seventh-grade year. I have found three common themes in the textual data: (a) lack of motivation; (b) segregation of social groups; (c) awareness of injustice.

**First Impressions**

In the pre-ASP situations, there was often inconsistent motivation among the students, some of whom were discouraged by others’ attitudes, which included their peers and previous teachers. During student interviews, the students began to share what they remembered. For example, Student B said in an interview,

> Yeah, fourth and fifth grade was basic techniques. Nothing was like oh my God, you’re better than me. Nothing was like, yeah and sixth grade you’re thrown into the deep end. Sixth grade was literally...Yeah. We were given music that was like oh, yikes. We couldn’t read it.

Student O said in the discussion online,

> I really started to fall behind because I never received any kind of positive encouragement for playing the violin. I felt like I was bad and there was no use trying to improve because no one believed in me, and there would be no point to improve.

These students shared how much they needed the teacher to give them encouragement. Student I said online, “Teacher didn’t believe in us so it didn’t allow us to see what we have.” They felt that they could not be good and there was a lack of motivation. Student
M said in an interview, “We couldn’t read it, because we weren’t taught it. Couldn’t read it, didn’t know what half of these notes were, how to count them.” Student M then went on to say,

Yes, we were the troublemakers. I was just sitting in the back fooling around, because obviously I didn't take it seriously and no one, none of the teachers told me you should take it seriously, you have good potential. No one said that, never took my instrument home. I kept that, it lived in the little cubby. Literally. I brought it to school, rest of the remainder of the school year, took it home. I didn’t touch it during the summer at all. No one told me wow, you should really do this, this and that.

Even for the students who took private lessons, there was a lack of motivation. Parent 3 said,

Prior to you arriving, James also was ready to sort of chuck ... I think he would have still taken part, but it was a very negative presence in the building, and it was ... after a while, he's like, "Why am I doing this? It's not fun. Teacher doesn't like me, I'm not getting anywhere." He saw no benefit to it. And it was only when the change happened, and he was like, “Oh, okay. It's all gonna get better here.” And we said, ‘Hold on, hold on. Things are gonna be different in high school’ and he did, but it was definitely negative the first sixth and seventh grade. Cause I think he had been sort of ... I don't know what the word is ... overlooked. I don't know. I think he felt very much like he couldn't get the time of day from some previous folks. And that was always disheartening to him because he felt like he was a decent player, and he never got any props.

**Half Split**

The hierarchical seating structure created a segregation of social groups for the students participating in orchestra. There was a clear distinction between the students who were taking private lessons and those who were not, which led the students to place themselves in the social groups they identified with socially and musically. For example, Student B said,

It was sitting by ourselves in the back, but this time it was really divided. The people who were taking it seriously, the people who were having private lessons, they were sitting up in the front. The violin 2s were like the people who didn’t care. The group of friends that were just sitting in the back were just fooling
around. I would get in trouble most of the times in orchestra. The violin twos were the best people too, because they’re so humble about themselves. I guess I was hiding. I didn’t want to get picked on. I don’t want to have people around me to hear how I’m playing, because obviously it was not good.

Student M shared a similar experience.

We bonded in the back of the whole class, because we’d always be like do you know what we’re doing, no, I don’t know what we’re doing. We used to fool around a lot, and we used to bond over not sounding good. That’s literally it. We made friends, our friend group was the kids who thought they didn’t sound good, and then the other friend group was the kids who thought they sounded good. Then it divided. It wasn’t split; it was like a half split. It was like the back was here, and then the front was the kids who were serious about it, but they had their little, oh, we’re going to bond over this G major scale while we were bonding about, what is happening, or what are we having for dinner tonight, because we’re not talking about this. I feel like it’s chiller environment in the back. You can make mistakes, you can do this, this, and that without the teacher even hearing.

Between the two different groups, the students did not have a clear understanding of each other’s differences. Student M said in an interview,

When they switch the seconds into first, we still gravitated towards the back, because the kids who were in the first gave us those stank looks. They were like oh, you’re originally second, what are you doing in our territory type situation. That spread so quickly. Then it’s always the violin ones having competition amongst themselves, or the violin twos and the ones having their own.

Student M said that the students who took private lessons were, “hyping each other up.”

Student M also said, “they’re like you’re first. Holy crap, you’re first violins, you guys are the main people. You’re always sat in the front, and they always took the you-always-sat-in-the-front as sometimes a compliment, but also sometimes as a diss.”

Students B and M shared their experiences in the middle school orchestra prior to ASP. They realized that there was segregation among the social groups for the orchestra. Assumptions were made on both sides of the hierarchy. Students who sat in the back did not understand where the students who sat in the front came from.
Awareness of Injustices

From the transcriptions below, I discovered that there was a sense of awareness amongst the students. Students began to realize that there was a clear difference amongst the orchestra students based on socio-economic status. Student O wrote in their essay and shared,

My friends who were in orchestra and I began to notice that we were constantly behind one person or all the way in the back all the time. We all felt extremely insecure with our playing, as the hierarchy seating was destructive to the confidence of every single member of our orchestra. I noticed this lack of confidence in everyone, including the people who tended to be first chair all the time. I realized that because of that lack of confidence, we had all built up walls around ourselves and we were unable to create a bond between one another. Due to the fact that we all did not think we were good enough, everyone felt judged and disliked by the people around them; especially those who we did not typically associate with outside of orchestra.

Student I said in an interview,

Yeah, I feel like everybody was always in the same spot or at least that first year, they were always in the first two chairs. And then everybody else would just change around that probably wasn’t fair to the others who worked hard. Everybody was always in that one specific area. Because, I mean, not to call the teacher out but the teacher probably just thought that, oh they play good. They’ll probably bring up the orchestra so that we should have them in front and everybody else will just fill in the spaces.

This system of hierarchy made students who couldn’t afford private lessons realize their differences in socio-economic status. For example, Student J said in an interview,

I remember in middle school I had a class with one of the students, and she had private teachers, and she did middle school chamber, and she would always pick on me because I didn't have private teachers. I couldn't afford to get a private teacher. It really made me feel discouraged, like I wanted to quit.

Student C had the same experience and shared in the interview,

It just made me feel like, I didn’t feel bad of myself; I just felt like I could never experience what it’s like sitting in the front because I was always in the back, or I would never experience what it’s like to do SSMA Solos or All County.
This was unfair to the students and Student B said in the interview, “usually the kids who sat in the front won awards and stuff. All the time, all the time. They used to get the recognition for everything all the time.” It was discouraging for the students and Parent 4 shared,

    They were getting left behind. And the ones who were excelling were already being pushed in the front. So there was a hierarchy and we noticed it ...And [my daughter] skated by, and she was being bullied, so she was okay sitting in the back and just falling behind.

Due to the fact that the students who sat in the back did not perform at the level with the students who took private lessons, they felt that the music was adjusted for their section for performances. Student M said in an interview,

    The thing is though with the second violins, sometimes they’d remove stuff from the second violins. They’d be like oh, you guys are not capable of doing this, so we’re going to just cut this part out of the music, take this part out of the music, just play whole notes. Don’t play for this measure, you guys can’t do it. Like oh, okay. Yup, and replaced it with hold out a D for four measures and letting the first violins try to take over.

During a parent interview, Parent 6 shared how other parents may have caused the hierarchical seating structures for the orchestra. Parent 6 shared their frustration about the seating by saying, “It was always a certain student who would get out of class right away so they could get the first seat.” This parent also said,

    I think what happened ... because I questioned the teachers myself. They were not given the background information of how this has happened since fourth grade. So the teacher was a little sideswiped where they said, "Okay." Because, what I understood was that the parent said, "Well, my child is better than those kids." I think the teacher did what she had to do because she wasn't tenured, first of all. And these parents go to the board and her hands were tied. They threaten people. That's not the way that any program should be, academics, anything like that.
Parent 6 makes an interesting point on the issues of hierarchy and expresses frustration about the school educational practices. The previous orchestra teacher may have not been tenured and was uncertain on how to handle conflicts with parents. There may have been parents of orchestra students who wanted their child to sit first chair even if the teacher disagreed. Administrators may have provided a lack of support for the untenured teacher, and supported the parents more, because these parents could have shown that they had more knowledge of the system of the orchestra by learning from their child’s private teachers. Parent 6 also mentions how a particular parent would, “threaten” the school and that there is a fear among school employees. Parent 6 is frustrated that nothing is being done.

In this section, the students and parents shared their experiences in the hierarchy seating structures in the middle school orchestra prior to eighth grade. The student participants and parents expressed how the instructional environment created a hierarchy in the orchestra and students felt they weren’t receiving proper amounts of attention or technical skills from their previous teachers. This unfairness in their educational treatment highlighted the differences within the different social economical groups in the classroom and how seating placement in the orchestra directly correlated to outside access.

**Eighth-Grade Social Experiences**

In the beginning, ASP was confusing for most of the students. According to the textual data, the integration of ASP began when the teacher made changes to the overall development of the orchestra. There were many conflicts with the new changes with the teacher and with the integration of ASP; both the teacher and students had to overcome
adversity at the same time. In Chapter I, I share the struggles with the integration of ASP, and how parents and community members wanted competition for the orchestra but it was from my awareness of the diversity of the ensemble that inspired me to continue with ASP. For example,

As I looked around the classroom, I noticed very quickly that there was something odd about where the students were sitting. Those who happened to be from Haiti were all sitting in the back of the orchestra. This was the first time I realized that there was a common understanding embedded in the students’ minds about who gets to sit in the front of the orchestra. (p. 9, above)

During the first days of school, I had to create a class page for the middle school orchestra, only to discover the, “chair challenges” signup sheet from the previous orchestra class pages. The sheet was very foreign to me, and I didn’t understand why it was necessary. It may be due to my lack of experience of working in a school that already had a program in place. I was oblivious to the fact that seating hierarchy was practiced in the orchestra. I sought to understand the social dynamic of the group and also, to get to know my students since I was the new teacher. During the first days of school, I had students write me an, “Icebreaker” letter sharing their interests, what they struggled in playing, and what they wanted to improve on. One particular student caught my attention and shed light to a situation about the seating hierarchy. In an icebreaker letter, a student shared with me their frustration with the unchanging hierarchy seating structure that had been practiced in the previous years. It had been a personal goal of this student to achieve the first chair, but despite their efforts to "practice" and do their best, as the teacher had advised, the first chair remained assigned to the same person. They were optimistic about having a new teacher and the opportunities it could bring. This particular student had been taking private lessons since the fourth grade. The letter demonstrates
that the seating was also frustrating for the more competitive student. The student realized that the seating was unfair, and although the teacher did not provide the trajectory of sitting first chair and the pre-requisite was unclear, doing her best was still not a measurable objective.

The Catalyst

The student participants shared their first impressions of me, the orchestra teacher at the time, and their reaction to ASP. Although ASP was practiced in the orchestra, there were challenges with ASP seating at the beginning. As their teacher, I had to reinforce ASP regularly in class and make sure that the students were practicing the new seating changes. The students who shared more of their experiences were students who often sat in the back of the orchestra for most of their years in the middle school before ASP. In an interview, Student J said, “When you came and you set everybody equal, there's no hierarchy it made me feel better about myself in a way.” Student B said in an interview,

The kids who felt like lost causes were like, this is what we need. Then you're like, we're going to switch seating. As the weeks went on, you could slowly see it starting to progress and everybody doing it. People still complained about it, but they still did it. It helped boost confidence more, definitely. There were some people who were mad, because they were like no, why are you putting the back players in the front, aka the players who always sat in the back and never had the same amount of opportunities to be great as they did type of situation. I know in eighth grade, when you came in, people were scared, but they were scared mostly because they were not used to having a legitimate music teacher. Those of us who always longed to be pushed, we finally got that push. We were like oh, she’s serious. She’s serious. The people who felt like they were great got so offended. They were like, who is she coming in here, walking all over us.

Student B and J both share the same first reactions about when I became their teacher. The students were eager to have some sort of change in their orchestra program and they were hopeful that I would make changes to help them musically. Among other students who sat in the back of the orchestra, the teacher gave students hope for the future of the
program and their development as musicians. They were surprised by ASP but also saw the social and musical benefits from the practice. In an interview, Student G said,

> Definitely surprised and know that you wanted to switch us up, want us to sit with someone else new, knowing that you did believe in us and wanting us to see what we were capable of. It felt like a hierarchy kind of like when we first came to the middle school. It was kind of like, like I said before. We'd be, "the best" and we would have to sit in the back and that really kind of hurt me. And now that you arrived at the middle school, it was kind of like, "Okay, let's try something new," and it ended up working and it ended up working really well.

Although ASP was confusing for some of the students, they were not used to the non-traditional seating setup. Some students who normally sat in the back of the orchestra expressed their fear that they would be seated towards the front of the orchestra. In an interview, Student I said, “It was kind of nerve wracking because it was just like, so where am I going to be placed?” My motivation behind ASP was for the students to develop musicianship through peer modeling but also to establish a classroom setting in which social hierarchies and divisions among students could become less rigid and intimidating. Although the implementation of ASP was an important pedagogical idea that I thought was best practice for this orchestra, I understood that there were going to be challenges socially amongst the students. Student O shared in an essay,

> Miss Yi made it a point to reinforce the fact that she cared about all of us, supported all of us, and that everyone of us mattered to her. She worked hard that year to make us understand that it didn't matter where we sat.

The students who sat in the back of the orchestra and in the front all mattered equally to me, and I wanted to establish a classroom and an orchestra program that was fair and equitable while still satisfying traditional measures of musical performance.

I began to develop a rapport with all the students, and when the awards for the district strings festival were announced, I chose a student who didn’t take private lessons,
That student became the pioneer and then the agent of change for the eighth-grade orchestra leading up to the high school. Student B said,

I remember in eighth grade when you talked to me about the award, and I was like, why am I getting it; why isn't Alice getting it or Christina getting it, and you're like, because they're not the orchestra. You're like, you all make up the orchestra, and you're a good person to look up to because you know what it was like to go from the back, and still feeling not confident in yourself, but still trying anyway.

The students were becoming increasingly aware of the social benefits of ASP, and they began to like me as a teacher. Parent 4 said, “she was actually very positive about it. She's like, ‘If Ms. Yi says it's going to happen, it’s going to happen.’ So she believed in you. She believed in you.” Student B then said in an interview,

Yeah, because we were so used to not being told what to do. It was like, oh, yeah. You saw potential in these kids want to be pushed, so I’m going to try to do something, and you did. Look at it the way it is now. Our sound improved within two months, which was kind of shocking. Our grade was so good. Everybody was like, oh, oh. We started all feeling good.

Developing a rapport with the students also gave me an opportunity to continually encourage them in other ways. I wanted to expand their musical curiosity and eventually develop their creativity but that process required a higher level of trust. ASP was an uncomfortable practice for them, and they feared sitting in the front and feared expressing interest in other aspects of music. I encouraged them and gave them a lot of positive reinforcement and this helped them become more open to new changes and musical explorations. I have learned quickly that during this process, some students did not feel comfortable with the instrument that they had been performing on. For example, Student O said in an essay,

One of the most memorable moments in orchestra has to have been the day I told Miss Yi that I didn’t want to play the violin anymore, and that I wanted to play the bass. I had always wanted to play and I only felt like I had the
opportunity when Miss Yi came to the middle school. All of our other orchestra teachers just made me feel so stuck, in a sense. Before Miss Yi came, when I was playing violin, I never got to sit in the front or play the solo during class. I was constantly stuck in the back because I felt like there was no need to practice if no one believed that I was good. I could just barely keep up with the music. That year I still sat in the back for the concert, but I didn’t feel worthless. I felt like an important, functioning member of the orchestra. I felt a change in the entire dynamics of our group and no longer dreaded going to class. That year, we played better than we ever have.

Student O shared that they felt comfortable speaking to me about their frustrations with their first instrument choice. Even though this student was randomized to sit in the back of the orchestra for the concert, Student O’s experience was different than how it had been in previous years. The middle school principal shared with me their observations in regards to my classroom. Principal A said in an interview,

> Kids feel empowered in your class. Kids want to be in your classes. They enjoy when they have you as a teacher. You're firm, but they know you care. All kids, and I keep using the word "all" kids, are growing and becoming better in the orchestra classes. They don't feel pigeonholed into a particular position. They know that randomly they could be in that front seat as well.

Principal A shared this important observation of ASP’s effects on student motivation and participation in the orchestra.

**Awareness**

When ASP was first introduced, the students had to overcome their own struggles of sitting with others in the eighth-grade orchestra. As their teacher, I also had to experience the struggles with the students as well. A student who arrived to the middle school during their eighth-grade year expressed what they experienced and felt among the orchestra students. Student W said in the online discussion,

> The hierarchy I experienced when I came to public school wasn't so rigid and obviously not enforced but it was more so silent and probably a result of what other kids had experienced before. I picked up on the other kids reactions based
on where they sat and I just remember feeling a lot of pressure when I sat in the front, and being able to feel more relaxed in the back.

Student B said in an interview,

The scariest part was when you were sat with somebody who was usually first stand. I remember specifically I always ended up with Alice somehow, some way, and I remember specifically you were like, Alice, move here, you, move here. I was like you’re trying, you’re trying.

There was a lot of resistance about ASP from the students who normally sat in the back and those who sat in the front of the orchestra. I had to facilitate the seating and move students around because they wouldn’t do it on their own. Student B also said, “some people were like, this is my throne, I claimed this seat sixth grade. You were like, um, no. We started switching it up, and I remember some kids used to not switch.” Some students feared the solo that was in the first violin part of the music we were playing so they would hide in the back at the beginning of class. Student M shared in the interview,

Oh my god. It was me and Elizabeth, this was when I first met Elizabeth, not talking, but just talked when we had orchestra. It’s like yea, I’m not doing the solo, I’m not doing the solo either. You had so much experience with your private school, I’m not doing the solo because I don’t have anything. Then Miss Yi looks at me like, you’re doing the solo.

The students who sat in the back shared their fears about why they resisted sitting towards the front or with students who took private lessons. Student M said in the interview,

Because sitting next to the people who are playing for all their lives and have private lessons are scary, because they’re going to think, you don’t sound good at all, obviously, because with their attitudes, they’re going to be like, you don't really sound great, in their heads. Or they specifically circle notes obnoxiously. They’re like oh, that’s a B flat, by the way.

Student B faced similar challenges and said,

Feeling judged or feeling like I had to shrink my posture or whenever. Or they give you that little look when you mess up. Do you not know what that is? No, I
don’t. I’m dumb, sorry. I’m not trying to have them be like, are you dumb? Yes, but come on. I didn’t want them to be frustrated with me thinking that I can’t play; I should be in the first violins. That’s why I wanted you to help me.

When the seating was randomized for the eighth-grade Winter Concert, the students were scared to sit in the front. I used a randomizer app on my phone and the students found out their seating on the day of the concert. Student B said, “Also the fact that we learned that the seating was scrambled, was randomized, I was scared, because I thought I might be in the front, I’m not doing no solo, I am not.” For the students who normally sat in the back in previous years, they resisted sitting towards the front. They also feared the randomized seating that was used for concerts and competitions. This took a lot of reinforcement and I had to establish a rapport with the students in order to gain their trust. The motivation behind this practice was about equity.

After the district strings festival and competition, the students began to realize the social and musical benefits of ASP. They discovered that the ASP was in fact an equitable practice for their orchestra and it helped boost their confidence. Student A said in a journal entry,

In eighth grade when we switched up the seating rotations it also gave me a chance to feel what it’s like to play in first chair, for example when we played in the district strings festival even though there were only like four cellos in the orchestra. At first I was nervous because I was outside towards everyone watching but as we played I began to feel comfortable which helped me gain confidence in playing especially since it was such a big concert.

Student B said in the interview,

It helped a lot, because we started from the bottom, now we’re kind of here. I remember in eighth grade when we went to SSMA, we were scared. We were terrified. We were listening to, I don’t know, James was playing some drag queen music. Besides the point, we were nervous. We were going to start crying, we were shaking. You could tell we were nervous too because we never got this opportunity to do this stuff. We beat out the freshman orchestra. Kids who never sat in the front were sat in the front, so I was like wow, there actually is so much
hope for our orchestra, and that’s what brought us all so close. We’re obviously a super close grade, like we all know each other, we all talk to each other, we all laugh about these eighth-grade things all the time. Even the kids who are obnoxious about hierarchy and stuff, we’re all close with them anyway. Our confidence was there.

The principal received many complaints from parents about the orchestra program’s new seating practice. It also caused the principal to question my teaching practice. Principal A said,

When I first met you, I didn't have a good feel for what you were doing. I couldn't read you, to be honest. I know you were dedicated to equity. I know that you had done some work in Harlem, and I know that was the case. I had some concerns. After a period of time, I grew to appreciate the chances that you took in terms of breaking the systems here in terms of helping students that were non-traditional string players, in terms of seat placement, in terms of giving them extra help when they needed, staying late, giving a good time so all the kids have a chance to be successful.

At first, the principal and I did not get along so well. The principal had received a lot of complaints from parents, and made assumptions about me as a teacher. Without knowing the reason behind my teaching practice, the principal had little knowledge of the impact the hierarchical seating was making in my students socially. After witnessing the performance outcomes of ASP at the eighth-grade concert, there was an increase in administrative support for the integration of ASP for the orchestra. The parents, however, were resistant towards the practice and became increasingly strenuous about the changes. Principal A said,

It is a status symbol, where a child’s seat matters. It created quite a bit of uproar when they were told that you would not seat in a normal manner. I remember having phone calls and having to explain that. Some parents, particularly our more affluent parents, did not like it. We weren't changing, so they grew to accept it, with some resistance, of course. Really criticizing you and your teaching techniques not based on teaching, but based on what they wanted for their child in a seated position.
The orchestra parents were used to the chair challenges and seating auditions that were implemented in the middle school orchestra program prior to my arrival. I have learned that there were a few parents who would argue with teachers and try to enforce the hierarchical seating upon them so that their child could sit first chair.

Since I had arrived at the middle school and integrating ASP, the Winter Concert was the first time I experienced parents’ resistance towards the ASP changes. After the concert, I walked back to my car, only to discover two parents standing near my car ready to approach me. They were obviously upset by the seating outcomes of the concert. The next day, I received countless emails from parents who were disappointed in my seating practice and demanded that I bring back chair challenges and seating auditions for the orchestra. I spent countless hours on email conversations, parent-teacher conferences and meetings with my administration defending my practice of ASP. Parents have expressed their frustration about the seating changes (p. x). For example, one parent questioned how their child is supposed to work towards first chair if there are no standards. Another wrote why their child was not being rewarded for their skills. They had invested in private lessons for their child and were upset that their child was not first chair. Although some parents knew that the new seating was grounded on community building, they still felt that the seating was unfair to them and to their child. The students, however, responded differently, and found that the new seating actually took a lot of pressures off them. These white and affluent parents felt the need to question me daily about the seating. They also made false claims about the seating arrangement for the orchestra. For example, a parent said that the seating was determined by my cultural bias. This parent felt that the seating was determined by more culturally acceptable or cultural resemblance
of students of color. It was disheartening to hear this claim from these parents considering that 40% of the children in the orchestra at that time were from Haiti. Those students in the orchestra who might have “resembled” my ethnicity, numbered only four. The student who had sat first chair during that concert was a child from Haiti.

An article at a local newspaper was also published that did not speak the truth about the middle school orchestra seating. Parent 5 recalls the experience and said,

There was actually a newspaper article written regarding the disappointment of certain teachers and starting to insinuate that there was a preferential treatment after all, even if there was no real seating, that it was kind of like ... it was rigged. Just because the teacher knows this student this way and that way, and that's how people are given chair.

It became increasingly challenging especially when the parents began to bully me about the seating. Parent 5 also said,

I remember meeting you the first time. It was the first parent-teacher conference. I had heard a lot about you, but I had never met you. And this parent, literally I'm waiting there, tried to cut me off. I was like, "excuse me." And I spoke but, yeah, it seemed like a very tense trying to size you up kind of thing and just give you the million questions and why this, why isn't this happening and why. I don't know if you remember, but I was like, "wow, I feel bad for her." I had to go to my next conference, but I did feel badly for you.

It was a very challenging time in April; the students were preparing for their major competition and the Spring Concert. I emailed my professor during this time:

April 10, 2016

Dear Dr. C,

As you may know, my school district is a mixed demographic and socio-economic community that embraces the arts. However, there still is segregation among races.

When I first started at the Middle School, I learned there was a hierarchical system in place in the middle and high school orchestras. Students who took private lessons had the advantage over other students. I found it unfair and unjust that the students who happen to be children from Haiti were sitting in
the back of the orchestra. This lowered their confidence and self esteem. Therefore, I created a rotation orchestra. Of course the hierarchical system had been established to motivate students to try harder in the orchestra program but my belief as a teacher is that ALL children can do well and can be better with or without private lessons with proper instruction. My job as their teacher is to provide them with the highest quality of music education and string performance regardless of their backgrounds and experiences.

The dilemma I face today and am very distracted by is the fact that parents feel their child should sit first chair in the orchestra because they have the money to invest in their child's private lessons. My Haitian students are unable to afford lessons since most of them are immigrant or refugee children who recently came over to the US. I've wasted my energy and my time dealing with these issues on a daily basis and defending my practice of the rotation orchestra.

Recently, one of the parents wrote an article on a local newspaper about my orchestra. Instead of telling the truth about the orchestra's rotation, they twisted it saying it was based on preferential treatment. Another parent mentioned it was based on cultural resemblance. Yes, I agree...this is ridiculous and I shouldn't let this bother me but it does. It is disheartening to hear that even in our music society, such implicit bias still exists and music teachers allowed this to happen!

I seek your advice as my mentor. I questioned myself a few months ago, if I should give in to the parents who want their child to sit first chair because I thought it would make my life easier. Then my heart tells me what are you doing to the children sitting quietly in the back? This is unfair.

I learned quickly that the rotation orchestra is breaking tradition and brings more social justice. It also breaks the hierarchal establishment. It brought an uproar in the community and people were angry. Instead of witnessing the change in the level of the orchestra, they cared more about their child's seating assignment.

As for the children, they are all happy playing in orchestra. They see the level of their playing improve and are proud of their accomplishments. The rotation encourages the students to play together, sit with someone different everyday with one purpose in mind, to play beautiful music.

I want to know if you think this fight is really worth fighting for. I'm not strong enough for social justice but I'm willing to learn. I fought this battle alone for too long and it's affected my work, and my school work. Please help me and give me the strength to overcome this struggle.

Musically Yours,

Tammy Yi

After writing this email to my professor, I learned quickly that there were more issues that I had never thought of. Obviously, there is a lack of education and understanding of
what it means to truly be in an ensemble. Parent 6 witnessed my struggle and shared in an interview

So it's a very difficult situation when you have that because you were the teacher. Your hands are tied. The director's hands are tied because ... the principal's hands are tied.

I have never feared not being tenured, nor did I believe in it at that time but I could imagine what previous teachers had gone through and how they were pressured by parents to create a hierarchy in the orchestra even if their instincts were against it. Principal A shared that parents with affluence and power tried to, “blame” the school and teachers about their child’s participation in orchestra because ASP was unfair for their child. Principal A said in the interview,

Money, I should say. They have more influence, and spent more money with their child. We had gone around the fact that they couldn't change the seating system.

Diverse Friendships

The student participants then shared the social benefits of ASP and how they started to form new friendships. The hierarchy was broken, and they became socially aware of the differences that had existed in the orchestra. For example, Student B said in the interview,

Didn’t know there was a label on the first stand, you know that kind of situation. After becoming friends with the people, we realized they were like, yo we felt like we had to do all this and try so hard, and they even told us, you were good. Yeah, and they were like, you should play out. I was like oh, okay. After that, and realizing that we both struggle even though we’re both at different levels clearly, we can both relate somehow. In the end, we all started becoming really close. It went from talking shit about everybody. That, and being like dang, they sit in the back, they’re trash. It went from oh, we don’t have any specific seat anymore, and then listening.
Student B shares an important experience of the outcomes of ASP among the students participating in the orchestra; since the hierarchy was broken, students no longer worried about their seating and started to focus their attention on learning. Student M shared in the interview a similar experience:

Well, I learned that they struggle as much as I did. Even though they were so amazing, they still panic. Even when they do something correctly and they feel like they didn’t, they’re so hard on themselves. I felt bad, I was like, dang, they feel like they’re up to the point where they can’t make any mistakes is like they have to beat themselves up for it.

The students who normally sat in the back became friends with those who sat in the front. From my observation, students were sharing their experiences in conversation and learning not only technical abilities in musical performance; they learned the similarities and differences among them. For example, Student O said in an interview,

It also made me look at all of my friends in orchestra differently. I got to hear from them and see that they had some similar experiences with practicing and improving and it made me feel like we were all improving together, and that no one was just going to get shoved in the back anymore.

Student O made an interesting point about how sitting in ASP had helped students to learn about each other’s experiences. This social interaction helped the student develop a relationship with each other and achieve a common goal. Throughout all the hardship as their teacher, I saw the beauty behind ASP when the students began to develop friendships. I witnessed the development in friendships in orchestra class daily but saw the true bond the students had when we won first place at a music competition. Student G said in the online discussion, “I guess you would say you're forced but it was okay. We were forced to speak to one another, someone new. But it was okay because now we're really close like a family.” Student C said,
As a group, I feel like we got way closer in eighth grade, because I remember we used to be very separated and we would have our own groups within the orchestra. When eighth grade came, I just remember music in the parks ... I never felt such a strong bond before with every member in the orchestra. I remember I would talk to people in the orchestra I would never talk to before, and we would just ... We talked like we've known each other for years, and it felt really strange, but in a good way.

I was very proud of my students for all the struggles and adversity they had to overcome with a new teacher, new music and new seating practices. It was beautiful to see them celebrate together. Student T said in the online discussion,

One of the most memorable moments was when we were on the bus going to Six Flags in eighth grade and we heard the news that we had gotten gold. I remember it was so exhilarating and the energy of the whole bus was so alive-something I can’t truly explain with words. After all of our hard work, we could celebrate and look forward to the fun ahead of us. I felt like this moment was a milestone for our middle schools orchestra program, and that it brought us together as players and classmates.

Student O shared in their essay,

During our first major competition, Miss Yi scrambled our seating once again. We went onstage with someone new next to us, and played extremely well. No one felt awkward about where they were, and no one was upset about not being in the front. We all shared a mutual feeling of excitement and desire to do well. After the performance we got back on the bus, commenting on our playing as a whole and complementing each other. We were all extremely nervous but supported one another, much like a family. Miss Yi came back on the bus and told us the results, with the orchestra winning gold. The award felt like major validation for all of our hard work as a group and everything we had gone through together. This moment was like one big epiphany. We all noticed how far we had come in just one year, both together and individually. The award was an extremely uplifting part of what was already my favorite year in orchestra up to that point in time. I never felt so connected to the people around me, and although I did not know every single person, nor was I best friends with everyone there; I felt like a member of an extremely loving and supportive group of people, who all had similar goals in mind. We all wanted to succeed, but it was now a universal desire to succeed as a group and uplift each other, rather than all go through experiences alone.

It was a beautiful exchange to see that the students began to come together and form deep-rooted friendships. After the prior misunderstandings of one another, there began an
awareness of their diversity, uniqueness, and the true makeup of their orchestra. In an interview, Student F said,

I think that during the concerts when we sit with random people from different classes I think that it's a good experience because it's like some people we never sat with, never spoken with, you can talk to people, you can give them your advice, they can give you their advice, it's an exchange between people you don't know, so probably the advice would be real, and I think it's cool how we sit.

ASP had worked for their orchestra, and become an impactful way for students to develop friendships. Student K said in an interview, “When I'd done it eighth grade, I just started liking it a lot more, created new friends, becoming a family.” The competition results had proven that equitable practices for the orchestra can succeed. Student H said in the class discussion,

The seat rotation in eighth grade really made the orchestra feel equalized compared to the system we had before with the best players in front. At the time the seat rotation was new to me and felt very weird but I grew accustomed to it. It made the orchestra feel more fun and equalized because now all the players were considered equal and all of us had a chance to shine in the front seat.

Student M said in the class discussion, “Rotation seating helped with the hierarchy because EVERYONE sat with each other and we would be comfortable with sitting with everyone and learning how to play with different people.” ASP was also encouraging students to break out of their comfort zone, and that was an important practice for them. For example, Student J said in an interview,

It motivates me because it makes me get to know the player and I like making new friends and talking to people and we can relate our experiences of playing and sitting in new seats always put me out my comfort zone, which I’m trying to do this year so I can experience more things.

Principal A said,

Performance, I felt improved. Again, I thought the kids did a great job. We heard a lot of compliments when we had the concerts, and the level of music that is being played here. I think kids, their self esteem improved as well, because
they're not buried in the back. Often life, not just in strings, if you are a minority child, you’re kind of used to being pushed to the back all too often.

Principal A shares a perspective how minority children in the orchestra are like being a minority in the real world. For the parents, ASP was confusing but they saw the social benefits of the practice in their own children. Parent 3 said, “I think we asked at one point, like, ‘Oh, did you guys have chair assignments?’ And he's like, ‘No, we're just moving around.’ It completely did not register.” ASP was something non-traditional, even in musical ensembles. There was a lack of understanding of why the practice was implemented for the orchestra. However, Parent 1 discovered that this was a beneficial practice for their son. Parent 1 said,

I’ve asked him before the performances where are you gonna sit? And it’s always different, and I guess it just didn’t really occur to me until recently, that this was an intentional thing which I think is great. It works really well for Nathan just in his temperament and the way he is and everything. I think that it’s been better.

For students like Nathan, who struggled with making friendships, ASP provided an opportunity for students to learn about Nathan and discover his unique personality. From my observation, the students began to bond with him; he developed communication skills and now students say hello to him in the hallways. ASP helped students similar to Nathan and also students who took private lessons and were normally sat in the front during prior years. Parent 6 shared their child’s awareness on the social benefits of ASP for all students in the orchestra. For example, Parent 6 said,

My daughter thought it was great. When you were her teacher, she came home to me and she goes, "Mom, she's really tough on us." I said, "Okay well, that's all right." I said, "Do you like her?" "Yeah I like her, but she's really, really tough and we're going to switch seats," and she goes, "but I like that part of it." I said, "Why do you like that?" She goes, "Because kids who are not so good can get a chance to be in the front."
ASP also helped diminish anxiety and pressure for the private lesson student. Parent 6 also said,

She actually prefers it. She said because of the pressure...I think it's made her want to play more because it's like, "Okay. Well I don't always have to be in the front. I can sit in the back and I'm still good. I'm still part of the orchestra."

At the end of eighth grade, the students began to form an appreciation of the process and began creating a diversity of friendships within the orchestra. Friendships were an important part of the student’s social and musical development. While practicing ASP, students were motivated by their peers and the teacher. The seating was encouraging the students to practice, and broke the hierarchy that was embedded in their minds. They became the agents of change a year later entering high school.

**Ninth-Grade Social Experiences**

ASP had created the opportunity for the students to form a bond with each other. It also gave me the opportunity to engage with all students especially during the times the students were rotated through the front seats. After transferring to the high school, the students were excited to hear that I was going to be the high school orchestra teacher. In the interview, Parent 2 said,

When she knew she was leaving eighth grade to come to the high school, she was like, "I'm not gonna have Ms. Yi anymore." I said, "Yeah, you'll probably have Mr. J." She was like, "Well, that's good." But when she found out that you were coming, oh my goodness. She jumped for joy. "Guess what? Ms. Yi's coming. We're gonna have her." She was thrilled. I was, too. She was thrilled. Thrilled.

It was a common understanding among the students that those students who were more invested in music by the time they reached high school would join the high school orchestras, but that was not the case that year. All 40 eighth-grade students decided to
enroll in one of the high school orchestras, Chamber Orchestra and/or String Orchestra. The students who sat in the back of the orchestra during their middle school years began to recruit other students into the ensembles. Student M said in the interview, “I had a sense, you were coming. I was like, you know what I’m going to do it. I was like, everyone, I was like, I’m going to do it. You should do it too.” Even the parents who had their children take private lessons were excited that I was moving up to the high school. Parent 1 said, “We found out at camp that summer. At music camp when we walked out to the car. Nathan was jumping up and down. He was really happy.” and Parent 3 said, “Mike was so psyched. So thrilled and really, really happy to continue working with you. Yeah, it was nothing but positive and looking forward to moving on.”

Being the high school orchestra teacher that year was very challenging for me and the students. New teacher, new seating and new teaching practices…again. The community was also very involved at the high school level since the orchestras have performed frequently at community events and performances. There were a lot of issues when I arrived at the high school and rumors were being spread that I did not believe in hierarchy seating. The community did not respond well to the changes, but my students in the eighth-grade class were ready to meet the challenges with me.

**Breaking Barriers**

During the interviews, the student participants expressed their concerns going into the high school orchestras, which was a mixed level ninth- through 12th-grade class. Although there were two ensembles, Chamber Orchestra and String Orchestra, the challenges in the two ensembles were the same. Student M said in the interview,

We were all like, this is it. We were so upset going into ninth grade because we're like damn, we have to go through this all over again, but that was not the
case. It was like the older kids at first were like oh, the younger kids, but then we pulled up and we were like listen, we’re not playing these games. We gassed ourselves hard, so when we came in the first day of school, we were like, y’all ain’t nothing. We are coming from this amazing eighth grade orchestra, y’all can’t touch us.

During that first year, the students and I received a lot of resistance from the upperclassmen. In the past, the high school ensembles practiced seating hierarchy by using seating auditions and chair challenges as a way to motivate students to practice. This system of hierarchy was inspired at the high school ensembles and then practiced in the middle school orchestras. During an interview, Student B shared, “There were some problems with that seating. There were a lot of problems amongst many people, because we were like, we felt like a lot of the people were like oh, this is it, there are going to be some new kids in the front, new kids in the front.” The 10th-12th graders were resistant to the changes and during every orchestra class, the seniors would position themselves towards the front, and then the juniors and then the sophomores behind them.

Principal B said in an interview, “Well I always knew there was first chair, I knew somebody was always fighting for first chair and it was always some type of dispute over first chair for years.” Principal B also shared that the school had always practiced “tradition types of seating” in the high school orchestras. Although the principal was unfamiliar with orchestral practices, the principal discovered that ASP, which was “kids facing each other” and “moving around,” and “changing seats,” was different from what was originally practiced for the ensemble, but witnessed how ASP was an equitable seating practice for the orchestra.

The seniors were more resistant to any changes in the ensemble, especially when ASP was integrated. They had practiced traditional hierarchy seating structures since the
fourth grade and thought they would sit in the front of the orchestra during their senior year. During the interview with the high school principal, Principal B said,

"We had some push back last year. You did a nice job last year bringing all your students together. I think we had some graduates that had a different, you know, perspective that were kind of the outside playing the inside. But, with everything else, once you move this class through and the next class through, the kids won't know anything else but your way. You're teaching them something new, so you won't have that push back anymore. But I think we've been very supportive of you and I think the students are coming around and they're starting to realize what the method is, what the meaning is behind your method and the reasoning, which is good."

The administrators were supportive of ASP because they witnessed the effectiveness and increase student engagement during my teacher observations. The seniors, who were used to traditional seating structures, tried to influence the underclassmen and tried to encourage the freshmen to follow the traditional hierarchy. They wanted to follow tradition and demanded that seating auditions are held and that the system of hierarchy would hold students accountable for their practicing. They had been disappointed with other students in the past who would not practice and knew that their lack of ability would affect the entire ensemble. There were also some influences from students who had already graduated, the alumni, who felt that they could share their opinion on the changes and instigate even more problems. They thought that on the basis of my opposition to hierarchical seating patterns, I was not a good teacher. During an interview, Student K said, "They probably didn’t like it at first because they were used to the way things were before. They had to talk to freshmen and sit next to a freshman everyday.” ASP had to be practiced daily, and gradually, the upperclassmen began to see the benefits of the practice. They were happy to see that the orchestra was playing better, because they cared so much about their ensemble. After all, these were the students who stuck
with the orchestra program throughout the years, and students who were not motivated
due to the loss of interest for orchestra or the hierarchical seating challenges would have
dropped out by the time they reached high school.

**Building Community**

ASP was practiced during that first year at the high school and the ninth-grade
students and I had to work together in building an ASP community for the orchestras.
The students understood the challenges of ASP from their experiences in eighth grade
and knew it would take time to change the minds of the upperclassmen. They were
positive about the experience and became the agents of change for ASP at the high
school. They also gained valuable lessons sitting with them. During an interview, Student
G said, “Because for freshmen or for an underclassman, speaking to an upperclassman
would be very intimidating.” Student K and Student I experienced the same thing. They
called themselves, “the new kids on the block.” Student I said in the interview, “We get
to see other students and we got to know them better and we’re starting to learn who they
are.” The students wanted to practice ASP, but encountered the challenges of the practice
with the upperclassmen. They knew they had to build relationships with everyone in the
ensemble and how they would experience the benefits of ASP through that way. Student
K said in an interview, “We had to show them how to use the system that you brought
up.”

During the online discussion, the students shared how ASP helped them with their
transition into the high school. Since the orchestras were a mixed ninth- 12th-grade class,
they were able to meet all the students in their section. Student C shared in the online
discussion,
So then, transitioning to ninth grade, it was the exact same way, even though this orchestra's 10 times bigger, it wasn't that hard to make new friends, especially with the upperclassmen, because of the rotation. I got to sit next to new people and would talk to them, and it was way easier to bond. So, I didn't feel like we were divided into groups anymore. It was more like one big cohesive orchestra. Even when we had group practices for concerts and even though for the people we've never seen in the other periods it was still not that hard to work together and create friendships.

ASP helped students to learn from the upperclassmen and conversations about classes, graduation and colleges were exchanged. For example, Student R said in an interview,

Even being a part of chamber, I got to know different upperclassmen. That really helped me with classes and stuff because they could give me head's up on what to expect. And just to know different people, even in your own grade, helps you grow as a person. Because you're really like, "Wow! Different command and then you learn different cool things about people.

There were a few upperclassmen who struggled making friendships with others and ASP had opened up new friendships for those students. In Student J’s journal entry, it read,

Today I sat with a girl who was a senior and we became better friends. We started talking more during track practice and seems very cool, nice and funny. We both are at somewhat of the same level when it comes to playing the violin. I should sit with her more because I only sit with her three times this year.

In an interview, Student T said,

I usually sat with this one kid that I wouldn't think to sit with. And he was a junior at the time, I'm not really sure. But, I don't know, we got along. And he was a good person to sit next to. I don't know how to explain it. I got to know him better. And it makes me happy because I would never expect to really talk to him inside of orchestra or outside of orchestra, really, if I didn't know him from there. But now I say "Hi" to him in the hallways and it's just nice to know different people.

Although the concerts were validation of the effectiveness of ASP, it was the competitions that were rewarding for the student participants. They were excited to see that ASP worked at the high school level and that the upperclassmen were beginning to
entrust in the practice. In the online discussion, students noted how much ASP had helped them become close friends with the upperclassmen. Student M said,

Ninth grade was the best year for me. Towards the end of the year, we were all so close. Too close, too close. Yeah, so that’s when I think we all realized, and when we had Steven go up and get the award, at that moment I was like, this is us.

Student B also reacted the same way and shared, “We were all so supportive, and when we won awards, everybody cheered for each other.” Student I wrote in the online discussion,

The most memorable moment in orchestra was the last time went to competition freshman year. The experience felt different from the year before. I felt that at that competition I felt more of a connection with the pieces and the people around me playing it. It felt unified.

I was curious to learn about the social and musical experiences with ASP with the upperclassmen that year so I conducted a pilot study with a few upperclassmen by using student journals and focus group sessions online. I discovered why the upperclassmen were resistant towards ASP. Student 1 said in their journal,

I feel like if the orchestra doesn’t sit with their friends then there is a huge lack of emotion. It’s always nice to sit with someone you don’t usually play with from time to time, but it’s not like in that very moment a connection between them will emerge. I’ve observed this myself and I strongly feel that if you sit next to someone who you bond with, then the connection from y’all will transfer into your playing and it will result in a better sounding orchestra that can display feelings and emotions!

ASP had influenced conversations between other upperclassmen. Student 2 discovered that they had a similar taste in clothes with their stand partner. Student 2 shared in their journal,

I sat next to a person I haven’t played with in a pretty long time. I complimented her shirt ‘cause I genuinely liked the print and material but also to break any tension between us.
Student 2 also shared their experience sitting with another upperclassman in the orchestra to whom they do not talk. Student 2 wrote in their journal,

My stand partner is someone I see regularly outside of orchestra. I won’t say I don’t like them, but due to a few bad incidences in the past I don’t have complete trust in them. Nevertheless, I didn’t let those past incidences influence our playing. Every time we messed up we would turn to each other and laugh which really made us both relaxed.

In the pilot study, Student 3 discovered common backgrounds and experiences with their new stand partner. Student 3 shared in their journal,

Today, I sat next to someone I met this year. We clicked very well. She’s an amazing player as well as a person. Musically I felt her pulse, which made us play together. Her and I are very similar. We come from the same place, which is Haiti. We play the same sport so we have many things in common. During class we laugh a lot together.

**Fostering Diversity**

During the school year, enrollment increased for the orchestras. Students began to bring their friends to orchestra class during their off periods. They would sit and observe the class, and listen to the non-traditional, traditional and multicultural musical works the orchestra was performing. I had a lack of double bass players in the orchestras, so I demonstrated playing the bass while I had students throughout the ensemble conduct the orchestra. These students did not have prior knowledge in music, nor did they get a chance to learn to play an instrument in elementary or middle school. Most of these students did not have access to music education, since they were pulled out for ENL classes and special education classes during music classes at the elementary school. They were interested, and that’s all that mattered to me. The students would attend concerts and see how much the orchestra looked like a family and they wanted to be part of it. The student participants shared with others outside of orchestra, mostly children of color, that
the orchestra was about, “love, variety and being about breaking out of your shell. We’re an exciting, friendly but still cool environment,” said Student I in an interview. In another interview, Student M shared,

I know a lot of people who didn’t do orchestra that are now trying to get interested in seeing us play. It’s like wow, I really want to be part of that family, because it really essentially is a family. That’s how close we are.

Student M also shared how they began to motivate others by telling them,

It’s going to be good. You’re really good. I was telling people that they were good. I would even be like, before it was bonding over how bad we were, now I’m telling people you’re so good, you can do it.

Even though Student M expresses so much excitement for the orchestra program and began recruiting other students, I recall a conversation with Student M in regards to their internal conflict with racial identity. Student M shared a concern during 9th grade how students who had the same racial background would bully them for having a diverse group of friends who were members of the orchestra.

Some students were protective of the orchestra and didn’t want others to join. For example, Student B said in the interview,

We’re so close now that whenever suddenly, who used to talk bad about orchestra are like, I want to join, I’m like, no. Sorry. You missed the train, since fourth grade, it stopped boarding at seventh.

During the year, the enrollment for one of the classes increased from 55 students to 80. There were too many students in the ensembles, that some freshmen and I began teaching new students during lunchtime on how to hold a double bass and then performing it at concerts at a SSMA level 4-6. For the students, it was a rewarding experience and ASP helped students to encourage each other and break out of their comfort zone together. These students were comfortable learning how to play an instrument because there was
no hierarchy in the orchestras. The hierarchy in the high school was challenging to break, but the ninth graders believed in ASP because they saw that it worked for them when they were in eighth grade. It was challenging as the teacher, considering the upperclassmen were very resistant to the changes. They were also resistant towards me being the teacher and bringing a new practice for the ensemble.

10th-Grade Social Experiences

This year, the new ninth graders had the opportunity to experience ASP at the high school. When I was the middle school orchestra teacher, these students were in the seventh grade, and we had practiced ASP then, but after I went up to the high school, the new middle school orchestra teacher practiced hierarchy seating and conducted seating auditions with the students. The teacher also received a lot of resistance from the students, so she left the school midyear. During an interview, Principal A recalls the experience and said,

We did hire a teacher that did not follow this philosophy. That teacher soon had to leave, because it really was such a disruptive force to what people were used to. After experiencing a level of equity, to go back to non-equitable seating, it didn't work, and that teacher decided to resign based on that, the resistance that they received.

Advocacy and Awareness

Now in its third year, the orchestras practice ASP and the classes have become more democratic. Students exchange leadership roles throughout the ensemble, sharing authority, and musical ideas with me and the rest of the orchestra. There was an increase in enrollment again in the orchestras, with new members learning how to play an instrument for the first time, and a new group of musicians, the ninth graders. The student
participants who are now 10th graders became protective of the bond they shared during their ninth-grade year with the upperclassmen because there was a rumor that the middle school orchestra teacher practiced hierarchy with the newcomers. Student B said in the interview, “I noticed that now still for the first [violins] and stuff, that this whole scramble seating’s slowing down once again.” Student M said in the interview,

It’s slowing down, because people are starting to gravitate towards the same seats, and these freshmen are blocking up the process. I get that they’re scared or whatever, but we were scared too at one point. They’re freshman, like freshmen are hiding.

Student B agreed with Student M and said, “They’re hiding. It’s starting again. That’s why we’re falling behind once again from what happened last year, it’s because of the freshman.” Student B also shared that other 10th-grade students felt the same way about the ninth graders and wanted me to have a “military camp for orchestra” so we can train the new ninth graders together. Student B said in an interview,

They’re getting too comfortable with their seating. They’re also always sitting with their friends. Michelle, Ruby, and I have tried to switch them up, but they don’t listen. I mean, sometimes they do listen when I’m like all right, stop playing games. We ain’t having this. We don’t need speeches every day, but we need a genuine, put your instrument in your cases, lock it up, I’m taking this period to discuss. Because we need a discussion period, not like five minutes. Put your seats on the corner, we’re all going to sit on the dusty orchestra floor, and we are going to have a chat.

The students also believe that ASP should be integrated early on. For example, Student B said, “Super early, not even eighth grade. As soon as you join, fourth grade they should be on top of this stuff.” Student B and Student M shared a lot of frustration about the ninth grade students. They felt that the ninth graders had broken up the orchestra family. Student M shares a challenge with ASP with a freshman bass player during the interview.

Every time I tell Henry to move, he’s like, why am I moving? Henry, can you just get up and move please, without any comment. That’s why I made Jessica
move, because I know he’s not going to want to move. If I tell him, he’s not going to want to move. He’s like, why? Why do you have to have to ask why all the time? Just do it. We'd just like you to be nice in general, because sometimes they're rude to you. You could be saying oh, take out your instrument, and they'd be like well, why? I don't want to. Listen dumbass, you're taking out your instrument because you have to play. There's a bond missing this year, there's something missing. Last year it was full, there's something missing. I don't know why. Freshmen are trying to step up and say what the people that are trying to lead are doing wrong. You need to settle down.

They also feared that I was not going to be their teacher anymore, and with a new teacher, the chair challenges and seating auditions would come back to the high school.

In an interview, Student B said, “Yeah, if you weren’t coming back, I would not continue. We were both like, we’re dropping if she doesn’t come back.” Student F also shared the same reaction in the interview,

I know how horrible this sounds, but if you're not here, I'm done with the orchestra, because I'm not ready for another teacher to bring us back to the level we were at. We came so far, I don't think many teachers are as encouraging as you are, and with all the school work I have on top of that, if I don't feel love or passion for what I'm doing, what am I here for?

I wanted to know why these students felt this way so Student P shared, “Because if I'm in the back of the orchestra, as if I'm trying to say something you won't hear my voice or what I have to say just based on where I'm sitting in the orchestra in the back.” This was such a powerful statement from Student P so I sought to understand why there was a sense of advocacy among the students. Student O said in an interview,

Even in class, just sitting next to a different person, or sitting closer to the front or closer to the back, wherever it might be, it's a new experience every day. It makes you feel better about yourself, because you're going to play the way you play whether you practice or not, you're going to play a certain way every day, and the person next to you or the person in front of you shouldn't dictate how you play or how happy you are in that class, or even where you sit shouldn't dictate how happy you are.
ASP became an important way for students to discover and appreciate diversity in the group. In a recent parent interview a parent discussed the importance of ASP and how it can create a social awareness of the injustices occurring in the world. It gave an opportunity for students who were from underserved populations to share their story, their experiences and educate others. During a parent interview, Parent 4 shared why ASP was an important practice for their child.

This is a country that's a melting pot regardless of what anyone else wants to think. I'm an immigrant, I came here when I was 16 years old, and I have to tell you, I have not felt discrimination the way I do right now over the past few years. And it's very disturbing. I didn't even realize I was different color when I came to this country to be honest with you. It sounds stupid but I didn't feel that way. And for me, I'm scared for my children. I also have a son, and they go happy-go-lucky. I go, "No, no, no, no, no. You need to be careful. You need to pull it back. We're in a different world right now because of what's happening and the awareness. And I even say that to my daughter. I'm like, "Don't care what anybody says, educate people. Whoever you sit next to, say hello, learn about them. Let them learn about you." And you know what? I think it works for her. And she loves meeting new people, and I think the seat assignment, moving them around is just helping them along.

ASP also created an awareness for students who came from affluence. For example, Parent 6 said,

She even said to me, she goes, Mom, some people can't afford to buy an instrument, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be in the front, or they shouldn't be seen." We're lucky enough where I could afford to buy that instrument for her. But there are people who can't. She's happy about that though, that other people can be known. Because money doesn't mean you can't be known.

It was such a powerful statement from Parent 6’s child that it relates so well to Student P’s experiences. ASP had created a social awareness for the students and the parents.
Social Equity

The 10th-grade orchestra students began to advocate for ASP because they wanted to maintain a socially equitable environment in the classroom. Principal B supports the social equity in ASP for the high school. During an interview, Principal B said,

“Yes, no, I love it. I think that you see a new excitement. I think the students seem to be much more engaged and passionate about what they’re doing and at times when they’re playing against each other. That play, when you had them facing you know, I think about the one student you have, and how he was so animated as he was playing. I think that it gives every kid a fair shot and they’re all on the same equal playing fields. Which I think that’s what your intention is. I think you’re meeting them. Which I think really shows equity. You know, you’re trying to get everybody at an equitable situation.

Parents began to realize the social benefits as it relates to their own children. In a parent interview, Parent 1 shared,

“...When I see him sit down in the performances, I see improved interaction between him and whoever he's sitting with. Whereas before eighth grade, I felt like he was really lost. Like he just wasn't really sure where he was supposed to go or what he was supposed to do, but even at that time, he was definitely at least in the middle of the pack as far as playing quality. It's not like he was the worst player and needed to be way in the back so that you couldn't hear him. He was a pretty decent player at that time, but I do feel like he's more integrated now, and I see more friendly interactions between him and whoever he's sharing a stand with. And when he does tell me about conversations that he has with people at school when he comes home, it's a lot of times kids from orchestra. Those are the stories that he's telling me. Nathan also doesn't have a lot of friends outside of school. He has like one really close guy friend, but he's not super social. But I do feel like he's been more social at school because of that.

It was important to me to maintain a socially equitable environment for all my students and with that practice of equity, I felt that the students can still achieve a higher level of performance. In an interview, Student P said,

“If you were in the same concert seating from back then based on how you play, I feel like the way people act now and how they're strong with their playing wouldn't be the same. Everybody would still be the same, but possibly kids would have dropped out already just based on the way it was before.”
This year, the students realized that the orchestra had to be equitable because Student O said in an interview,

I think that it made us all feel like we don't know who's going to be first, so let's work together to be the best that we can be as a group. It made us all improve as one. The whole difference in where everyone's at, but when we play together it's like we're all on the same page, just because we all got to experience that sitting first, or sitting next to someone new just because of the rotation orchestra, we all got to improve together.

The Principal also witnessed the social benefits and said,

I just think that it's a collaboration of people coming together, you know, collaboration of people bringing their skills together to make a beautiful music. It's a collaboration of people bringing so much together to make beautiful, beautiful music.

**Pride**

During the interview sessions, the students had a sense of pride of the teamwork that was established because of ASP. They gained confidence in their playing ability and saw ASP as an opportunity to create new friendships. They bonded with the new ninth graders, and reflected on how ASP had helped them and the orchestra. Witnessing the improvement in themselves and in others was inspirational to them. Student T said in an interview,

It was nice to see a change in the orchestra and to see how people did improve. Because I know there were people that I went to elementary school with and they were unmotivated. They didn't want to practice. They didn't think that they were good enough either and so they were unmotivated with orchestra. With everything that came along with seating rotation, it gave them a chance and it gave them hope to improve because when you're told always, "I belong in the back" or "I belong in the middle", it doesn't make you motivated or want to try harder to get in the front if no matter what your efforts are they'll always be futile. With that, it gave people a chance. I've noticed so many people improve throughout the years. I have seen my classmates grow. It's good.

Student X also felt the same way and shared in the interview,
I think everything has improved within the past few years. There was usually beef all of the time before seating rotations and different things like that. Now, it has gotten calmer. People, at least in my perspective, people around me don't care as much cause we're all chilling.

Since the seating was randomized for the concert, Student F shares how the seating helped their parents see them in the front for the first time. Student F said in the interview,

This year I don't care. If it's open I'll sit there, but one of my favorite parts of growing as an orchestra had been hearing our parents and the response, the feedback we got back on oh my gosh, look at my high school's orchestra now. We went from our parents being like oh you did good, to now, like that was actually so good, you guys were amazing. My mom has always told me, I want to see you. I could see you, but I want to see you somewhere where I can see you and focus on you. I could barely see you during the concerts, and I thought it was really cool this past concert how I sat on the end, because even though I wasn't first chair, you could get a clear view of how I was playing and where I sat. It was really good. But I'm really happy on how I did during the concerts, and I thought it was really cool this past concert how I sat on the end, because even though I wasn't first chair, you could get a clear view of how I was playing and where I sat. It was really good. But I'm really happy on how I did, but I remember right before I got to the concert I was like to my mom, "You're going to love where I'm sitting. I'm not going to tell you, but it's going to be a great surprise for you." I remember how happy she was hearing that. It was good.

Like Student F, this was a first time for Student C to sit in the front of the orchestra.

Student C said, “Everyone was very supportive. They were congratulating me, like you're in the front that's great. And I was very surprised. I just remember telling my mom. She was so proud. She was like finally you're in the front. I can see you now.” Student C said,

My parents were very proud of me. I remember their comments and reactions compared to sixth and seventh grade. Before they would always be like, "You guys are really good, but I preferred the band, they were amazing." Now they're always like I can't wait ... And now they're always like I can't wait for the orchestra, I can't wait to see what you guys are going to do next, and you guys are going to do great at competition. I just remember the feeling I had during competition when we won gold. I felt so proud that we came such a long way, especially from middle school. We went from people saying it's like the orchestra isn't that great or that good to I want to be in orchestra, or I want to participate, or watch them, or be them even.
ASP has also inspired students to explore other possibilities. For example, Student B built a lot of confidence in their playing and auditioned for the Chamber Orchestra last year.

While you rotated us more and more and more, the nerves started to go away. Especially being like, as you see us now, even before Amy switched to the bass, we were so used to being sat where at this point, that we were like okay. I'm sat in first chair? No it was like, I'm so used to this scrambled seating that everybody gets a chance at it, sitting first chair, and then it's whole process. Then I was like okay, if I can easily sit wherever and play confidently or sit with whoever, then I can probably try to do chamber orchestra. It helped, helped a lot.

**Inside Awareness to “Outside Practice”**

ASP had inspired students to share the experiences outside with others. They’ve been practicing ASP for the past three years, and have moved away from hierarchy. For example, Student O had participated at Senior All County this year, which was a district music festival, and only the students who scored a high enough score on SSMA solo the year before get selected to participate. Student O said,

After switching to bass I felt a lot more confident because I was actually able to love my instrument, and this year I got the opportunity to participate at senior all county. While I was there I noticed a lot of the kids were really centered on where they sat and who was next to them, and if they were as prepared as the person they were with, or whatever the reason. They were all very anxious to be first. It was a very different experience, because I remember saying to one of the girls who's my friend from another school, I don't care where I sit, as long as I'm here. I'm just happy to be here, and she was very astonished by my answer because she was like I'm second, isn't that great. It's like sure, good for you, but I'm fine sitting in the back, because I'm playing the same music as you and I'm still here, it's just great to be here.

During the parent interview, Parent 2 said,

She was taking lessons in the beginning from a neighbor of mine who taught music in high school. And it's funny. Going back to that question kind of. When she mentioned to the teacher that the seats were moved around now, everybody has a particular seat, she was like, "Oh, really?" Teacher was like, "Oh, really? That's different. Why she do that?" I said, "She does it because she feels it's fair to everybody." And we just kind of left it at that.
This awareness was not just shared in the various outside ensembles the students were participating in, it was also shared with their parents and community. Student J said in the online discussion, “From middle school to high school my view of orchestra has changed completely.” and Student G said, “The orchestra may sound good with the top people in the first seats, but it would probably sound better with others sitting it in front and mixing it around to influence the music a lot better.” The parents also shared the social outcomes from their perspective and what they witnessed in their child’s social development.

Parent 2 said,

She is very focused with school and music and ... she doesn't have a lot of friends. I'll put it to you this way. I mean, her classmates she's friendly with but outside of the school, not so much, okay? So ... like I said before, this has opened up an opportunity for her to make more friends and being a little bit more friendly with people that she wouldn't normally be with. When I watched the music department, all of it, all the children with all the different instruments, it's like a community. You know, the children are like a community within themselves, and they laugh and have a good time, they enjoy it, they talk about it, they ... So it's like ... my daughter does not lack self-confidence at all. But it's like now she feels like, I think she's come to a place where she feels she's fitting into the community of music, so to speak.

Parents began to support ASP further and share the experience with others. Parent 1 said,

That's a really good point especially now with everything that's happening socially in our country. This is a really great thing that you're doing because it's a way to objectively address discrimination based on what somebody looks like or other preconceived notions of someone that's different from them. It is serving that function, and I hadn't really thought about it before, but what you were saying about how ... this in particular is really to Nathan that they're interacting with him in an improved way because it's true. Especially when he was younger, if you'd look at him from far away and you'd see him do some of his ticks that was causing the bullying, but now, they're all having to interact with him by moving around and they can see that he's funny, he's interesting, he's into a lot of different things, he loves reading, he's very artistic. He's like a really complex cool person. But was by the time he reached high school totally closed off because of the experiences that he had when he was younger. So your moving the chairs around and kind of forcing the other kids to get to know him better is, it's great.

Parent 2 said,
You get a chance to meet other people that you might not get to meet or even talk to or share the stand with and music with. It’s just a different type of learning experience meeting someone else by sharing that stand or whatever. That’s somebody she might not get a chance to do that with on a regular basis. And she loves...your class is her favorite class. I’m not just saying that. Your class is her favorite class. She loves the fact that it’s, you know, you’re very strict and very organized and very concise about everything you’re doing. She loves it. At the same time, she enjoys the music...but she really likes the idea of having different seats and not just having the best person up front and not so good person in the back or whatever regardless of what their ethnicity is, but she just likes the whole idea of moving it around, everybody getting to know each other.

Students who took private lessons since the fourth grade saw leadership benefits without the hierarchy. For example, Parent 6 said,

The seating, she has no problem with it. She is very happy with this way it's happening because, as I said, she doesn't always need to be in the front. She said, "I like being in the back, Mom. I want to be a leader. I want to help somebody. I wanna make sure that the group is doing this." I think that this is easier for her to have this kind of seating so it's less pressure on a kid, in particular her also.

The students began to share their journal entries this year and what they learned from ASP. Student T said,

I thought when it was first introduced, that it was a good idea or something that was interesting. I wasn't exactly opposed to it, but it was like, "Oh, it's there". I am not really thinking much of it. I think it's important because of all the benefits. When you have seating arranged in a sense where there is the best are in the front and then the "worst" are in the back, then it does create a sort of hierarchy. And it creates privilege in the mindsets of people that think that they are automatically deserving of a certain seat when it's not always the case and people do improve.

From another student journal, Student O shares,

It’s extremely fascinating to see how far we’ve all come, both separate and together as a group. All of this happened because of an extremely uplifting and confidence-boosting seating plan and mentality and I couldn’t be more thankful to have experienced it. Without it, I wouldn’t be anywhere close to where I am today and it’s just wonderful to have been a part of it. I hope one day everyone can stop focusing on where they sit and just all be together playing music, happy and thankful to be invited along.
As stated by student O, ASP was very, “uplifting” for the students and for the community. Even throughout all the struggles and changes in the student’s social experiences and interactions with others, ASP was a needed practice for them and really helped them through their adolescent social development. This year, I felt less resistance from students and parents about ASP. I also believe that due to the success of the program and the outcomes of the student’s participation in the orchestra, the community, who had advocated for seating auditions received resistance from the school and the students.

**Summary**

ASP gave students the opportunity to become aware of themselves, of each other’s differences, and feel the experience in different positions within the hierarchy. By learning each other’s struggles, and relating to each other’s experiences, students began forming friendships that encouraged them to work together towards the common goal of orchestral performance. The seating experience encouraged them to become advocates for the practice as they entered high school. As they became the agents of change, they encountered challenges with other students who were resistant that then encouraged them to advocate for social equity.

Learning from the social experiences, it is important to look into the musical development of the orchestra, and if the social justice impact used by ASP perpetuated any musical satisfaction for the students, parents, and administrators.
Eighth-Grade Musical Experiences

There was a clear distinction in abilities between the students who sat in the back of the orchestra and students who sat in the front. As their teacher, I felt it was my responsibility to close the achievement gap for this orchestra, so I believed that ASP was one way that this orchestra can develop skills. The students lacked technical abilities in strings performance and did not have a unified cohesive sound as an ensemble. As a motivator, ASP provided all students the opportunity to sit towards the front of the orchestra. The common themes that emerged from the students musical experiences were the following: (a) Seating Motivation, (b) Musical Partners, and (c) Musical Rewards.

Motivation in Seating Practices

Some students described how ASP influenced their motivation to practice. The front of the orchestra provided me, as the teacher and conductor, an opportunity to work closely with students in the front and to have easy access to them so I can provide them additional guidance and support. I also had a clearer view of each individual student’s musical abilities as they rotated through the seats at every rehearsal, and was able to provide them feedback and positive encouragement along the way. Student C shared during the interview the conversations we had when she was in the front of the orchestra.

I remember the beginning of eighth grade. I wanted to quit orchestra because I was always in the back. I didn't really feel like I participated that much, and then the eighth grade started and you became our teacher and you were very invested in everyone, and that's when the rotations started and I started to put more effort and I guess improve on my skills in orchestra. For example, I remember I think one of the pieces that you gave to us. It was something we did in middle school chamber, and I wasn't really confident in it, but you were pushing me to do better when I was sitting in the front, and then that's when I was more comfortable sitting in the front and doing more solo work.
There were many insecurities among the students, especially from those who normally sat in the back as they rotated towards the front. I had to encourage them, but also reinforce ASP. During an interview, Student M said, “Even when we were like, no no no, we can’t do this, we can’t do this, you were like no no no, you’re doing it.” I wanted to encourage the students and make them more successful with their playing ability because I felt they were intimidated by the seating change. Student I also had a similar experience with the conversations in the front of the orchestra. Student I shared in the discussions,

Then in eighth grade it was a major advancement, not impossible though. Like the countless eighth notes and shifts we learned sitting in the front and how to better our posture. Also how to make your sound be heard in different areas of the orchestra as before it felt like we were in the same spot every day.

Student N said in the interview,

One of the big things that I experienced was having to sit first chair for the first time in eighth grade. I always sat in the back but once you became our teacher we ended up rotating a lot and I ended up sitting first chair. I knew I had to practice.

It was not only sitting closer in proximity to me that the students feared and motivated them to practice, they also discovered they had a responsibility and became aware that they had to keep up a standard with their stand partner. During the interview Student M shared, “you couldn’t mess up, you have to know the notes, you have to do this, you have to sound good.”

Despite the many positive indications and experiences among the group, students had varying reactions. At first students were motivated by fear of being judged either by me or by their new stand partners, but eventually they were motivated by less negative emotions, that is, by the excitement of interacting with new people and approaching music in a fresh way at almost every rehearsal. This was the great advantage of the ASP program. The motivation to practice was because they feared that I was able to see their
lack of ability or that their stand partners would see their lack of ability, but later they
realized that ASP was helping them improve. Student B shared their experience as they
rotated towards the front of the orchestra. From the interview,

Then we moved up a stand, and you’re like, oh my god, I’m not in the back
anymore. You’re like, I’m still in the back, but I’m not in the back-back. You’re
like, maybe I’ll try a little bit, maybe help the people behind me know what
they’re doing. Then you move up a little more, and you’re in the second little
section. You’re like uh-oh, uh-oh. The teacher can see me. You’re like, I’m just
going to depend on the first stand people. Then you reach first stand, and you
don’t know what you’re doing. You’re panicking, shaking whenever you play.

Student J shared a similar experience in their interview.

And then when you came, when you were doing all the rotations, and different
parts and all that. At first I didn't know how to feel about it, because I felt
uncomfortable, like this is way out of my comfort zone, and then I started to get
used to it, but I would still always sit in the back. I remember one class you told
me to come sit in the front, and I was a little nervous. I knew I had to practice. I
felt more comfortable with it, and now more in class. I played better.

This experience gave the students a chance to develop their confidence. Not only did they
practice more at home, but they felt that their music making had greater value. In the
group discussion online, Student O said,

The rotation seating made me want to get those more difficult pieces and parts
down perfectly, so on the days where I was sitting first chair, I felt like I deserved
it, and that I was good enough to sit there.

The experience was also helpful for students like Student D. Student D struggled with
their learning disability, and shared in the group discussion, “Sitting in the front next to
Ms. Yi is very helpful because if I mess up she’s right there to help me.”

The students who normally sat in the back of the orchestra showed a positive
attitude towards ASP. They shared how ASP changed their attitudes about orchestra and
about themselves. Although some students were nervous about the experience, it also
helped build their confidence. Student O said in an interview,
And then when we started to rotate seats and everyone got the chance to play a solo or sit in the front, it was a very different experience, because it is nerve wracking to sit there and play the solo or to be first chair, but it was fun to experience that feeling to feel like for the first time I actually feel like there's a point to me being here. I went home and practiced. It meant that there might actually be a chance for me to do better. I was more part of the orchestra than sitting in the back, which is kind of silly, but it makes a lot of sense as someone who from fourth grade sat right in the back of the orchestra, as if I could go behind the curtain and it wouldn't matter on stage.

Student M had a similar experience and began to practice more. Student M shared their response in the group discussion.

Eighth grade was a big change because I got to sit first and that was my first time playing first violin ever and I was actually proud of myself. I worked harder and took home my violin and my parents were able to hear me individually for the first time too.

ASP had helped increase the performance level of the overall orchestra and inspired students to try more challenging pieces of music repertoire. The outcomes of their performance inspired the students who were taking private lessons to practice even more at home. They were happy with the orchestra’s increasing skill and musicianship.

Parent I said,

I remember being, like I said before, really impressed at how they had progressed. Like I said to James’ dad, ”Wow, that was next level.” … James had been taking private lessons all along, and he was bored with the school music. And then when you came along, now he actually practices at home. Since eighth grade, he actually practices. He never needed to practice at home before to learn the music. And it's good. I think that it's good for him to have the challenge.

Musical Chairs

During the first few months of ASP, the students realized that sitting with others had musical benefits. They shared their experiences with their stand partners and what they learned from each other. Student I said, “With sitting next to someone, I was able to be in tune because I realized I wasn’t in tune. I fixed my bowing most of the time because
of my partner.” Student I discovered their playing ability when performing with others. They began to share the importance of balance and began to listen to each other. Other students such as Student N said in the discussion,

I’ve learned many things starting in eighth grade with the different seating. I got to sit next to many different people and they all taught me ways to get better. I sat next to Christine and she helped me play all my flats and naturals correctly. I learned to listen to people and follow along.

During the online discussion, students commented on their experiences with their stand partners. Most of the responses were from students who didn’t take private lessons.

Student N began to develop their skills with intonation and note accuracy. Student G also shared,

Sitting next to James and Mike, they helped me because he always played the right notes and played to his best ability. With James, he was great with rhythm and if I got lost, I could follow him.

Student H had a similar experience: “I started to learn some of the basics. I sat next to James and Mike, and they taught me some of the basics of music theory. James taught me basics of rhythm and helped me keep up with the tempo.” James and Mike were both students who took private lessons and ASP helped students who struggled with their playing to work with their peers. The students shared the importance of coordination and how to learn certain skills in string playing. Student M wrote in an essay, “I learned how to shift properly and vibrato by sitting next to this Shawty and just watching her” Student O and Student J both learned how to develop their musicianship. For example, Student O said, “I learned vibrato by sitting next to Samuel and Alice. I also learned a lot of theory by sitting next to Jennifer. She constantly pointed out accents, dynamics, which helped.” This conversation inspired others to share that they learned how to play, “sharps and
flats” better and actually understand it that would eventually lead them to be more successful with challenging repertoire they were to perform in high school.

During the online discussion, the students began to share their musical perceptions about the orchestra. Student B said,

I realized everybody’s dependent on each other. I feel like everybody used to think, first chair, I have to be dependent on the person I’m sitting next to, but with the seating change, you’re like, everybody played so differently. You’re like whoa, we really have to listen to each other now, and I feel like that’s what started happening more. Definitely more coordination.

Just like Student B, Student C began to realize that the “seating rotation [helps you] see the orchestra’s strengths and weaknesses as a whole and helps you be a leader.” Some of the students expressed that ASP motivated them to practice, build more confidence, and gain more interest in the program. For example, Student K said, “We played better, played together a lot. It was good. A better vibe. I wanted to practice more.”

For students who took private lessons, they witnessed the changes in the orchestra’s ability. They cared more about the orchestras overall sound and were happy with the ASP outcomes. I discovered that former first violinists needed support on rhythm because they were used to playing just the main melody in the first violin parts. Since the second violin music did not have a wide range of melodies, those students who played second were able to teach the first violins about rhythm and tempo. The students saw that the orchestra was becoming more cohesive.

During the parent interview, a few parents shared what they remember in the conversations they had with their children during eighth grade. These parents had children who had taken private lessons since the fourth grade. Parent 3 felt that the rigor of the orchestra program had increased.
So I think he was happy that there was a change, and I know he was very happy at that concert. And we thought it was so great that the level of music that you guys were tackling was so advanced and all of that. Again, he likes the challenge, so I think he was happy that there was a challenge in terms of the repertoire.

ASP served as a tool to share information acquired inside and outside of the classroom, allowing students to gain technical and musicianship skills to better understand repertoire and perform more challenging music. As the students developed their musical community in preparation for their performance competition, they became aware of each other’s common goal in improving their musical performance.

**Musical Awards**

The accomplishments that came out of ASP had been a validation to the students and the community. During that first year, the eighth-grade orchestra attended a music competition, performing against other orchestral ensembles. Not only did the orchestra place Gold, the adjudicators commented on their, “high level of performance,” their, “attention to detail” and the, “musicality of their performance.” The adjudicators also shared that the orchestra was, “unified, moving together” and was so, “alive.” What was unique about this competition was that the adjudicators had musical backgrounds as professional orchestral musicians and conductors. When the students went up on stage, I decided to randomize the seating again. Instead of spending the first fifteen minutes warming up the orchestra, like the other ensembles had done, I spent time randomizing the seating. The adjudicators were confused by what was going on and I had to explain what ASP was. They were shocked, and the high school orchestra teacher who performed before us, said I was crazy.

The students were very nervous at the competition, but I felt it was important to continue the same practice we had done throughout entire the school year. Throughout
every competition and every concert, I felt it was possible to have an equitable teaching practice while still performing at the highest level. Student B said in the interview, “When we performed, we were nervous obviously. When we got out, we were doubting ourselves, doubting ourselves, but then you came on the bus and you said we got first place in competition. That was crazy.”

Although the competition results provided me and the students with validation of the success of ASP, I was very nervous. I had a group of diverse students who came from various string pedagogy backgrounds and musical experiences and I had to merge their experiences and make them cohesive. Part of me struggled with the idea of employing ASP at competition, but I knew it had to be done. That day, the students performed at the best of their ability. They moved while playing, used vibrato, took breaths together, and mimicked each other’s bows. I can see how nervous they were, yet focused. Their nervous eyes showed how much they believed in me and trusted in my direction. I felt such a close bond with them musically at the competition.

During the parent interviews, the parents shared their opinion of the concert and performances. They had not realized that the increase in the orchestra’s capabilities was due to the influence of ASP. Parent 5 said “I was very impressed with the level of music and just the change. Again, I don't like talking about previous instructors, but it seemed like the level of rigor had definitely increased.” Parent 4 said in the interview,

You know, it's kind of you heard it all before, been there, done that. But you did come and basically you did meet all the ... I don't know how to say it, all the hype they had given you definitely met and superseded that. And so it's just the fact that you did give that challenge and the expectation was set really high. And for the students who were serious about it and did have a passion, they did strive to meet the challenges you placed in front of them. So I appreciate you doing that.
ASP had also inspired the parents and the community members. Even though parents did not understand what ASP was and how it worked, or believed in the potential outcomes, the performances gave validation. Parent 4 said,

> It was amazing. I mean, I cried. I cry for everything, but it was just so amazing. And I turned to my husband, I go, "Oh, my God. I can't believe this. This is amazing." And she felt so proud to be part of that. It gave them ... You could see it in their faces. They were so confident, and they felt so good. And it was amazing. Amazing.

**Ninth-Grade Musical Experiences**

The students began to realize how ASP helped develop their skills as musicians through peer mentorship as they transitioned into the high school orchestra ensembles. They share their musical discovery on how ASP has influenced their musical abilities and share their experiences with their new musical partners, the upperclassmen.

**Musical Discovery**

The eighth-grade class began to realize the importance of practicing and how it can be an effective way for them to learn more challenging pieces of music in high school, but I noticed that there were more violins than other instruments in the ensemble. I placed the first violins on my left, cellos and violas in the center and then finally the second violins on my right. I felt that this change would help students develop their understanding of balance and teamwork. The first violins would face the seconds, and they will be able to communicate with each other. The violas and the cellos were next to each other so they can hear the balance in the middle sections. This also eliminated the hierarchy amongst the violin 1’s and the violin 2’s, and show that each of the parts were equally important. In the focus group session, Student A said,
Going into the school year, Miss Yi swapped the positions of where violins 2s and cellos sat. I personally liked this because as a cello player, I could hear both the parts of violins. Before I couldn’t tell whose part was whose and everything sounded morphed together. Playing the pieces we were given in high school was easy, too; in eighth grade Miss Yi challenged us by giving us music that would be given to high schoolers.

Since the students had a positive musical experience the year before, they were very confident about their performance ability going into the high school and meeting the new musical challenges. For example, Student M said, “We definitely sounded better than you, I am sorry to say, but listen, we’re on the same level. We’re playing the same level of music here.” I felt that the ninth graders were ready and capable of playing at the higher caliber of musical performance, but gained a lot from working with the upperclassmen.

The upperclassmen were shocked how well the ninth graders performed and saw the benefits of having them in their ensemble. The ninth graders realized how strong the upperclassmen were and that they had a lot of experience and variety of skills that they had not yet acquired. In an online discussion, Student I said, “and hopping into the high school, it felt no different because we played about the same material, just with better and stronger players.” At the same time, the students realized when playing with the upperclassmen that the level social environment and musical performance expectation was more serious, so they began to practice more. “It gave me the responsibility of bringing my instrument home and practicing and it also helped us sound better, because we have to practice and know the parts and stuff like that. I definitely liked that.” The enrollment for orchestra was high and the students discovered the musical benefits of performing with a larger ensemble. They began to practice more, and were inspired by their new peers and musical discoveries.
Musical Partners

Students began to share what they were learning through ASP in the String Orchestra and Chamber Orchestra. Students shared how they learned a variety of skills with their stand partners. They learned how to fine-tune their vibrato, perform higher shifts, and more advanced bow control techniques while being cohesive with a larger orchestra. In the online discussion, various students shared what they learned from working with the upperclassmen. Student G said,

When I sat with Eric, he gave me really good constructive criticism about my bow hold/posture along with vibrato and using my fourth finger when necessary and it worked out because I believe my playing improved over time.

Similarly, Student K said that they learned how to move when they played, while developing a fuller sound, which helped develop musicality. Sitting next to an upperclassman helped them to learn how to play certain sharps and flats. For example, Student K talked about, “how to play certain notes, how to play certain rhythms.” Student H said, “Chris sat next to me in the viola section and taught me how to do vibrato for the first time. I also learned how to keep the tempo better.” Students also learned how to move and lead the orchestra. Student N said, “Tina would help me lead and taught me how to do vibrato.” Skills such as shifting helped the students achieve a higher level of musicality and gave them a variety of ranges. All these functions were an important part of the students’ development as string players. The ninth-grade class needed to learn how to shift in order for them to make decisions on how to organize their fingers for a wide range of playing, and easier playing in performance. Vibrato helped the students to learn how to produce a mature sound out of their instrument since the high school level of performance was focused on performing music more maturely.
Some students wanted to change instruments when they went up to high school. There were also a lot of students who had not participated in orchestra in earlier years. In this case, peer-modeling was very helpful and upperclassmen taught beginning technique and instrumental performance to those students. Student O said, “Mike and Carlos taught me about vibrato on the bass. Aaron taught me how to quickly fix bowings and intonation to match the people in my section.” Just like Student O, Student M also learned the bass and said, “I learned the bass clef from someone in my class that I wasn’t close with.” Among learning rhythms and bowings, the upperclassmen helped them expand their technique. For example, Student N said, “Sitting next to the upperclassmen helped me expand my techniques. Jennifer, Lisa and Don taught me how to shift.” During the parent interview, Parent 4 shared,

She actually loves sitting next to different people because she goes, “They challenge me. When I sit next to a person, it makes me grow even more.” And I think she's sitting, oh, I don't want to say his name. The person she's sitting next to now, she thought, you know, but she loves sitting next to him. And I watched them during the concert. It's hilarious watching two of them go at it, you know? It's amazing to watch her just grow, keep growing.”

Musical Rewards

When the orchestras went to competition, the awards were truly awards for the students’ efforts. The students shared their ninth-grade experiences in the online discussion. Student J said,

It felt like a huge weight off my shoulders, everyone's shoulders, because it felt like a big accomplishment. I felt like all the hard work and practice and all the yelling Ms. Yi did, G sharp, G, G Sharp, it just paid off. It just felt worth it.

The students also noticed that they were playing at much a higher level and Student M said,
The most memorable moment I had in orchestra was going to SSMA last year. I honestly never felt good enough to play at a competition and at such a high level. It most definitely paid off because we got gold, my confidence grew a lot. Coming from a level 2 during seventh grade, and then going to level 6? All of sudden, two-year difference.

Student B also had the same experience and said, “Ninth grade was the best year. I think in general, like string orchestra has ever had. We did level 6, and we sounded good!”

Student S said,

One of my most memorable moments was when I went to SSMA with the ninth-grade orchestra. When I found out that we got gold I was very happy for everyone because we all put in hard work and received a great award.

The students were very proud of themselves and all their accomplishments. Student P said,

You really hear the people in the front more than the people in the back, because the judges are looking at people based in the front and not in the back. So basically it's as if they did the work, but knowing that there is no hierarchy everyone's mixed up scrambled, it's like we did it all together.

During the parent interviews, Parent 1 said,

This is just my observation, but the old way, maybe you'd see certain kids that were getting promoted higher really improving, but it is unbelievable the improvements that the entire group has made. When you go to the concerts, it's so true. Wow. You know the level of the music, I wouldn't have ... I mean, I come from a background of music, too, and just the progress that I've seen.

When the competition results came out, the students were even more excited. I felt that the students began to realize that ASP worked for them. Parent 2 said,

When you guys won first place and you had everybody in the auditorium, you remember that? You could hear the roar of excitement from the students. It almost sounded like something was wrong because when they were told, all at the same time, all the kids were, like, "Yeah!" They all screamed. And we ran to the auditorium because we thought something was wrong. And when we got there, they were all excited and high fiving each other. She always talks about all that kind of stuff. And she's ready to do trips and go here and play there. She's ... Oh, my gosh. You know how much she loves it. It's just ... I enjoy coming to the concerts, I enjoy sitting there and tapping my foot and bopping my head. It's just
so relaxing. It's like, "Oh, my God." These children are Carnegie Hall material. All of them. They are so good, and ... oh, my gosh. I could go on and on and on. I was enjoy it. I never thought I'd enjoy it so much, but I enjoy it so much. And what's fun about it, when she's practicing, I'm like, "Do this, do that," and she's like, "Mom ..." Like I said, because I have such a different appreciation for it now and understand a lot more about it, it's just great.

From the upperclassman pilot study, Student 2 shares what they learned from their new stand partners.

In the video, I noticed that we don’t seem to be moving noticeably, however, when we were playing the moving parts of Cakewalk we did get some similarly. Actually, during Cakewalk, I noticed that my partner played the sforzando in a different way than I did. I realized that I had actually been playing the styling wrong! So, I watched how they played it and silently adjusted my technique. I’m glad that I caught that mistake while sitting next to them because I don’t think I would have caught it with anyone else in the section. This is because my partner plays in a pronounced way so the technique was easier to catch.

Student 2 also shared in another journal entry that their stand partner struggled with playing confidently. For example, Student 2 said,

We had to play a solo today for one of the pieces. Actually, my partner was supposed to play it alone but was nervous so we played it together. I feel really strong and confident knowing I can help my friend during orchestra. I just wish they would have a little more confidence in their playing ability. But whenever they need guidance while playing a piece I’m here to help. While we played the solo, I noticed our bow strokes and styling were syncing. We also moved together and began mimicking each other’s volume.

Student 3 shared their experience sitting with someone that they didn’t like. For example, Student 3 said, “Today I sat next to someone that I actually really don’t like. We didn’t talk at all, but musically I felt her rhythm and her movement which made me play with her and move with her.”

In that year, the orchestras competed at the same competition they had competed the year before. Professional musicians from the festival evaluated the competition and they rated the orchestra at the Gold level, which was the highest rating at competition.
Prior to ASP at the high school, the high school orchestras have received a Silver rating. This experience was very uplifting for the ensemble because the upperclassmen finally witnessed their accomplishments come into fruition. Although the seating was randomized, they were very happy about the outcomes and began to believe in ASP for their orchestra.

**10th-Grade Musical Experiences**

The student participants began to reflect on their musical experiences this year, and what they witnessed in the change of the orchestra program, and how ASP has influenced the development of technical skill and musicality through their collaborative influences. They also reflected on how the orchestra improved overall with the ninth graders. The ninth graders had a middle school teacher the year before who placed students based on their ability. That teacher left midyear. The method made the ninth graders feel vulnerable and insecure about their own playing.

**Fostering Musical Capacity**

The new 10th graders were now very nurturing and led the orchestra through peer mentorship. Recently, the 10th-grade class performed at the Winter Concert with their orchestra. In the focus group session, they began to share the conversations they had with the ninth-grade stand partners and how they developed their musicianship together in preparation for the concert. The 10th graders felt a responsibility to mentor the ninth graders as they prepared for their first concert together. Student C said in the online discussion,

This is the first time I think really I ever sat in the front, and I was very shocked, we got very happy. My stand partner, she was in another class, and I think the
same thing with her, we both had the same reaction. And just sitting in the front, even though it's very nerve wracking it kind of changes you because you start to do things you would never do normally like body movement, breathing, it helps you show more of a leadership role, and it's still not in a way where people envy you.

Student E said, “I talked mostly to the bass players about the music and what we had to do to fix minor issues with the two sections.” Student K and O talked about how they made decisions with the freshman by deciding who was going to play the top notes and who is going to play the bottom notes.” The 10th graders were mentoring the ninth graders. For example, Student I said, “We had conversations about being in sync together and the transitions of the pieces.” Student G said, “I switched with Mike and Ian, I feel I’ve been giving pointers to them as well between each piece about what specific notes to play.” Student K said,

I sat in the back and shared a stand with one of the freshmen. It was different because like I heard my instrument a lot more. And I had to help my partner with the music like rhythm and how to play notes.

The 10th graders felt great about their performance at the Winter concert. They commented on the focus groups session that the orchestra had become more “unified” in sound and, “spirit.” Student R said,

It's not just about hearing other sections' part. You can hear another person in your section play and then you're like, "Oh, this person's really good at this thing and they need a little work on this thing". But that's okay because we are there to help each other. And the way that the seating is placed for a performance highlights their strength. All of that plays a role in how the final sound of the orchestra will come out.

Student P shared that ASP encourages each other to play louder.

Ever since we started doing that, it makes everybody get a feel for the front and the back. It also makes you play louder and not be as shy as you would as if you were just playing in the back, because you know no one's going to hear you, so you won't even bother try playing. The switching up makes you play no matter where you sit.
In November, I wrote in my journal about the experiences I witnessed among the students while I sat in ASP. I felt it was important to observe the experiences from various areas of the orchestra but it made me aware of the areas where students needed to improve on the individual level.

November 17, 2017

Today, I had the students conduct the ensemble while I sat in ASP with the orchestra. I sat with a 10th grader in the first violin section, and noticed she was struggling playing the piece we were preparing for the winter concert. I gave her some guidance and suggestions on bow technique. I wrote in her music where she should place the bow on certain passages in the music. As we transitioned to another piece, I moved to the second violin section. I immediately witnessed a ninth grader struggling on learning her accidentals. I grabbed the pencil behind my ear, and circled the accidentals. I also demonstrated where those notes were on her violin and had her listen to the difference between a C natural and a C sharp. Then I grabbed a cello, sat in the back of the orchestra only to discover that my cello section struggled articulating the accents in the music because they did not know how to use their bow grip to produce them. I demonstrated how to make the accents more crisp and clear. Sitting in the back made me hear the double bass section much more easily. I could hear every note that needed more help on intonation and technique. With the cello I already had, I demonstrated how to produce a full sound out of the bass. Finally, I sat in the front of the viola section, next to a 12th grader who was overly confident in his playing but lacked precision on intonation and bow technique. His instrument wasn’t very good, but I was able to demonstrate on producing a much more mature sound out from his instrument. After he listened to the sound on his instrument, he made the immediate connection. I asked him to play a passage over and over again to mimic my sound.

The concert also encouraged the students to make their own assessments of their performance. For example, Parent 4 said in the interview,

She came home that night from the concert, we went to bed late. She's looking at my tapings of how they played, and she's critiquing it. "Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, okay. No, but we were good. We were good. Right, mom?"

This student’s evaluation signifies their confidence in their performance ability, but also critiquing through the lens of a mature musician.


**Cohesiveness**

Since the 10th graders were mentoring the ninth graders, they witnessed a change in the overall performance level of the orchestra. The orchestra was becoming increasingly cohesive. This made the orchestra more unified. Student B said in the interview,

> When I start moving, he starts moving, so I’m like okay, there’s a little domino effect here. Now I’m like, if I’m helping this kid with his moving, I guess, if that’s one thing I can help him with, then I’m going to try my best to be as enthusiastic and happy in the back as possible.

Student J said in the interview, “Now as a sophomore we have a variety of different players and we sound different, which makes a lot of musicality.” Student I also shared the same thing in the online discussion, “I improved a lot when I became a 10th grader. I felt more of a connection to everyone and the whole orchestra musically.” Other students like Student P said they moved with the whole orchestra, and Student G said in the interview,

> I feel like we're definitely more in sync with talking to people and getting to know them better especially with the playing. That we're cohesive. I don't know I think that's the right word. We all were unified. Because of all the constant switching seats, it helped us get comfortable with one another. Helped us create one sound no matter where we're sitting.

At the Winter concert, both of the ensembles, Chamber Orchestra and String Orchestra received a standing ovation. The students were really proud of themselves. Right after the performance, I wrote in my teacher journal about the experience.

December 17, 2017

This was the first time I witnessed the true social and musical effects of ASP. While conducting one of the pieces with the String Orchestra, I saw Sharon give David a look, to remind him to follow her bow direction. Elaine was pointing out the measures to a freshman because he got lost. James was moving and giving gestures to Tom to move more collectively with him and Nathan was bouncing in
his seat and although that made Tina nervous, it encouraged her to move more. I have never seen Tina smile, but it was great to see that she enjoyed it. When I gave them big conducting gestures, they began to move more, and it was a beauty to see how diverse the orchestra was and how musical they’ve become. The sound was more unified than it’s ever been and much more alive. As for the audience, they gave us a standing ovation. I didn’t bow by myself like most conductors do. We bowed together in the end. Unified. We did this together.

Musical Accomplishments

The 10th graders were becoming more proud of their musical accomplishments this year. They were also proud of the fact that they were able to share their knowledge with others. Student O said,

Even though I experienced this negativity from some people, I decided to pass what I learned forward. I began to help out anyone who expressed interest in playing the bass it became clear that teaching truly is one of the best ways to learn. Helping other people kept pushing me to go over things like scales, posture, and bow technique.

I witnessed this student coming in during lunch and helping new orchestra students or any student who was interested in joining orchestra, and taught them how to play the bass. I hosted a holiday party for the orchestras and students brought food from their own cultures. Student K share their experience their journal,

Last day of 2017 and last day before the holiday break. We spent it watching the Winter concert from that week and eating food that each student brought individually. It was probably the best holiday party of them all. And I think we did really well at the concert too.

In my journal, I recall the experience at the holiday party.

December 22, 2017

What a great way to learn about each other! Today, the students brought food from their own cultures. I was very impressed that they were willing to share part of their culture with others and willing to try various types of foods that were on the table. Since my class was the only class that was having a holiday party on the last day of school before Winter break, I encouraged the students to bring their friends and have them try the food. Oh, was I surprised to meet the football team,
the wrestling team, and the basketball team. I have never seen these kid’s faces before. They were very respectful and thanked me for inviting them to the party. We did have a lot of food left over so I didn’t mind. This was my first time trying Haitian food. It was so delicious! Students were excited to watch me eat their food from their culture, and started taking pictures with me to send to their parents. I also felt part of their family. It was a beautiful experience.

As the quality of the orchestra improved and the students became aware of the importance of exchanging knowledge, they began sharing their musical abilities outside of the classroom. A few of the 10th graders began to go to the middle school and help out with the middle school orchestras after school. Student B, who is now a member of the Chamber Orchestra and also joined the String Orchestra, said in the interview,

The other day I went to help out with middle school chamber! I used to dread going but this one time had changed my POV on it. Helping all these young musicians made me so happy. I want to provide them with the help and support that I never received when I was younger. I’ve now made it a personal goal to take these kids under my wing and help them as much as possible by never missing a single MS Chamber day.

The hierarchy that once existed between the high school orchestras, Chamber Orchestra (auditioned) and String Orchestra (non-auditioned) was eliminated. What was once segregation between the ensembles was evident through the students’ attitude and perceptions of their counterparts; Chamber Orchestra had been characterized as an “elite” ensemble while String Orchestra had been classified as the “normal” ensemble. Eliminating the hierarchy increased the enrollment of Chamber Orchestra students to also joining the String Orchestra class because they were able to find musical motivations by performing on other instruments while helping their peers. ASP also allowed them to expand their compassion for students in String Orchestra by learning their socio-economic status.
Summary

The motivations behind ASP were for students to learn and acquire skills from each other, and develop musicianship through the process of collaboration, teamwork, and through peer mentorship. Through interactions enabled by ASP, students increased their musical abilities because they acquired musical skills from one another such as shifting into different positions, using vibrato and producing a mature tone out of their instrument. They also expanded their musical capacities by critiquing their own playing and their performance within the orchestra and the overall orchestra performances. Through peer mentorship, it inspired students to transfer their musicianship skills to others outside of the program.
V – DISCUSSION OF THE ASP JOURNEY

In this dissertation, I examine the social and musical lives of public school orchestra students participating in ASP. This new seating arrangement created an embodiment of social justice while still producing quality results in musical performance. ASP may be defined as a social justice practice (Vaugeois, 2015) as it created ways for students to become aware of injustices and to work together towards improving social conditions in the music classroom. The orchestra can be interpreted as a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger-Trayner, 2015), characterized by the notion of collective thinking and shared musical interest. The initial inquiry began with the notion of equity in the performance classroom and whether equity, can contribute to producing quality results. To address this issue, the following research questions were posed: (1) How do ASPs affect musical capacity for both the individual and the orchestra? (2) How do Alternative Seating Practices (ASPs) influence social relationships and community awareness for students participating in an orchestra? (3) How has the experience changed over the course of 3 years?

In Chapter I, I have mentioned that CoP has three characteristics into developing a community: (a) the domain, (b) the community, (c) and the practice. The orchestra students shared the same interest in performing in the ensemble, and through their interactions made daily through ASP, they were able to increase the level of the orchestra’s performance. According to Dobson and Gaunt’s (2014) study on professional musicians interactions in CoP, collaboration and building a community among players
can increase the quality of the orchestras’ performance. The outcomes of this study revealed similar principles in CoP. The, “domain” brought the students together, in which the students shared the same intrinsic value in orchestral performance, the “community” gives students the opportunity to teach each other through peer modeling and mentorship through the participation in ASP, and ASP developed the, “practice,” in which the students interact with mutual respect and acceptance of each other by providing them with the opportunity to engage with one another both socially and musically.

The three general findings that have emerged in the study are: (1) Students became aware of each other’s positions within the hierarchy and felt the different experiences both socially and musically as they sat in different seating arrangements; (2) Students were motivated because they found tangible value participating in the orchestra and increased musical capacity by exchanging their musical knowledge and vulnerabilities with others; (3) Students learned the importance of working together as they all contribute to the diverse music making experience which formed their unique sound as an orchestra. In this discussion, I will relate my findings to the theoretical framework and the research questions.

**Research Question 1: How do ASPs affect musical capacity for both the individual and the orchestra?**

Studies that included seating arrangements in academic classrooms provide us with an understanding of the different performance outcomes. For example, in Ciera, Musyoka, and Oketch’s (2013) study, students sitting towards the front of an academic classroom had higher learning gains. This was similar to Perkins and Wieman’s study (2005) in which they examined how students who sat in the back of the classroom in a
physics course were more likely to fail the class. In this study, students who normally sat in the back lacked string performance ability. Through ASP, I could quickly identify students’ strengths and weaknesses’, allowing me to tailor instruction to highlight areas of improvement. It was then when I realized ASP was an equitable seating practice in which students were improving their musical skills and discovered intrinsic value as they participated in the ensemble.

The orchestra students had some initial trepidation when I started using ASP because they had developed preconceived notions of their placement and musical abilities within the orchestra. Traditionally, educators-in-training learn that seating auditions and chair challenges are meant to be great motivators for students to practice, for example, Glawe (2017) shared that chair auditions remind students to be more accountable. But there is also evidence in the literature review, that seating auditions can create insecurities for the orchestral musician. The students in this study shared that competition in hierarchical seating structures did not strengthen them as musicians or individuals, but instead it created injustices both socially and musically for the orchestra.

Students indicated that it wasn’t until they believed a teacher cared about them and their playing capabilities that they were motivated to work on improving. This was a similar case to that described in the Siegel, Rubenstein, and Mitchell’s (2014) study on student motivation. They discovered that students valued their courses because they developed self-efficacy and teachers cultivated their learning. The teacher also helped the students become competent in the subject and the students witnessed that the teacher was passionate and hardworking. The eighth-grade students attributed their success in orchestra to the meaningful relationships with me as their teacher and because of this
experience, they were motivated to improve. Student O shared that, in her mind, I
demonstrated care for all the students by reinforcing that their seating didn’t define who
they were. They also realized that they had to work together to produce a good
performance, so they began to motivate each other through promotive interaction, in
other words, “students were promoting each other’s success by helping, assisting,
encouraging, and praising each other’s efforts to learn” as presented in Johnson, Johnson,
and Smith’s (2015) cooperative learning.

Students who took private lessons, and normally sat in the front of the orchestra,
began helping their new stand partners on their weaknesses during rotations. They also
found comfort and satisfaction with ASP because of the diminished pressure amongst the
competitive students. These students found a new intrinsic value for being a part of the
orchestra and began utilizing their musical strengths to help others. For example, Parent 6
shared that their child, who had been a private lesson student, felt that it was their social
responsibility to help other students in the orchestra from where they were sitting, so all
students would be more successful in the front. For the orchestra to collectively succeed,
their stand partners had to improve their capabilities individually, corresponding to the
element of positive interdependence in cooperative learning. By eliminating the
hierarchy in the orchestra the entire orchestra was able to improve in together.

The “domain” brought the students together; the students found intrinsic value in
performance, and they had the same musical motivation to play music alone and with
others. ASP led to a collective engagement in musical motivation. For example, Student
B realized that sitting in ASP made the orchestra work together. This was a similar case
presented in Hruska’s (2011) study, in which students understood that the increased effort
of each individual would raise the orchestra’s musical ability. Student M shared that they started to practice because it was intimidating to sit with students who took private lessons. Gaunt and Dobson’s (2014) study on, “peer support” and, “peer pressure” among professional musicians had parallel findings. When the students entered high school, they also felt pressure from the upperclassman to practice and realized that there were still additional skills they needed to acquire in strings performance as the level of expertise in the high school orchestra was more experienced than that of the middle school. From the pilot study, Student 2 shared how they discovered that their stand partner performed a sforzando differently than they did, and this experience encouraged Student 2 to adjust their own technique and then transfer this knowledge every time they encountered a new stand partner. Student O also recalls the exchange of knowledge that ASP encourages within the community. Students learned from their, “community” how to shift, use vibrato and produce mature tones from their instrument to fit the musical expectations of the high school orchestras. In the journal entry, I share some of the experiences I’ve witnessed among the students in their musical abilities, and was able to guide them on musical parts. Sitting in ASP with them made the experience for the students relatable to me, and although I was the teacher, they felt less threatened when I sat with them and were receptive to my feedback. Students were less intimidated and instead, focused on their desired to improve.

Through social experiences, the students found similar musical motivations with their stand partners. The students who were sitting in the front were motivated because they were satisfied with the performance outcomes of the orchestra and wanted to help their new stand partners. The students who normally sat in the back, ASP had helped
them discover confidence as they were improving in technicality on their playing abilities. Students were collectively working towards what student O recalls as the “universal desire” to work collectively towards the orchestra’s domain. They practiced with their instruments and expanded on their musical capacity by connecting to different parts of the music arrangements while sitting in ASP.

**Research Question 2: How do Alternative Seating Practices (ASPs) influence social relationships and community awareness for students participating in an orchestra?**

Bell (2016) asserts that the principles of social justice include recognizing equity and inclusions by eliminating the injustices that caused hierarchy. When the students were in eighth grade, I integrated ASP to eliminate the injustices that were evidently caused by the previously practiced music ensemble hierarchy. During my first interaction with the eighth-grade students, I became aware of the diversity makeup of the ensemble, and the division among the students, created by the hierarchy seating structure. Matthews (2016) argued that privileged teachers and students stigmatize out-group individuals, they judge these to be less able which subsequently hurts the music instruction environment. These were the perceptions of the students who sat in the back. Student W shared that they found the hierarchy was so silent, but felt the pressures of the seating among the students. The orchestra students segregated themselves into social groups in which they felt they belonged, socially and musically. Student B and M shared the history of the ensemble’s hierarchy and that seating hierarchy was formed because students who lacked confidence in playing ability, gravitated towards sitting in the back of the orchestra. They also spoke to their perception of the teacher, who they believed purposely placed them in
the back. They observed that students who sat towards the front were students who took private lessons and were rewarded for their efforts and often given more opportunities.

Vagueouis’s (2009) theory on how students should explore different possibilities for living and working together in and through music education supports how ASP acted as a socially just, “practice” that helped students understand and experience various positions in the hierarchy. These experiences allowed the students to clear up misunderstandings on preconceived notions that the hierarchy had created. For example, Student B and M shared that they learned from both students who sat in the back and those who sat in the front, struggled similarly and simultaneously within the area that they were sitting in. When the students who normally sat in the back began sitting in the front, they experienced the pressures normally felt by students who sat in the front and began to put in more effort. Student H recalls the feeling of equity and inclusion in the classroom and Parent 1 shared how their child struggled with making friends, but witnessed a change in their child’s increased engagement with other orchestra student musicians by participating in ASP. Similar endeavors helped the students find relatable experiences, which led to the formation of unexpected new friendships and a mutual respect of music making amongst the students.

Hewitt and Allan’s (2012) study on student participation in an advanced youth music ensemble in Scotland, demonstrated how social interactions were important to students participating in an ensemble because they enjoyed meeting new people, enjoyed performing, and had musical satisfaction through participating. In this study, the orchestra students shared the same interest in performing music and shared the same concern for the orchestra’s musical proficiency. The social exchanges that occurred in the
“community” of the orchestra, gave students the opportunity to begin teaching each other through peer modeling and mentorship, producing methods in which the students were continually learning. This is similar to the social and cognitive development in peer tutoring presented in Webb’s (2012) study, where peer social interactions were more effective in student learning. As they interacted socially through ASP, they learned that for the orchestra to improve, they had to work together.

Research Question 3: How has the experience changed over the course of 3 years?

I sought to understand what motivated the students to be a part of the orchestra once ASP was integrated, and the reason behind their continued enrollment in the program. I’ve witnessed an increase in the orchestra’s enrollment, student participation, friendships and conversations, improved engagement, and an increase in musical performance ability. The experience of the musical and social changes that occurred can be reviewed in three phases: from awareness into practice, agents of change, and unity & harmony. This study demonstrates a long-term commitment to ASP through longitudinal study. Rather than considering a single control group over a limited period, as is the case in a number of qualitative studies, the research presented here follows a cohort of students over the course of three years. The constant is the researcher (i.e., the author of this paper). In this way, it is possible to see three important results: (a) The effect of ASP upon a defined group of student musicians, which would be expected of a typical qualitative study; but also (b) The effect over time to a general cohort, with some additions and subtractions within the group; and finally, (c) The way in which students peer-educate each other. This last effect is important, as it shows the peer-mentoring that occurs at individual music stands can also occur over time and in different settings. In short, the students
bring an ethic of community and organic diversity with them beyond the initial instructional and interactive phases.

**Figure 4.** Timeline summary

Through the students’ participation in ASP, they became cognitively aware of the injustices that were developed in the orchestra by the hierarchal seating structure. These injustices created a clear division between the “front” and “back” of the orchestra, in which musical and social inequities were formed. ASP provided the opportunity to bridge the achievement gap musically and socially between these two groups, both as individual students and for the collective orchestra.

As the students transitioned to ninth grade and joined the high school orchestra, they became the agents of change for the ensembles existing members. Existing members were accustomed to hierarchal seating and hesitant to change, but the ninth graders were confident in the outcomes ASP would generate. Their positive prior
experiences, allowed them to understand the value this practice would bring on their new diverse ensemble and wanted it to be continued in high school. As it would provide an opportunity for all orchestra members to further develop musically and socially through peer learning. I further enabled this practice as the new high school orchestra teacher, but it was the 9th graders that implemented the practice by teaching others how to rotate and the importance behind it. In Ryan’s (2011) study, students that participate in peer groups at the beginning of the school year are likely to find intrinsic value in the enjoyment of school and increase their achievement level through their groups towards the end of the school year. In this study, students recruited their friends to join the ensemble throughout the school year.

As enrollment increased in the high school orchestras, the now 10th graders found harmony through their social and musical interactions and experiences in the ensembles. Through their efforts to develop the musicianship of their peers and provide them with social awareness, they expanded on their individual musical capacity. Grounded on the new relationships with the incoming ninth graders, they discovered social justice and social equity in the performance classroom and were able to apply and advocate for these principles outside of the classroom.

**Summary**

ASP is a seating practice that was integrated under the notion of social equity while building musicianship with the use of peer modeling. While this was the intention behind the practice, ASP had an unexpected outcome; students became friends with students who they normally would not associate themselves with and learned how to
work together as a microcosm of society. I had to implement the practice of ASP during its first year and as it evolved, the practice became student driven.

As stated by Student O, ASP was a, “confidence boosting” seating plan that provided the opportunity for students to find intrinsic value in performing and being part of the orchestra, with a high-performance outcome. In 1971, Von Wrochem (1971) introduced the concept of rotating “desks” in the orchestra because he believed it will give every member of the orchestra the ability to find “real value” and a “true sense of self-confidence.” This was a non-hierarchical belief that had produced the same results of ASP for this orchestra. ASP includes a variety of seating arrangements for the orchestra that includes; scrambled seating, rotational seating, and randomized seating. It is the practice of arranging seats in the orchestra that produces quality music performance results, social and musical development for the individual musician and for the orchestra collectively.
VI – SUMMARY

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to investigate students’ experiences in ASP in a public school string orchestra program. I sought to understand the social and musical experiences from my own students engaging in ASP, influenced by my awareness of the diversity makeup of my ensembles and how seating hierarchies had separated the group socially and musically from their past orchestra experiences. I wanted to know if ASP had any effect on my student’s musical abilities and if it had any changes on their social experiences. From my observations as a teacher, students began acquiring new skills, became increasingly motivated and began advocating for social equity. I discovered from the research that ASP had more than a social justice impact on the student’s lives, it became a measurable practice that was performed in the music classroom. ASP had influenced students to have conversations where they dispersed knowledge, find shared interests, expanded musicianship, and became equal partners in which their awareness of others and social equity expanded outside of the classroom.

Key Findings

There is a lack of evidence that seating hierarchy increases an orchestra’s capabilities in musical performance and from this data, we learn that these rigid structures can harm student’s social and musical experiences. I offer the following key findings from the research process:
• Seating structures influence student’s social and musical experiences.

• Students described feeling differently depending on the positions in which they sat, and realized that different positions brought out different aspects of their playing.

• Students became aware of the injustice both social and musical and all desired for social equity.

• ASP produced equal partnerships, in which social and musical accountability is spread throughout the ensemble.

• Defying hierarchical structures did not affect the overall outcomes of the orchestra’s performance. Students developed as musicians through equal partnerships developed through CoP and how social equity can satisfy traditional measures of musical performance.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This research was conducted 20 miles outside of a major U.S. city. The school population is richly diverse in a community that supports the arts, sets high educational standards and expects musical excellence. Learning from my own students, I became much more aware of ASP’s effects on diversity, equity and inclusion in a performance ensemble and how we can utilize the talents and the strengths of our students’ unique musical contributions and empower them to make music together in a variety of contexts. Considering the delimited scope of this autobiographic study, I recommend the following lines of inquiry for future study.
While ASP worked for this string orchestra, future research may wish to replicate this study on ensembles such as bands, choirs and symphony orchestras and how the integration of ASP and the effect of CoP have any effect on these music students’ participation socially and musically. A further exploration of communities of musical practice (CoMPs) presented by Ailbhe Kenny (2016) should be investigated. I intentionally did not include the student participant’s genders in order to hide the identity of the participants; therefore, I recommend future researchers to examine the differences in social and musical experiences in ASP for the different gender roles. In addition, I recommend that studies can enact a variety of social justice pedagogy practices that includes; student choice in music repertoire, exchanging in leadership opportunities, that carries onto more democratic practices in the music classroom.

Second, this study is concentrated in a diverse school setting and the demographics of the school setting do not match the makeup of the ensemble. Although there were more than 46% white students in the school district where I conducted the research, the high school orchestras was made up with 75% of students of color. This ensemble is not a common makeup of a high school orchestra; therefore, I encourage researchers to conduct further studies in ASP in ensembles with various demographics. It’s been in my experience that teachers are interested in these studies that help increase enrollment in their ensembles that match the demographics of their school settings and how to integrate socially just ensembles that include a diverse student body.

Third, ASP includes scrambled seating, rotational seating and randomized seating for concerts/competitions. In this study, the student participants shared their experiences in a variety of seating patterns but did not explicitly share which seating had the most
impact on their learning. Literature suggests that there are differences in performance outcomes in classroom seating, therefore, future research may wish to explicitly consider the outcomes of each of the ASP seating arrangements for ensembles through action research projects.

Fourth, I offer an autobiographical account in my dissertation in which I study 25 of my own students participating in ASP. I used online discussions, student/parent/administrator interviews, student journals and student/teacher journals. Future researchers may wish to conduct research on case study research on specific students and/or teachers in various schools. In addition, researchers can explore different methods such as using national surveys and study social justice practices that are going on schools currently.

**Implications for the Profession**

My musical upbringing has not been traditional. I started playing the violin when I was four and continued through middle school but since my parents were struggling immigrants at that time, they found it financially difficult to support my musical dream of becoming a violinist, so I had to quit violin early on. Since I lacked formal experiences in orchestras, I was not exposed to seating hierarchy and I didn’t have a model to follow. I was free from traditional practices since it wasn’t part of my cultural heritage. Teaching in this school district was also my first experience working with diverse teenagers and because of my limited experiences within these populations; the effects of seating hierarchies were more noticeably wrong to me. My formal music education training did not require me to observe classes in a variety of settings nor be exposed to current orchestra teaching practices, and their models of instruction. My more independently
formed expectations of what an orchestra could be made a positive impact on how I teach and structure my classes by basing my instruction on cultural awareness because intergenerational cultural transmission was the only thing I could identify teaching with. I was able to create my own methodologies based upon this understanding and use them in my classes.

My personal experiences also contributed to the unique success of ASP. As a person of color I offered a first-generation perspective, honed through years of discrimination and struggles faced by immigrant families in striving for the “American Dream.” Social injustices were evident in my upbringing and it has been my desire for social change throughout my life, but it wasn’t until I witnessed social inequities in my students that I was able to make the connection that moved my desire for social justice into practice. My awareness and courage expanded as I struggled with the outer resistance to ASP. My awareness of diverse people and the social constructs that are developed through society empowered me to challenge social inequities. The integration of the new seating practice began with many challenges for me. These included resistance from parents and students. As the situation evolved I was also very sensitive to what my students were thinking, their defense mechanisms, and their perspectives and interpretations. These were challenges which I related to my internal conflicts with racism. We began surmounting the challenges and new difficulties and then social justice became more paramount to them. This routine practice shaped the students’ thinking as they saw the benefits of ASP in the classroom from seating hierarchy. As they developed into young adults, they created a movement as a group that desired social equity when they arrived at the high school.
I admit that I had to continuously reinforce the seating practice in class, and remind students of the importance of equity. I felt it was my responsibility to share with the students the truth about my philosophy and why hierarchy did not work for their orchestra. Being honest and vocal about social inequities helped me and the students to shape our understanding, thinking about ourselves, and the world around us. Students shared what they were learning and this belief with their parents at home, which led to confusion for some, but with others, the students were educating their parents about social justice and because of this awareness, the parents became less preoccupied with where their children were sitting. The word was being spread so quickly to the rest of the community and students were sharing these conversations with each other outside of class.

Vaugeois (2009) suggests that the purpose of music making is for one’s pleasure, therefore, we should respect the music making experiences of each individual. Vaugeois’ theory explains how we can practice social justice in the music classroom and my experience suggests that we can embody social justice in group musical performance by using ASP. As mentioned earlier in Chapter I, the orchestra works together as an organization with one purpose in mind, to create beautiful music together. However, the orchestra still has a hierarchical mandate, which makes it an exclusive society: the conductor is the leader, and that leadership is transferred to the concertmaster, and then to the principal players and then the other musicians who sit behind them. In order to break the hierarchical structure for the orchestra, the conductor, who is considered the highest leader, must be the first one to step off the podium and allow the orchestra’s musical capacity and artistry to naturally evolve. That’s what musical leadership truly means and
that’s how we can create a democratic musical society within our ensembles through student-centered instruction. By giving students the freedom to perform, respect their musical differences, we can create a socially just environment in our classrooms that practices compassion through the art of making music.

Ultimately, teachers do their best to teach what is appropriate for their students in ensembles; however, I struggled to find an orchestra teacher who would be willing to integrate ASP for their orchestras because they feared that ASP would negatively affect their ensembles. From this research, we learn that students are aware of their social environments, and their position in hierarchical settings. We have to be careful not to support students’ negative social experiences just because we want to satisfy musical expectations; this study demonstrates how we can create a socially just ensemble that still has a high level of performance outcome. Eliminating the hierarchy in the ensemble made the students increasingly motivated to practice, enjoy playing music together and recruit their friends to join the inclusive ensemble. Of course there is skepticism to how we teach our diverse students, especially when they have such differences in their abilities; however, the study reveals that both the students who takes private lesson and those students who do not still find intrinsic value in performing music together in the ensemble.

Although we know that students are able to acquire skills through peer modeling and mentorship, we are unable to continuously implement this understanding into our practice at the core of our instruction. This study did not pair students based on ability, nor did it necessarily pair students who took private lessons with students who did not, the seating was always different for the students based on the respect that every student
has a diverse musical experience and contributes their music making experiences to the ensemble, which develops the ensemble to create a unique unified sound. Although the contrast was most evident between the students who sat in the front and those students who sat in the back, all students attributed their success through peer modeling with anyone with whom they sat. Through peer modeling and mentorship, the ensemble can increase their musical capabilities. By shifting out of the hierarchy system and using ASP for the orchestra, there are strong social outcomes, which gives increased credibility to ASP. Thus, teachers should feel more confident in using this system. We have the ability to produce high quality musical outcomes in our performance ensembles; however, as teachers, we also have the responsibility to create a socially just classroom.

If teachers want to integrate ASP for their orchestra, there must first be an awareness of social inequities that are formed inside and outside our classrooms, that is, understanding the importance of social justice. Teaching for social justice requires us to first admit there are social inequities in the world around us and then to challenge social inequities we have created ourselves. Within the field of music education there are several injustices that are evident. For example, there is a lack of diversity in composers in required literature performed for state and national competitions, that is, compositions penned by women and people of color. Within that same purview, composers often profit from writing music based on cultures other than their own, writing arrangements or integrate sounds associated with other cultures in their own compositions. These acts of appropriation send the wrong message by legitimizing appropriation and could even be seen as encouraging aspects of colonization.
How music is written for first and second violin players is another issue that promotes seating hierarchy in the orchestra ensemble, and although I can exchange parts to make music repertoire equitable for these players, in competitions we have to perform what is written in the score. And while we are working with violins, which constantly have the main melody for their parts, exchanging parts for other instrumentations is what needs to be encouraged to expand all instrumental players’ musical capacity. Lastly, the traditional orchestra’s performance setup also creates an injustice for certain instrumental players. For example, basses are always seated in the back of the orchestra. Being aware of these situations is required to create a social justice practice for the ensembles. It begins with the awareness and understanding of how musical equity can be practiced throughout the ensemble.

Of course it will take time, energy, and courage to teach for social justice, and sometimes teachers ask, is it even worth the effort? Just like practicing an instrument, social justice is a practice. As you continue to constantly think about your practicing, your mind will constantly be aware, and this awareness expands further outside of the classroom and can eventually lead to active social justice learning and teaching that is socially conscious.

**Final Thoughts**

During the time I was finishing up my dissertation, I stumbled upon a current societal issue on immigration policy, which affected my students. I began to rethink my responsibility as a teacher, mentor and friend to my students who happen to be children from Haiti and from various South American countries. These children have been affected by the outcomes of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy.
I am sure there are many educators wondering what we should do in this situation if our legal responsibility as educators is to be mandated reporters. Even though my students trust me, they were too scared to share their feelings, their troubles and their struggles about the recent changes. The DACA situation made students silent about their issues because they feared that if anyone found out, their families would be separated.

There seems to be a lack of care and understanding about students from diverse backgrounds, and these misconceptions should be taught in the classroom, where students can experience the lives of others. Matthews (2015) says, “privileged groups tend to see their lives as normative,” (p. 243) and as privileged teachers, we may not be aware of the social occurrences in our classrooms so prioritizing open conversations and exchanging in dialogue can help us be aware of each other’s perspectives and hopefully come to understand each other. Throughout the ASP journey, I realized that ASP was an opportunity for students to learn about each other’s differences and engage in conversations. Tatum (2017) says that, “We have been taught not to notice or to accept our present situation as a given, ‘the way it is’” (p. 340), and in our current situation, where violence and hate have become the forefront of education issue; it is our responsibility to reinforce practices that will help students develop socially and respectfully together. Only we can make that difference.

Oluo (2018) explains, “as long as we have had the spoken word, language has been one of the first tools deployed in efforts to oppress others” (p. 138). We cannot ignore historical injustices that have present-day effects; it is important for us, regardless of ethnicity or background that we are constantly socially aware that what we do, and what we say will create societal outcomes for the future. Using derogatory words that
describe a group of people, including but not limited to: race, gender, sexuality or appearance can negatively impact our students by promoting their acceptance of these patronizing acts. Giving students nicknames because we cannot pronounce their full names is unacceptable. Our own lack of awareness continues to play a role in cultural illiteracy and in the words we use to describe and identify our students, often by dismissing their cultural identity through appropriation. Students are part of a struggle to find their own identity in an environment with great challenges and I’ve learned this working with high school teenagers. I witnessed how social media and television tells them what they should be, or what they should look like and the student often becomes confused and seeks guidance from their role models. As adolescents, they constantly change their social identity as they develop as human beings by understanding themselves and society around them, but they battle with the preconceptions of their identity and we ourselves continue with the same struggle.

As teachers, we have to be social role models and teach our colleagues and our friends that this is education’s greatest social responsibility and share with others the importance of our voices and our perspectives and to never stay silent. Freire (1968) has written that, “human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world” (p. 88). I have personally dealt with the struggle in finding a diversity of perspectives in music education in my doctoral studies. As we continue in these discussions, I hope that eventually it will lead to wider social change where music education research is an inclusive society and can support a variety of perspectives in the educational practices we are involved in.
My experiences as a Korean American, military veteran, LGBTQ activist, Christian and social justice advocate gave me experiences related to how I teach my diverse students. My experiences in both traditional and non-traditional backgrounds have provided me insight and new perspectives of how I approach education but even though I was able to learn so much from my own experiences and relate to my students, I will never fully understand my students’ experiences. That is why it is important for us to listen to our students’ voices and hear their perspectives; students are aware of the social occurrences in our classrooms and are at the forefront of our teaching practices.

I do not represent all people of color; however, I can share my perspective as an Asian-American, non-traditional musician, and a teacher of diverse students. Even though Asian-Americans are often perceived as similar to certain privileged races and this has become another struggle that I have dealt with personally, ironically, we are silenced by privileged groups and silenced within our own social group, and have become powerless, like orchestra musicians who are led by a totalitarian conductor. I learned that when teaching students of diverse backgrounds, we really have to step up and take a stand for all people of color and bring our outside perspective, while working on the inside experience. We bring experiences from both sides of the spectrum, of what privilege and marginalization looks and feels like.

As Asian-Americans, our culture has made music part of our cultural identity, especially as first generation immigrants; we tend to hold on to traditional practices heavily because we do not want to lose our traditions and forget the importance of our cultures. However, this strong mindset needs to be changed as we live in a culture that is so diverse. Although we are stratified from the effects of immigration policy which
affects us the most, we cannot forget the people of color who came before us, and must advocate for equity for all human beings. We need to guide our students and treat them with respect, the way we as immigrants want to be treated. As Kaplan and Owings (2015) affirm,

Social Justice is the philosophy that promotes a fair society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity. It affirms that all people share a common humanity and have the right to equitable treatment, support for their rights as human beings, and a fair share of community resources. (p. 79)

Even throughout all the struggles of teaching and the challenges in the new seating practices, I am reminded of the beauty behind this practice when I see a different face at the front of the orchestra each day. I will continue this practice and share these experiences with others. As teachers, we must stand up for an equitable vision of the orchestra, especially when it can produce good music and instill healthy civic values. After all, we are stand partners first, in the orchestra.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Pilot Study Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>F/R Lunch</th>
<th>Experience (in years)</th>
<th>IEP/504</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 6</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 8</td>
<td>Violin</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. None of the students listed receive private lessons.
Appendix B

Assent Form for Minors

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027

Assent Form for Minors
Protocol Title: Back of the Orchestra: High School Student’s Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices
Principal Investigator: Tammy Yi tsy2101@tc.columbia.edu

You are being asked to partake in a study called, “Back of the Orchestra: High School Student's Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices.” As a Researcher and your Teacher, I am interested in learning your experiences when we practiced scrambled seating and randomized seating in orchestra when you were in 8th grade, 9th grade and 10th grade. As a student participant, I will be asking you to journal your experiences, reflect on past experiences and also be part of an online discussion that will be on Google Classroom.

I_______________________ (child’s name) agree to be in this study, titled________________.

What I am being asked to do has been explained to me by ___________________________.
I understand what I am being asked to do and I know that if I have any questions, I can ask ________________ at any time. I know that I can quit this study whenever I want to and it is perfectly OK to do so. It won't be a problem for anyone if I decide to quit.

Name: __________________________________________________

Signature: ________________________________________________

Witness: _______________________________________ Date:_______

Investigator’s Verification of Explanation

I certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to ___________________________ in age-appropriate language. He/she has the opportunity to discuss it with me and knows that they can stop participating at any time. I have answered all of their questions and this minor child has provided the affirmative agreement (assent) to participate in this research study.

Investigator’s Signature _____________________________ Date ______________
Appendix C

Parental Permission Form

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Protocol Title: Back of the Orchestra: High School Students Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices
Online Discussion Consent and Interview Consent
Principal Investigator: Tammy Yi tsy2101@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

Your child is being invited to participate in this research study called “Back of the Orchestra: High School Student’s Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices.” Your child may qualify to take part in this research study because your child is under the age of 18 and is a 10th grader in the orchestra program. Approximately twenty to thirty children will participate in this study and it will take 2 hours of your child’s time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

To further investigate on high school students experiences in alternative seating practices.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE THAT MY CHILD CAN TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? (Describe the research procedures in chronological order step by step.)

If you decide to allow your child to take part in this study, the principal investigator may interview your child. During the interview they will be asked to discuss their musical and social experience in alternative seating practices. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the recorded interview is written down the original recording will be deleted. If you do not wish your child to be audio-recorded, your child will not be able to participate. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes. Your child will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep their identity confidential.

Your child will then be asked to participate in an online discussion run by the principal investigator where children will discuss their experiences in orchestra on a Google Classroom platform. Everyone will be asked not to discuss what is being spoken about outside of the group but it is impossible to guarantee complete confidentiality.
**WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that your child may experience are not greater than your child would ordinarily encounter in orchestra. Your child might feel embarrassed to discuss their experiences. However, your child does not have to answer any questions or divulge anything they don’t want to talk about. Your child can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your child’s information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering what they say or their identity, such as using a pseudonym (or code) instead of their name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

**WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN MY CHILD EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is/is no direct benefit to your child for participating in this study.

**WILL MY CHILD BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

Your child will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for your child’s taking part in this study.

**WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN MY CHILD LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?**

The study is over when your child has completed the interview, online discussion group and journal entries. However, your child can leave the study at any time even if they haven’t finished.

**PROTECTION OF YOUR CHILD’S CONFIDENTIALITY**

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your child’s real name with their pseudonym. Research data concerning children will be kept for five years.

**HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?**

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your child’s name or any identifying information about your child will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

**CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING**

Audio and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission for your child to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish your
child be recorded, (choose the correct sentence) they will still be able to participate in this study or they will not be able to participate in this research study.

_____ I give my consent for my child to be recorded ________________

Signature

_____ I do not consent for my child to be recorded ________________

Signature

**WHO MAY VIEW MY CHILD’S PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY**

_____ I consent to allow my child’s written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College ________________

Signature

_____ I do not consent to allow my child’s written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University ________________

Signature

**OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT**

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes ________________  No ________________

Initial  Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes ________________  No ________________

Initial  Initial

**WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

If you have any questions about the study or your child’s taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Tammy Yitsy2101@tc.columbia.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection at Teachers College, Columbia University.
PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

• I have read and discussed the informed consent with the investigator. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.

• I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary. I may refuse to allow my child to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future student status or grades; services that my child would otherwise receive. I understand that my child may refuse to participate without penalty.

• The investigator may withdraw my child from the research.

• If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to allow my child to continue participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.

• Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies my child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

• I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to allow my child participate in this study

Child’s name: ______________________________________________________

Print Parent or guardian’s name: ______________________________________

Parent or guardian’s signature: ______________________________________

Date: __________________
Appendix D

Administrator Assent Forms

**Middle School Principal**

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

**Protocol Title:** Back of the Orchestra: High School Students Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices  
**Interview Consent**

**Principal Investigator:** Tammy Yi tsy2101@tc.columbia.edu

**INTRODUCTION**

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Back of the Orchestra: High School Student’s Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you were the administrator for the 8th grade orchestra class in 2015-2016. Approximately 25-35 people will participate in this study and it will take 2 hours of your time to complete.

**WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the social and musical outcomes of seating rotation/scrambled seating, also known as ASP (alternative seating practice), in a high school orchestra. The principal investigator is interested in learning the student participants experiences and how their experiences in ASP has changed over time.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed for no more than 60 mins. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identify confidential.

**WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are NOT greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life. **However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything they don't want to talk about.** The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym (or code) instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.
WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of music education research.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
You will NOT be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when the interview has been conducted. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name you’re your pseudonym.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING
Audio and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish to be recorded, you will NOT be able to participate in this research study.

_____I give my consent to be recorded _________________________ Signature

_____I do not consent to be recorded __________________________ Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

_____I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College __________________

Signature

_____I do not consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University __________________

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT
The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.
I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________
Initial                                                  Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________
Initial                                                  Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?
If you have any questions about the study or your participation in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Tammy Yi
tsy2101@tc.columbia.edu
If you have questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection at Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

• I have read and discussed the informed consent with the investigator. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
• I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future services that I would otherwise receive. I understand that I may refuse to participate without penalty.
• The investigator may withdraw my participation from the research.
• If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to participate and to continue participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
• Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
• I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to allow my child participate in this study

Print Name: __________________________

Signature: __________________________

Date: ______________
Appendix D (Cont.)

High School Principal
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

Protocol Title: Back of the Orchestra: High School Students Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices
Interview Consent

Principal Investigator: Tammy Yitsy2101@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

Your are being invited to participate in this research study called “Back of the Orchestra: High School Student’s Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you were the administrator for the 9th grade orchestra class in 2016-2017 and the 10th grade orchestra class in 2017-2018. Approximately 25-35 people will participate in this study and it will take 2 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the social and musical outcomes of seating rotation/scrambled seating, also known as ASP (alternative seating practice), in a high school orchestra. The principal investigator is interested in learning the student participants experiences and how their experiences in ASP has changed over time.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed for no more than 60 mins. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identify confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are NOT greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything they don't want to talk about. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym (or code) instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.
WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of music education research.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
You will NOT be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when the interview has been conducted. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven’t finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name you're your pseudonym.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING
Audio and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish to be recorded, you will NOT be able to participate in this research study.

___ I give my consent to be recorded  __________________________

___ I do not consent to be recorded  __________________________

Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College  __________________

Signature

___ I do not consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University  __________________

Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT
The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.
I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________
Initial                                                  Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________
Initial                                                  Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?
If you have any questions about the study or your participation in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Tammy Yi
tsy2101@tc.columbia.edu
If you have questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection at Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the investigator. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future services that I would otherwise receive. I understand that I may refuse to participate without penalty.
- The investigator may withdraw my participation from the research.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to allow me to participate, and to continue participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

    My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Print Name: ________________________________

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ______________
Appendix E

Online Class Discussion Questions

Google Classroom

1. Please respond to the questions below:
   a. Your age, ensemble (Chamber or String orchestra or Both)
   b. What instrument you play
   c. How long you've been playing that instrument
   d. Why are you in orchestra?
   e. How long have you've been in the orchestra program in this school district?

2. Thinking back over the years, what are some of your most memorable moments in orchestra?

3. Reflecting back to your very first orchestra experience, what do you remember learning in your orchestra classes?

4. Thank you for sharing all your experiences in orchestra this year. For your last question: please share your experiences during the Winter Concert.
Appendix F

from Student Journals

When I was in 3rd grade and I saw the school orchestra perform for the first time, I knew that I wanted to play bass. I stared at the bassists for the entire duration of the concert, even when the orchestra was no longer playing. That day my "friends" ridiculed me for wanting to play an "unmanly instrument" and I decided to pick the violin.

I started violin that summer, and for the next 4 years, would go on to play with the orchestra. I never smiled or felt happy during music class, nor did I ever practice. I did the bare minimum to keep up, and none of my teachers, until Miss Yi came, pushed me to do better. At every concert I felt like I could fade behind the curtain and no one would notice. I felt like no one cared. I brought up my feeling to my close friend who I always sat next to for concerts, and she expressed that she felt the same way. We were always in the back, behind the same people, forgotten. Then everything changed.

because it seemed to fit the mold that everyone saw me as, practical. All everyone saw me as was practical. The bass was deep and big and everyone who played it seemed to be a serious, serious, (usually) dude. I wanted to challenge that idea, but I couldn't because I was the shy, practical, nerdy girl.
On the first day of 8th grade, Miss Yi walked in, and told us exactly what changes would be made. I remember being scared out of my wits, and hearing many of my friends tell me that they wished to drop out because we had all never experienced this kind of pressure in orchestra class. Many of them quit that day. The most notable change that Miss Yi made was her. She worked hard that year to make us understand that it didn’t matter where we sat. That year I still sat in the back for the concert, but I didn’t feel worthless. I felt like an important, functioning member of the orchestra. I felt a change in the entire dynamic of our group, and no longer dreaded going to class. That year we played better than we ever have.

In the common setting, I sat next to someone new everyday, and even got to sit first row many times during class. I got to know my section better, and felt happier to be there, making new friends along the way.

Miss Yi made it a point to reinforce the fact that she cared about all of us, supporting all of us, and that every one of us mattered to her.

I still need my instrument. I suppose it for most 4 years, but as soon as I got a teacher who believed in me, I couldn’t let it up anymore. It was my 14th birthday and I told Miss Yi that I needed to speak to her during lunch. She immediately looked concerned because it was a known fact that I didn’t speak to her unless I needed to, let alone outside of class.
During lunch that day I decided actually going and decided not to. Fate did not have the same plan for me, because as soon as I walked out of the music room to deliver a paper, I ran into Miss Yi. She asked me to speak to me privately, and I blurted out that I wanted to play more bass and not away as fast as I possibly could. She could often be seen saying that she was so excited and that I'd be a role model for young girls. She packed up a bass and I brought it home the next day. That summer I began lessons and practiced a ton. When school started, I was the only bassist in class. My cellist that I was not comfortable around, due to a few poor alterations. To play next to me that year. I felt supported by everyone except for my own section; some looked down on me for reasons I did not understand. Miss Yi constantly told me how proud she was, and after every concert my parents and family showed undying support. Once again I felt love from everyone except my own section. There were only two of us in class that year. So motion did not affect me as much, and I stood last for one permission.

However, I accomplished a level 4 piece. Started taking better private lessons with a more experienced teacher. Not that my 1st teacher wasn't trying, and improved quickly. A piece passed and I found myself auditioning for chamber one year. And 11 days after I first started playing bass, I broke out of the mold, people put me in and prospered under the support of
Miss Yi and the orchestra family that I would’ve never had, had we not all bonded during 8th and 9th grade. In 10th grade I’ve found immense support in my section, and made a friend in that cellist. Everyday is an adventure and I get to learn new things from the different people I sit next to. The section is bigger now and it feels like a family with the exception of me.

Invited there, considering my experience, being my family is also always proud no matter where I am. (Although I must admit I ended up sitting 4th or 5th out of about 9 students which I am very shocked and thankful for to this day.)

It’s extremely fascinating to see how far we’ve all come, both separately and together as a group. All of this happened because of the two who are on the more difficult side of it. I get to experience new challenges within my own personal music career. For example, I attended Senior All County this year, and noticed how much this rotational seating has been humbling in a way I had some friends there from other schools who were closest in sitting in the front, while I was just another thankful to be.

An extremely uplifting and confidence-boosting seating plan and mentality and I couldn’t be more thankful to have experienced it. Without it, I wouldn’t be anywhere close to where I am today and it’s just wonderful to have been a part of it. I hope one day everyone can stop focusing on where they sit and just all be together playing music, happy and thankful to be invited along.
Appendix G

Principal Interview Questions

Middle School Principal:

1. Please tell me about your background and how long you have been working in this school.
2. Can you share some of your observations with the 8th grade orchestra class when you were their Principal in 2015-2016?
3. What are some of the changes you’ve witnessed both socially and musically with the 8th grade orchestra students?
4. What changes have you witnessed in the music program and the overall school district ever since the alternative seating practices were introduced?
5. What is your goal for your students to learn in the future?

High School Principal:

1. Please tell me about your background and how long you have been working in this school.
2. Can you share some of your experiences as an administrator for the music programs here at the high school?
3. What are some of the observations you’ve conducted with the high school orchestra programs in 2016-2017?
4. What is your goal for your students to learn in the future?
Appendix H

Student Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your age, grade and instrument you play in the orchestra?
2. Do you enjoy being in orchestra? If so, can you please elaborate on some of the experiences that make being in orchestra enjoyable?
3. What did you learn most being in orchestra?
4. What motivated you continue to play in orchestra?
5. Do you remember your experiences in 8th grade orchestra? If so, what were they?
6. What was some of the most memorable experiences in 8th grade orchestra?
7. What are some of the most memorable experiences in orchestra when you came up to the high school?
8. What changes have been made ever since you started practicing seating rotation and scrambled seating?
9. What are the differences in social and musical experiences you’ve had being in 8th grade, 9th grade and 10th grade in orchestra?
Appendix I

Informed Consent Form: Parents

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000

INFORMED CONSENT

Parent Informed Consent

Protocol Title: Back of the Orchestra: High School Students Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices
Interview Consent

Principal Investigator: Tammy Yi tsy2101@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Back of the Orchestra: High School Student’s Experiences in Alternative Seating Practices.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you were the administrator for the 8th grade orchestra class in 2015-2016. Approximately 25-35 people will participate in this study and it will take 1 hour of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to investigate the social and musical outcomes of seating rotation/scrambled seating, also known as ASP (alternative seating practice), in a high school orchestra. The principal investigator is interested in learning the student participants experiences and how their experiences in ASP has changed over time.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed for no more than 60 mins. You will be given a pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identify confidential.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are NOT greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything that you do not want to talk about. The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym (or code) instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.
WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is no direct benefit for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of music education research.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
You will NOT be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when the interview has been conducted. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name you're your pseudonym.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING
Audio and video recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don’t wish to be recorded, you will NOT be able to participate in this research study.

_____ I give my consent to be recorded _________________________ Signature

_____ I do not consent to be recorded __________________________ Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

_____ I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College ________________ Signature

_____ I do not consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University __________________________ Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT
The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.
I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________
Initial                                                  Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes ________________________   No_______________________
Initial                                                  Initial

**WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

If you have any questions about the study or your participation in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Tammy Yi tsy2101@tc.columbia.edu

If you have questions or concerns about your child’s rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection at Teachers College, Columbia University.

**PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS**

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the investigator. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty to future services that would otherwise receive. I understand that I may refuse to participate without penalty.
- The investigator may withdraw my participation from the research.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study.

Print Name: ______________________________

Signature: ______________________________

Date: ______________
Appendix J

Parent Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent ID</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent 1</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Healthcare Professional</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 3</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Arts &amp; Performance</td>
<td>250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 4</td>
<td>Multi-Racial</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 5</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>200,000 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent 6</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>100,000 +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The “*” symbol indicates parents did not want to disclose income information.
Appendix K

A Student Letter/Essay

[Handwritten text]
Appendix L

Competition Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>AREAS OF REVIEW</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOUND QUALITY (30.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tone Quality</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pitch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TECHNICAL ACCURACY (30.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technique</td>
<td>2B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MUSICALITY (35.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretation, Musicianship</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breath/Mallet/Bow Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STAGE DEPORTMENT (5.0)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score: 92

Evaluation Scale: 90-100 = Superior, 80-89 = Excellent, 70-79 = Good/Average, 60-69 = Fair, Less than 60 = Needs Improvement

8th Grade Orchestra

All takes the inner parts needed to listen a work in intonation!
Overall, very good!
Great job! Cello's Repertoire was perfect for the age of the group.
A very well-rehearsed group, a pleasure to listen to.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>AREAS OF REVIEW</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Keep listening to your teacher for all strong technique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be more expressive and stay expressive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Tone Quality</td>
<td>□ Natural (for this age group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Free (of tension)</td>
<td>□ Vibrant (has energy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Blend</td>
<td>□ Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pitch</td>
<td>□ Accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Technique</td>
<td>□ Attacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Accents</td>
<td>□ Articulation/Bowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Missed Notes</td>
<td>□ Challenge of Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>□ Accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Tempo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MUSICALITY (35.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Interpretation, Musicianship</td>
<td>□ Correct Style Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appropriate Repertoire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Balance</td>
<td>□ Expressivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Artistry</td>
<td>□ Nuances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Sense of Ensemble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Communicating with a Sense of Purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dynamics</td>
<td>□ Use Of Full Range (ff/fp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Use of Subtle Dynamic Changes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breath/Mallet/Bow Management</td>
<td>□ Phrasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Carefully Planned and Executed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>STAGE DEPORTMENT (5.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>□ Attitude</td>
<td>□ Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Appearance</td>
<td>□ Posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relax</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ADJUDICATION SCALE – By Score: 90–100 = (Superior) 80–89.9 = (Excellent) 70–79.9 = (Good/Average) 60–69.9 = (Fair) Less than 60 = (Needs Improvement)
**ADJUDICATION FORM**

**SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA – STRING ORCHESTRA – CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**

**DIRECTOR’S INSTRUCTIONS:**
Each group should play 2 or 3 selections. Actual performance time should not exceed 15 minutes.

**ADJUDICATOR’S INSTRUCTIONS:**
Please award an overall performance score against each category below, including comments relative to each criterion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>MAXIMUM SCORE</th>
<th>ACTUAL SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TONE:</strong> Control, beauty, blend.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautiful!! Wow!!</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTONATION:</strong> Chords, melodic line, tutti section.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent, key working on it, listen to recording for some places.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TECHNIQUE:</strong> Articulation, facility, precision, rhythm, attacks, releases.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For High School Students - outstanding!</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dv. II  Lii? weight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BALANCE:</strong> Ensemble, sectional.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERPRETATION:</strong> Expression, dynamics, artistry, tempo, phrasing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent Choice of Repertoire!</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His Dwn - slow it down, keep it steady, it will be even more effective for your listeners.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL SCORE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCORING/AWARD LEVELS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUPERIOR (GOLD)</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>85-100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXCELLENT (SILVER)</td>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>75-84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOOD (BRONZE)</td>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>60-64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERIT</td>
<td>50-64</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>50-59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESTIVAL</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
<td>BELOW 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final rating awarded to the group is based on the average score of all of the adjudicators.

**ADJUDICATOR’S SIGNATURE**
Appendix M

A Pilot Study Student Journal

Stand Partner Reflection #2 4/26/17

My Stand partner is someone I see regularly outside of orchestra. I don’t really like some of the things they do but I won’t say I don’t like them, but due to a few bad incidents in the past I don’t have complete trust in them. Nevertheless, I didn’t let those past incidents influence our playing. Everytime we messed up we would turn to each other and laugh which really made us both relaxed. In the video, I noticed that we don’t seem to be moving at the same rate, however, when we were playing the moving parts of canzone we did get it. Similarly during actual playing, during canzone, I noticed that I had my partner played the 5 in a different way than I did. I realized that I had actually been playing the timing wrong. So, I watched how they played it and slowly adjusted my technique. I’m glad that I caught that mistake while sitting next to them, else I don’t think I would have caught it with anyone else in the section. This is b/c my partner plays in a pronounced way so the technique was easy to catch.
I'm so glad I got to sit next to this person today! AA This person and I get along so well when we play! Everytime one of us gestures or moves in a certain way, the other will follow. I think that when we sit together, I'm the more dominant player and my partner looks to me for leadership. This motivates me to try to play the dynamics and rhythms correctly and with distinction so that my partner doesn't mess up my part.

We joke a lot before during and after class. Today, we both got mad b/c one of the corn players was holding up the class. Mrs. Yi noticed and made a funny comment on our similar problems. We usually talk a bit in the middle of switching music but we also talk communicate while we play. If one of us messes up or is lost, we both make swift eye contact, laugh and will help each other get back on track. My partner

We had to play a solo today for one of the pieces. Actually, my partner was supposed to play it alone but was nervous so we played it together. I feel really strong and confident knowing
I can help my friend during orchestra. I just wish they would have a little more confidence in their playing ability. But whenever they need guidance while playing at a pace I'm there to help.

While we played the solo, I noticed our bow strokes and styling were synching. We also moved together and began mimicking the dynamics each other's volume.