MAKING ROOM FOR THE CREATING PROCESS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL LARGE ENSEMBLE SETTINGS: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT

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In performance-driven large ensemble settings such as band or orchestra, the artistic process of Creating found in the National Core Music Standards, which includes improvisation, composition, and/or arranging, is often ignored or omitted. Music educators believe these creative endeavors to be essential in a holistic music education, but struggle to implement them in their large ensemble settings such as band or orchestra. A Participatory Action Research cohort of four high school large ensemble directors collaborated with the researcher to overcome these deficiencies in their teaching practices. Collaboration took place in a synchronous online professional learning community (OnPLC).

During the 16-week collaboration period, participants shared their experiences and delivered two lessons featuring composition, improvisation, and arranging in their
large ensemble settings. Participants shared their recorded lessons in the OnPLC for critique. Working within a model of efficient collaboration, participants were able to overcome the obstacles of time, student insecurity, teacher insecurity, and teacher attitude. Participants found that a 7-step creative music strategy was a versatile method by which they could design meaningful lessons without infringing on performance quality. Success was measured by participants’ ability to meet the anchor standards found in the artistic process of Creating. Success was also measured anecdotally by positive student outcomes. Students’ success and aptitude for creating music not only surprised them, but surprised their teachers as well.

Participant post-interviews revealed that all participants believed they were successful in this endeavor, and now have the confidence to implement lessons featuring improvisation, composition, and arranging into their curriculum. Participants believed that viewing recordings of successful lesson examples allowed them to re-define their expectations of what improvisation, composition, and arranging lessons might entail. Consequently, participants found that the obstacles of time, teacher attitude, and student apprehension were easily surmountable by utilizing their own teaching experience and instincts as music educators. Minimal training or professional development was needed for participants to feel successful. An attitude of, “making it happen” was essential for their success.
DEDICATION

For the loves of my life:

Erica, Cole, and Kennedy
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*Philippians 4:13*

M. P. F.
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

This study was about changing mindsets and empowering music educators to adjust their teaching practices to reflect their desires to provide a holistic music education for their students. In Southern California, a strong ideology exists which encourages competition and product-driven music education. The participants in this study all recognized the importance of teaching for process as well as product, but in some cases saw this as too daunting of a task. The participants from this study wanted to discover how they might include more creativity in their performance-driven courses. Specifically, they sought to include improvisation, composition, and arranging in their large ensemble settings such as wind ensemble, concert band, or orchestra. The following is an account of their journey and their collective success.

Personal Narrative

Upon moving to Southern California at the age of 14, I made a life-changing decision to join the marching band as a high school freshman. My participation in the high school marching band was undoubtedly a formative part of my high school experience, not unlike athletes who played football, basketball, or water polo. I was fortunate to have a truly incredible music educator whom I still look up to this day. Despite his best efforts to direct us toward the process-oriented parts of making music, as a teenager I was motivated by competition. The rewards of winning trophies and achieving top ratings at festivals were strong motivators for my musical achievement.
Some of my greatest high school memories are competing and winning with the marching band.

Each school year, after the marching band season was over, the remaining months of my high school experience in the band program included participating in the jazz band and wind ensemble. As students, our focus and motivation were earning the top rating at an adjudicated band festival or to, “beat” other jazz bands in our division. Looking back, I am confident that my band director taught us that it was more critical for us to meet our highest potential as performers, and not focus on the scores we would receive. An ideology of performance-driven music education seems to run deep in Southern California.

When I joined the ranks of music educators, I created a program that aligned with a profile of a Southern California band that I had perceived to be successful: one or two concert bands, a jazz ensemble, and a competitive marching band as the centerpiece of the program. After three years of teaching high school band, I pursued a graduate degree in conducting. This experience changed my approach to teaching. While studying under a new mentor, I was compelled to think about music as a process and not a product. I began to emphasize a process-oriented approach to music in my teaching practice, connecting my students more to the aesthetic experience of music, with less focus on ratings and scores. During a roundtable discussion at one of the annual local music association conferences, my conducting teacher imposed a controversial question to the room: “How do you measure success when you remove competition from the equation?” The room was silent for some time, as the notion of abandoning competition is not a notably popular subject among high school music educators in Southern California.
Just as that room of music educators were silent that day, I too was silent, pondering the question of measuring success in the absence of competition. I started to rethink everything I thought I knew about teaching music. As a high school band director, I questioned the process by which I measured my students’ musical skills and abilities. I concluded that I had adopted a product-driven system of gauging my students’ success as musicians (and my success as a teacher). I solely measured myself and my students against the ratings and scores we received at festivals and competitions. I also began to consider the implications of process in music education with a variety of questions: What did a score at a competition mean? Did that score reflect the journey that my students and I embarked on to perform that day? Was our journey any more or less significant than those of my colleagues’ students because of a score given by some adjudicators? Are we merely teaching to the test to get high marks at a contest or festival? When it comes to measuring success, is winning a valid means to an end?

As I struggled with these types of questions, I challenged my preconceived notions of what a successful high school band director in Southern California might look like. I re-evaluated the way in which I utilized my precious class time with my students. I began to appreciate the processes of music more than the products. My world opened up as I endeavored to expose my students to a holistic music education beyond traditional performance preparation.

**High School Large Ensembles and the National Core Music Standards**

**The Organization of the National Core Music Standards**

The National Core Music Standards (NCMS) present three artistic processes: Creating, Performing, and Responding. When combined, all three processes are said to
represent a holistic music education which is embodied in the fourth musical process of
Connecting (NCCAS, 2014; Shuler et al., 2014). In alignment with the Common Core
initiative, the NCMS emphasize an importance of the process of knowledge acquisition
over the products of knowledge acquisition (Shuler et al. 2014). With an emphasis on
process over product, the NCMS were intentionally designed to overlap with one another.
For instance, standard MU:Cr2.1.E.8a from the artistic process of Creating states, “Select
and develop draft melodies and rhythmic passages that demonstrate understanding of
characteristic(s) of music or text(s) studied in rehearsal” (NAfME, 2018a). To
successfully meet this standard, students would need to transfer knowledge from the
musical process of responding which emphasizes the musical behaviors of analyzing,
interpreting and evaluating repertoire (NCCAS, 2014).

The NCMS are organized into five unique strands (music disciplines) to address
varying curricula: (a) PreK-8 General Music, (b) Technology, (c) Ensembles, (d)
Theory/Composition, and (e) Guitar-Harmonizing Instruments. In alignment with the
Common Core movement, standards are built on anchor standards across each of the
Artistic Processes, which are then divided into descriptive tasks at varying levels of
proficiency. Each anchor standard is accompanied by corresponding student behaviors
such as: select, analyze and interpret, present, plan and make, and imagine. The inclusion
of essential questions and enduring understandings with each anchor standard is meant to
inspire higher level thinking and practical application of the musical skills and behaviors
for students (NCCAS, 2014). Enduring understandings are meant to focus on, “big
ideas”:

Enduring understandings are statements summarizing important ideas and core
processes that are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the
classroom. They synthesize what students should come to understand as a result of studying a particular content area. [...] Enduring understandings should also enable students to make connections to other disciplines beyond the arts. (NCCAS 2014, p. 14)

Essential questions are, “questions without simple answers, but meant to provoke deeper thought and inquiry. [...] Essential questions also guide students as they uncover enduring understandings” (NCCAS, 2014 p.14). The resulting organizational framework of the NCMS is depicted in Figure 1.1, beginning with the five unique musical disciplines (strands). The specific flow of anchor standards, essential questions, and musical behaviors for the artistic process of Creating is depicted in Figure 1.2.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 1.1. Organization of the National Core Arts Standards for Music (NAfME, 2018a).*

**The Four Musical Behaviors Within the Artistic Process of Creating**

As described in the National Core Music Standards (NCMS), the artistic process of Creating emphasizes four creating behaviors: (1) imagine, (2) plan and make, (3)
evaluate and refine, and (4) present. Evidence of student achievement in the four behaviors may include original improvisations, compositions, and/or arrangements of music. The first two behaviors (imagine, plan and make) emphasize improvisation, composition, and arranging. The third behavior (evaluate and refine) asks students to look at their work critically based on the criteria of achieving an intended purpose. The fourth behavior (present) asks students to share their work, possibly in a performance setting. When arranged sequentially, the four music creating behaviors represent an authentic process that musicians take on when creating music. The process begins with unorganized musical ideas which may begin with short improvisations or motivic play (imagine), which are then organized into a coherent musical gesture (plan and make). As the music begins to take shape, informed decisions must be made by its creator to best fit within a context and intended purpose (evaluate and refine). Finally, a finished product is ready to be presented as a performance of some sort (present). In this framework, the creating process ideally begins with musical experimentation and improvisation (imagine) before composition or arranging takes place (plan and make; evaluate and refine). The artistic process of Creating in the NCMS has three anchor standards. Each anchor standard is accompanied by an enduring understanding (practical application) and an essential question (meant to inspire deeper thought). Figure 1.2 shows how these are presented in the NCMS.

The NCMS present a research-based model for the holistic musical development of students. For the model to work as intended, music educators must apply the four behaviors found in the artistic process of Creating in their curriculum. High school band directors, in particular, report difficulty finding opportunities in their large ensemble
settings to administer activities that ask students to improvise, compose, or arrange (LaCognata, 2009; Strand, 2006). To achieve the goals of holistic education in high school large ensemble settings, an intervention may be needed to support high school large ensemble directors’ curricular choices. Professional development opportunities currently exist to better assist educators in their quest to meet the demands of educational frameworks such as state and national standards.

Figure 1.2. Organization of the Artistic Process of Creating Within the National Core Arts Standards for Music: Ensemble Strand (NAfME, 2018a).

The High School Large Ensemble and the NCMS

In Southern California, a typical large ensemble high school band setting is a place where traditions of the past are transmitted through an abundance of skills-based tasks and performance preparation. The large ensemble may be defined as a traditional
concert band or wind ensemble with at least 20 participants. Many high school large ensemble directors in Southern California highly value ensemble performance opportunities as a mode of transmitting musical understanding to their students (Whitmore, 2017). Therefore, high school large ensemble directors in Southern California find themselves in a perpetual state of performance preparation, making curricular decisions to use instructional time to meet the utilitarian demands of their rigorous performance schedules (Allsup, 2016; Reimer, 2003; Whitmore, 2017). In this utilitarian model, “sonic outcomes” are prized as a measurement of good teaching, encouraging the monopolization of instructional time to address skills-based musical outcomes (Allsup, 2016, p. 42). Consequently, little room is made for process-based musical behaviors in the high school large ensemble setting which demonstrate deeper musical understanding. For the purposes of this study, a process-based musical behavior engages students to connect critically to the music they are studying beyond the demands of the technical skills needed to perform repertoire.

The movement toward standards-based education in the United States encouraged the field of music education to align music curriculum frameworks with those found in other subjects such as math, science, and language arts. In 1994, the Music Educator’s National Conference (MENC) released a set of standards that included a multitude of musical benchmarks and behaviors (performing, composing, improvising, evaluating, arranging) that represented a research-based view of a holistic music education (MENC, 1994). In 2010, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was released in the United States. In partnership with The National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (NCCAS) released a process-oriented set of
standards in 2014, revamping the MENC standards from 1994 to align with the Common Core initiative (NCCAS, 2014; Shuler, Norgaard, & Blakeslee, 2014). Similar to the 1994 MENC Standards, the National Core Music Standards are voluntarily implemented, developed by educators, method neutral, philosophically-based, (Shuler et al., 2014) and include assessable outcomes (Burrack & Parkes, 2018). By October 2019, the NCMS had been adopted by 30 states, with 10 states in a revision process toward future adoption of the NCMS (NCCAS, 2019). As standards-based education evolved since the early 2000s, the field of education has also seen changes in professional development offerings for educators.

**Professional Development for Music Educators**

**Professional Learning Communities**

Teacher isolation remains a commonly researched issue in the teaching profession. Isolation has been found to be experienced heavily by music educators, who are usually (with some exceptions) the only professionals at their school site that specialize in teaching their subject area (Conway, 2008; Jackman, 2017; Verdi, 2016). Since the early 2000’s, professional development (PD) opportunities have been utilized at school sites through semi-regular teacher collaboration setting (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Collaborative settings help to mitigate the negative perceptions of teacher isolation and improve teaching practices (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Jackman, 2017; Stanley, 2011).

Due to their subject-specific exclusivity at their teaching sites, music teachers may rarely have opportunities to collaborate with other music teachers during designated school site professional development (PD) time. As such, PD provided to music teachers by their school sites has been described by music educators as a, “one-size-fits-all”
approach, with little transferability or relevance to music educators’ specific teaching assignments (Conway, 2008, p. 15; Sanderson, 2017, p. 34; Stanley, 2011, p. 71): “Music educators are often assigned to professional development groups that are tailored to teachers of other subjects” (Battersby & Verdi, 2015, p.26).

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a collaborative setting of social inquiry with three emphases: (1) “Ensuring that students learn, (2) A culture of collaboration, (3) A focus on results (DuFour, 2004, p. 9-11).” When implemented as intended, PLCs have been found to be an effective model for improving teaching practices while managing the negative aspects of isolation experienced by teachers (Jackman 2017; Sanderson 2017; Verdi; 2016). Music educators who participate in PLCs with other music educators (preferably in the same discipline) have reported positive outcomes related to social support and the improvement of teaching practice (Jackman, 2017; Verdi, 2016). For instance, music teachers who participate in PLCs with other music educators are more likely to experience a heightened sense of belongingness, relatedness, and meaning (Verdi, 2016). Additionally, PLCs have the potential to improve teachers’ instructional practices by providing mutual accountability amongst their members, collaborative development of common assessments, as well as confidence and validation in classroom procedures (Sanderson, 2017).

As music educators are usually the only ones of their kind at their particular school site, the logistics of geography and schedule alignment present significant barriers to forming music-PLCs. For high school band directors in particular, conflicting rehearsal and performance schedules may create a formidable challenge to finding a common time and location for a face-to-face PLC. “[Online PLCs] can emerge as a solution to this
problem by offering internet-based platforms for music teachers in different districts who would otherwise have difficulty meeting as a group” (Battersby & Verdi 2015, p. 28). For high school large ensemble directors with impacted schedules, the Online PLC (OnPLC) has immense potential to be a viable social and curricular support system.

**Participatory Action Research**

An individual in a musical ensemble participates in a process laden with collaboration, self-reflection, and trial and error, with the goal of delivering an authentic, collaborative performance. This process requires communication, adjustment, flexibility, and an established vision and purpose from all involved. In a similar fashion, music educators in a PLC embark on a journey of self-improvement to better serve their students; working together toward a shared purpose and vision, by exhibiting both flexibility and reflexivity. As a method of inquiry, Participatory Action Research (PAR) invites participants to become co-researchers with a facilitator (researcher) in a quest to address a problem or issue that participants have in common with one another. A PAR cohort works together over time as a team, critically reflecting on their own journey to develop a shared purpose and vision.

As a model of collaborative inquiry, a PAR cohort closely resembles a PLC in that the cohort not only supports one another critically and collaboratively, but discovers knowledge in reciprocity with the other members. A transformative process takes place over time in both the facilitator and the participants. As a method of inquiry, PAR, “is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 4). PAR is messy by design, as a cycle of inquiry requires the cohort to constantly participate in a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting
throughout the study (Kemmis, 1982, cited in Herr & Anderson, 2015). Figure 1.3 is a graphic depiction of this cycle of inquiry. This process of PAR requires the cohort to be in a perpetual state of creativity as they will be, “designing the plane while flying it” throughout the duration of the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 85). As a PAR cohort takes an active part in this process, participants glean their own practical knowledge which informs their future teaching practices.

![Figure 1.3. Cycle of Inquiry in Action Research.](image)

**Problem Statement**

The prevailing culture of product over process in high school music programs has distracted many music educators from delivering a comprehensive music curriculum to their students (Allsup, 2016; Colwell, 2014; Gouzouasis & Henderson, 2012). High school large ensemble directors in Southern California claim to see importance in delivering a holistic music education to their students. However, they cite a lack of available class time to implement these tasks due to their rigorous performance schedules. Therefore, high school large ensemble directors have difficulty meeting all of the Artistic Processes found in the National Core Music Standards.
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to work with a cohort of high school music directors to explore the extent to which they were able to design and deliver a holistic music curriculum to their students in a large ensemble setting. Furthermore, this study investigated indications of their evolved perceptions and attitudes toward the role of creative processes in their curriculum (such as improvisation, composition, and arranging), and how these perceptions took shape during and after their participation in an Online Professional Learning Community.

Rationale for This Study

There is a wide range of views and philosophies of what music education could and should be. A product-oriented emphasis has dominated the educational landscape in high school large ensemble programs (Allsup, 2016). This approach has manifested a sense of confinement for some high school large ensemble directors who wish to adopt a more heuristic, process-oriented approach to music education (Whitmore, 2017). As music educators may feel trapped within a performance-driven paradigm steeped in traditionalism, they must be equipped with tools that can help them change their instructional practices to better align with the National Core Music Standards.

The intended contribution of this research is to support high school large ensemble directors who are struggling to achieve their vision of a holistic music education for their students. Specifically, this research intends to provide an observational model by which they may successfully implement the artistic process of Creating found in the National Core Music Standards. Furthermore, high school large
ensemble directors may apply the findings of this research to inform their own curriculum planning and teaching practices.

**Research Questions**

Using Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a method of inquiry, I recruited a cohort of four high school large ensemble directors to participate in this study. The guiding research questions for this study were designed to reflect the unique journey of each participant before, during, and after their participation in an Online Professional Learning Community (PLC):

1. Prior to their participation in an Online PLC, how do high school large ensemble directors describe the role of creativity as contributing to a holistic music education?
   a. To what extent do improvisation, composition, and arranging appear in their previous teaching practices?
   b. What obstacles and challenges do they anticipate while discussing implementing improvisation, composition, and arranging into their past curriculum?

2. What instructional strategies can high school large ensemble directors design together in an Online PLC to include improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices?
   a. Which improvisation, composition, and arranging activities do they choose to implement in their teaching settings? What reasons do they give for their choices?
b. What problem-solving strategies do participants utilize to overcome obstacles and challenges they face?

3. Following their experience in an Online PLC, what measures of success (if any) do participants describe from their participation in a 16-week collaborative process?
   a. What measures of success and/or failure do participants describe regarding their implementation of improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices?
   b. What enduring changes, if any, do high school large ensemble directors plan to implement pertaining to the inclusion of improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices?

**Overview of Research Design**

To better understand and support high school large ensemble directors in their unique settings, a cohort of four high school large ensemble directors participated in an online Professional Learning Community (OnPLC). As a cohort, participants in the OnPLC explored their own personal experiences with the implementation the artistic process of Creating into their curriculum as prescribed by the NCMS. As a methodological approach, participatory action research (PAR) inspired a process of social inquiry that took place over the course of 16 weeks. As a PAR cohort, participants functioned as co-researchers along with the facilitator as they collectively engaged in a critical cycle of inquiry (plan, act, observe, reflect).
Definitions

Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging (ICA)

ICA appears in this document as a sequential process of experimentation which leads to the creation and refinement of musical ideas. The creating process follows a logical progression, beginning with improvisation that leads to composition and/or arranging.

**Improvisation:** Improvisation can be defined as the spontaneous and purposeful creation of musical ideas. With consideration of ICA as a process, improvisation precedes composition and/or arranging as experimentation.

**Composition:** Composition is the preservation of original musical ideas that result from musical experimentation. Composition implies a process of the purposeful planning and revising of musical ideas into a musical product to be performed.

**Arranging:** Arranging is a reimagining (or, “remix”) of unoriginal musical ideas that take form as a result of musical experimentation. Similar to composition, arranging implies a process of the purposeful planning and revising of musical ideas into a musical product to be performed.

National Core Music Standards (NCMS)

The National Core Music Standards were released in 2014 by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) as a guiding framework for music educators. The framework emphasizes three artistic processes that represent a well-rounded music education for music students: Creating, Performing, and Responding.
Four Artistic Behaviors in the Artistic Process of Creating

Four behaviors sets are presented as a logical sequence that students participate in during the creating process: imagine, plan and make, evaluate and refine, and present. First, students *imagine* their work by experimenting and improvising musical ideas. As their musical ideas take shape, students *plan and make* their work by composing and/or arranging. Students then engage in a revision process where they *evaluate and refine* their compositions and/or arrangements. Finally, students *present* their work by performing their compositions and/or arrangements.

Anchor Standards for the Artistic Process of Creating

Each artistic process found in The National Core Music Standards is organized into anchor standards that students are meant to meet as evidence of learning and growth. The three anchor standards students must meet for the artistic process of creating follow a progressive sequence and are as follows:

1. **Generate/conceptualize artistic ideas & work:** students are asked to *imagine* musical ideas through a process of experimentation and improvisation.
2. **Organize and develop artistic ideas & work:** students are asked to *plan and make* by beginning a process of composing and/or arranging music.
3. **Refine & complete artistic work:** students are asked to *evaluate and refine* their work by critically revising their compositions and arrangements. Students then *perform* their compositions and/or arrangements.

Model Cornerstone Assessment (MCA) for the Artistic Process of Creating

The Model Cornerstone Assessment (MCA) is a project-based learning unit carefully designed to address all three anchor standards found in the artistic process of
Creating. MCAs were developed by NAfME in all three artistic processes (creating, performing, responding) as a companion to the National Core Music Standards (NCMS). The MCAs are designed to be flexible and accessible to all music educators for the purpose of guiding their students to meet all of the anchor standards found in the NCMS framework.

**Professional Learning Community (PLC)**

A professional learning community (PLC) is a collaborative model used by educators to improve teaching practice. PLCs emphasize critical reflection and collaborative discourse among professional educators with the purpose of better serving students’ educational needs. While PLCs are a successful model for supporting teacher growth, the intended use of PLCs is ultimately to use evidence-based practices to support student learning and growth.

**Online PLC (OnPLC)**

The Online PLC (OnPLC) is a collaborative model whereby educators meet in an online space instead of a physical face-to-face setting. OnPLCs can be synchronous, where participants meet in real time through “video chat.” Or, OnPLCs can meet asynchronously, where participants access a repository of online materials at their own convenience.

**Summary of Remaining Chapters**

In Chapter I, I provided my own narrative about what led to my interest in conducting this study, offered an overview of the NCMS, the role of PLCs as professional development, and PAR as a research methodology. Additionally, a problem
statement, purpose, rationale, research questions, were presented. Chapter II summarizes relevant literature on creativity in educational settings, the act of creating in music education settings, and the role of professional learning communities in music education. Chapter III outlines the research approach for this study, including methods of data collection, data analysis methods, findings from a pilot study, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and delimitations. Chapter IV is a presentation of four participant portraits and their individual experiences with teaching improvisation, composition, and arranging before, during, and after the study. Chapter V is a portrayal of participants’ collected experiences with improvisation, composition, and arranging throughout the study. Chapter VI is an analysis and discussion of participants’ experiences. And Chapter VII concludes with a summary, responses to each research question, limitations of this study, recommendations for future research, and implications.
Chapter II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore with a group of high school large ensemble directors the extent to which they were able to provide a comprehensive music curriculum to their students in a large ensemble setting. To better understand the dynamics of the study’s purpose, and to address the research questions presented in Chapter I, three domains of related literature were investigated: (1) Creativity and Creating: Philosophical Foundations, (2) The Act of Creating in the Music Education Setting, and (3) Professional Development and the Professional Learning Community.

The first topic defines what creativity is in educational settings. Creativity can be described in a variety of ways: as a process of problem solving (the ability to think divergently to solve a problem), personality traits that someone may exhibit (one is creative, or is not creative), or a product/outcome (creativity in action, or the production of a creative product).

The second topic focuses on how creativity manifests itself in the music setting, specifically as improvising or composing. Improvisation and composing are widely accepted as representations of the highest-order cognitive skills in music. The National Core Music Standards refer to improvisation and composition as the primary modes of engaging students in four creating behaviors: imagine, plan and make, evaluate and refine, and present. This topic includes a rationale for improvisation and composition as representations of creative thought, as well as the obstacles faced by music educators in
implementing these skills. The third topic is a review of the relevant literature on professional learning communities as a relevant system for professional development and social support for music educators.

**Creativity and Creating: Psychological Foundations**

**Creativity as Emergence**

The educational models of the early 20th century were built upon a philosophy which Sawyer (2015) refers to as instructionalism. Philosophically, an instructionalist system of education was meant to prepare students for life in an industrialized society. This system of instructionalism emphasized obedience, timeliness, and conformity, where knowledge was considered to be fixed, linear, and bound by authority (Bailin, 2015; Sawyer, 2015; Webster, 2016). Instructionalism aligns with a convergent process of knowledge acquisition, which resembles a direct path to meaning. Convergent thinking relies on recall of memorized facts, with a notion that knowledge is absolute and that solutions to problems are dualistic in nature. Piaget’s constructivist learning theory emerged as a rival educational philosophy, where knowledge is constructed based on, “boundaryless learning and meaning” through the process of divergent thinking (Sawyer, 2015; p. 15).

In contrast to convergent thinking, divergent thinking requires the learner to discover knowledge through unconventional means. The path to discovery by way of a divergent thought process is messy. The divergent thinker’s path is indirect: there are detours, dead ends, and deviation. The process of divergent thought leads to deeper understanding, and emergent learning which is, “boundaryless” (Sawyer, 2015; p 15). Piaget believed that constructivism is rooted in the belief that knowledge is not fixed, but
rather is constructed through the process of divergent thinking, which leans to emergent learning (Bailin, 2015; Sawyer, 2015). Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory states that emergent learning does not only take place at the individual level, but that deeper learning thrives when individuals work in collaboration with others (Sawyer, 2015). Piaget described both creativity and learning as emergent processes (Sawyer, 2015). Emergent learning theory is at the heart of constructivist ideals; therefore, creativity is also constructivist in nature. Cognitively, creative processes employ a balance and interplay between both divergent and convergent thinking (Kokotsaki, 2011; Kokotsaki, 2012).

**Constructivism and Creativity**

Creativity as an exemplar of emergent processes suggests that new knowledge is not just constructed, but that the process of thinking creatively also, “represent[s] a complete reorganization of thought” (Sawyer, 2015, p. 20). This reorganization of thought in a divergent manner leads to the creation of products and ideas that are unpredictable, irreducible, and novel (Sawyer, 2015). For these reasons, constructivists believe that creativity, and creative thought is important in all subjects (not just the arts).

Creativity is also said to exist in personality, such as one *is* creative, or *is not* creative. Coleman (2015) states that creative skills are necessary to produce, “critical, ethical, and engaged members of society” (p. 6) in all walks of life. The view of creativity as a trait of one’s personality raises a question: “Can creativity be taught, or is it innate?” Bailin (2015) describes creativity as a set of, “cognitive processes,” where one thinks, “divergently, intuitively, out of the box,” as well as, “personality traits,” such as, “spontaneity, non-conformity, risk-taking, tolerance of ambiguity” (pp. 3-4).
**Tension Between Freedom and Structure in the Constructivist Classroom Setting**

When creative processes are used to acquire new knowledge, a tension exists between the freedom of imagination and the coexistence of tradition and convention in a classroom setting (Bailin, 2015; Sawyer, 2015). Constructivist learning depends on the use of scaffolding, or building upon prior knowledge to support learning goals. Scaffolds are structures or parameters, which paradoxically encroach on a free, divergent thought processes. To truly encourage creative learning, “a set of scaffolds and structure must be in place to guide students,” without impeding on the freedom of thought necessary in the emergent learning experience (Sawyer, 2015, p. 26). Sawyer describes this as a teaching paradox, where the goal should be, “disciplined improvisation,” which, “allows for the creative benefits of collaborative emergence, yet guided by teacher practices, curricular structures, and learning goals that aid students in their own processes of creative learning” (p. 26). Disciplined improvisation requires the cooperation of the educator to set up the optimal conditions for students to be successful in constructing their own knowledge. Sawyer refers to this phenomenon as “collaborative emergence” (p. 26). What Sawyer describes as collaborative emergence can also be described as learner-centered instruction.

**Learner-Centered Theory and Deeper Learning**

Constructivism by nature is a learner-centered approach to knowledge acquisition (Kokotsaki, 2012; Robinson, Bell, & Pogonowski, 2011; Sawyer, 2015; Webster, 2016). In the constructivist approach to learning, knowledge is actively constructed by the learner, “rather than passively receiving information transmitted to them from teachers and textbooks” (Weimer, 2013). A learner-centered approach is, “the act of individual
learners connecting new information to what they currently know in ways meaningful to them” (Weimer, 2013, p. 21). When learners take on a greater role in their own learning, the process becomes more divergent, and consequently messier (Weimer, 2013). For this reason, critics of learner-centered approaches state that it is, “inefficient,” and, “dilutes the intellectual integrity of course content… [sacrificing] academic rigor and standards” (Weimer, 2013, pp. 22-23). Practitioners of learner-centered instruction argue that, “deeper learning” is more likely to take place by adopting a learner-centered approach to instruction.

Constructivists acknowledge the criticisms of learner-centered instruction as messy, but view this as collateral damage which is justified when an educational outcome of deeper learning is prioritized (Weimer, 2013). When creative acts and processes become a part of the learning environment, deeper learning and understanding take place (Custodero, 2015; Kokotsaki, 2011). Custodero (2015) states that, “through the act of creating we are making meaning from understanding,” and that, “creativity might best be interpreted as a process by which certain questions, circumstances, and ideas provoke re-imagining” (p. 9). Custodero’s views on deeper learning suggest that acts of creating are best supported in learner-centered environments which give agency to students who develop their own deeper understandings of the world.

**Domains Where Creativity Resides**

As a cognitive process, creativity is considered to be either domain-specific or domain-general (Bailin, 2015; Sawyer, 2015). Creativity as domain-general implies creative transfer, where, “everything relates to everything” (Peterson & Madsen, 2010, p. 26). From this stance, one who possesses the ability to cognitively engage in divergent
thinking should be able to think divergently across a variety of contexts. The educational implications of domain-general creativity suggest that specific classes on creative thinking could help to cultivate general, transferable creative skills in students (Sawyer, 2015). The theory of rhizomatic learning gives credence to the notion that domain-general creativity and transferability is feasible (Ellis, 2016). Rhizomatic learning, “describe[s] the way that ideas are multiplied, interconnected and self-replicating. A rhizome has no beginning or end […] like the learning process” (Cormier, 2011; quoted in Ellis, 2016, p. 125). Ellis further maintains that,

The process of learning creatively promotes making connections between the concepts being learned to many other encounters that are both personal and academic. Students make connections of concepts and images from their personal lives, digital culture, and education to develop unique solutions to problems […] Creative solutions are attributed to knowledge that is previously known/recalled, identified, newly acquired, previously applied, newly applied, practiced, planned, compared, contrasted, created/produced, assessed/evaluated, presented and re-created. (p. 125)

In contrast, Bailin (2015) and Sawyer (2015) both argue that creative problem-solving skills and strategies are primarily domain-specific, and may not be subject to transfer to the degree that Peterson and Madsen (2010) describe. While domain-general notions of creativity may be limited in scope, this does not mean that creativity cannot be taught.

The view of creativity being domain-specific suggests that creative problem-solving skills and processes possessed by an individual may only be relevant within the local context. Bailin’s anecdotal theory of, “athleticity” best explains how domain-specific skill is not transferable to other specific contexts (2015, p. 6). According to Bailin (2015), Athleticism (being athletic), can have a variety of specific implications in proficiency. An athlete may be proficient at shooting free-throws in the domain of
basketball, but that does not make them equally proficient at pitching in the domain of baseball, yet both individuals would be considered to be, “athletic” by virtue of their individual, domain-specific skills. In this idiom, one may have an aptitude for creating music as a composer for an orchestra, but those same creative skills and processes do not transfer directly to the creative problem-solving skills necessary to develop of a pharmaceutical cancer-curing drug in the field of medicine. A valid argument exists that creative skills and processes are domain-specific, specialized, and may only have marginal transferability.

**Creating in Action: Creative Products**

Creating is, “a defining characteristic” of the human condition (Bailin, 2015, p. 2). The act of creating requires that the emergent process of creativity has taken place at some level (Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015; Okida, 2015). A creative product, or new idea is necessary for the manifestation of creativity (Coleman, 2015; Sawyer, 2015; Webster, 2016). Merriam-Webster defines *invent* as, “to produce (something such as a useful device or process) for the first time through the use of the imagination or of ingenious thinking and experiment” (2018). *Innovation* is defined as: “(1) the introduction of something new. (2) a new idea, method, or device: NOVELTY,” and *novelty* is defined as, “something new and unusual” (2018). Working definitions of creative products include a multitude of descriptors such as novel, valuable, useful, appropriate, coherent, irreducible, and unpredictable (Bailin, 2015; Kototsaki, 2012; Kraftwohl, 2002; NCCAS, 2014; Sawyer, 2015; Shuler, et al., 2014). Sawyer (2015) emphasizes that ideal creative products are both novel and unpredictable, which are concepts that are foundational in emergent learning theory.
It should be observed that, “novel” is a frequent-used definition of a creative product; however, Bailin (2015) emphasizes that, “novel is not enough,” and that the creative product must have value, “in terms of meeting a need or solving a problem” (p. 5). She further elaborates that creativity is the way in which we “solve problems in an innovative and effective manner” (Bailin, 2015, p. 3). Divergent thinking is necessary to intuitively predict cause-and-effect relationships, and to arrive at the most ideal solution to the problem at hand. The value of a creative product is closely linked its ability to offer solutions to real problems. However, problems range in severity. Coleman (2015) states that, “everyone is creative […] because even the most mundane tasks require some level of problem-solving” (p. 2). Creative problem-solving also involves creative problem-finding, or the foresight to predict possible complications and to develop necessary and appropriate contingencies (Custodero, 2015).

The Ubiquitous Nature of Creativity

When one imagines what it means to be creative, many hold a, “romantic view” of creativity and creative people (Coleman, 2015; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015, p. 2). This romantic view is the belief that creativity is elusive and mysterious, and that some individuals are innately creative. Alternatively, this belief also implies that some individuals are not innately creative. Many have challenged this view of creativity, and believe that creativity can be developed in individuals (Custodero, 2015; Kokotsaki, 2011; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015; Sawyer, 2015). For this reason, it is recommended that educators shed their romantic ideals of creativity, and embrace creativity as ubiquitous, and therefore teachable (Custodero, 2015). If one views creativity as the ability to solve problems in an, “innovate and effective manner,” the process of creativity
(and creating) becomes less exclusive, and more teachable (Bailin, 2015, p. 3). The notion that creativity is related to teaching is evident in educators’ valuation of cognitive frameworks that emphasize creativity as a desirable outcomes and behavior (Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015).

**Cognitive Frameworks**

Educators have long held cognitive frameworks such as Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy or Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) in high regard (Albuquerque Public Schools, 2009; Kraftwohl, 2002). These frameworks are not only meant to promote deeper learning in students, but also to guide the instructional practices of educators. Hierarchically, cognitive processes that encourage divergent thinking to produce novel and useful solutions are at the top of these frameworks (Ellis, 2016). Webb’s DOK is organized into four levels which represent a continuum of cognitive processes that range from convergent to divergent: “(1) Recall and Reproduction, (2) Skills and Concepts, (3) Short-Term Strategic Thinking, and (4) Extended Thinking” (Albuquerque Public Schools, 2009, p. 5). Level 4 of Webb’s DOK (Extended Thinking),

Demand[s] extended use of higher-order thinking processes such as synthesis, reflection, assessment and adjustment of plans over time. Students are engaged in conducting investigations to solve real-world problems with unpredictable outcomes.” (Albuquerque Public Schools, 2009, p. 13)

The descriptors of Extended Thinking (DOK Level 4) describes a resulting creative product that could only be generated by a creative cognitive process.

Bloom’s *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain* (now referred to as simply Bloom’s Taxonomy) was first published in 1956 (Kraftwohl, 2002). The first incarnation of Bloom’s
Taxonomy was organized hierarchically by the following nouns: “(1) Knowledge, (2) Comprehension, (3) Application, (4) Analysis, (5) Synthesis, and (6) Evaluation” (Kraftwohl, 2002). A revised Taxonomy was reimagined in 2001, and is organized by the behaviors: “(1) Remember, (2) Understand, (3) Apply, (4) Analyze, (5) Evaluate, and (6) Create” (Kraftwohl, 2002, p. 215). The revised Taxonomy promoted, “Create” to the top over, “Evaluate” as the highest-order cognitive process. The, “Create” cognitive behavior is described by Kraftwohl (2002) as, “putting elements together to form a novel, coherent whole or make an original product” (p. 215). The use of models such as Bloom’s Taxonomy is evidence that educators recognize that creative processes and the creation of creative products are not only manifestations of the highest order of cognitive skills, but that they must be teachable (Ellis, 2016).

The notion that creativity is ubiquitous suggests that everyone is capable of participating in the process of creativity at some level. In addition to creativity being attributed to the act of creating, or the creative process of solving a problem, creativity is also used to describe personal behaviors (or characteristics). Individuals with an aptitude for creativity are commonly described as exhibiting: (a) messiness that accompanies divergent thinking, (b) spontaneity, (c) nonconformity, (d) risk-taking, (e) tolerance of ambiguity, (f) willingness to fail, (g) overcoming a fear of failure, and (h) posing questions (Bailin, 2015; Sawyer 2015; Webster, 2016).

**Summary: Creativity and Creating**

Piaget’s concept of constructivism emphasizes a process of divergent thinking to construct knowledge in an emergent fashion. Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism implies that emergent learning thrives in social and collaborative settings. The
boundaryless journey of knowledge acquisition through constructivism fosters deeper understanding, which is the foundational design of the cognitive tenets of creativity. Moreover, constructivism naturally fosters a learner-centered approach to instruction. Creative skills are believed to exist primarily in domain-specific contexts. However, rhizomatic learning and transferability challenge the notion that creative aptitude can also be domain-general. The manifestation of the creative process in action is considered to be a creative product.

For a product to be considered creative it must be novel, have value to solve a problem, and be unpredictable. Creative products have been notably described as appropriate, coherent, useful, and irreducible. As problem-solving scenarios range from the mundane to severe, we are all capable of creative thought in our day-to-day activities. Creativity is widely considered to be ubiquitous, and accessible to all. This belief is further evidenced by the inclusion of creativity and creative processes at the top of hierarchical cognitive domains such as Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy and Webb’s Depth of Knowledge. Creative products are one direct result of creative processes, but individuals are considered to have creative aptitude if they exhibit characteristics such as risk-taking, spontaneity, and willingness to fail. The following section is an application of how concepts of creativity and constructivism are present in the act of creating in musical contexts.

**The Act of Creating in the Music Classroom Setting**

**An Absence of Composition and Improvisation**

One’s ability to deliver a creative product is an indicator of one’s ability to engage in creative processes to some degree (Bailin, 2015; Coleman, 2015; Kokotsaki, 2012;
Sawyer, 2015). Kokotsaki and Newton (2015) state that, “the creative process can be described as the thinking that takes place as a person is planning to construct a creative product” (p. 492). Art, in particular, is considered to be a product of creative thought (Coleman, 2015). In music education, the cognitive processes that take place during the acts of improvisation and composition are considered to be primary activities for generating new and novel ideas in music (Chenette, 2016; Kokotsaki, 2011; Kokotsaki, 2012). Therefore, the manifestation of creative products that result from improvisation and composition are evidence of higher-order cognitive processes.

Cognitive frameworks such as Bloom’s revised Taxonomy, and the emergent learning theories behind constructivism give acceptance to the impression that one’s ability to create new music through composition or improvisation represents the highest order of musical understanding. As such, the 2014 National Core Music Standards (NCMS) place an emphasis on Creating as one of the essential artistic processes. Creating, as a central element of the NCMS, requires students to call upon a variety of musical skills and understanding to demonstrate and construct musical knowledge (Shuler, et al. 2014). Kokotsaki (2011) elaborates that, “when children are collectively involved in creative, and especially improvisational activities, a deeper musical understanding based on collaborative and constructivist learning takes place” (p. 111).

The creation of music, either through improvisation or composition, is widely regarded as a worthwhile musical endeavor for students’ authentic demonstration of deeper musical knowledge (Azzara, 1993; Kokotsaki, 2011; Kokotsaki, 2012; Norris, 2010; Stringham, 2010). In Kokotsaki’s (2011) study on student teachers’ perceptions of creativity, she concluded that many student teachers believed that composition and
improvisation are evidence of higher-order musical creativity, yet these activities were overlooked in their lesson and curriculum planning. Furthermore, it has been observed that most large ensemble classes (especially at the high school level) are not providing adequate opportunities for students to be creative in the idioms of composition or improvisation (Cooper, 2005; Norgaard, 2017; Norris, 2010; Vitale, 2017).

High school band directors, in particular, place a low valuation on composition and improvisation in large ensemble settings, possibly due to a belief that these activities are irrelevant to their specific curriculum (LaCognata, 2009). LaCognata (2009) conducted a study measuring methods of high school band director’s grading and assessment practices (N=454). On a Likert-type scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important), high school band directors rated improvisation (M=2.32) and composition (M=2.02) as relatively unimportant. When high school band directors were asked to rate the influence of the National Standards to their assessment practices they indicated an equally low response (M=2.83). The influence of state standards on their pedagogy received an even lower rating (M=.72). Among the specific standards that guide their instruction, high school band directors indicated that, “Standard 3: Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments” (M=2.32), and, “Standard 4: Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines” (M=2.02), received the lowest mean scores of the nine. It should be of note that this study predates the 2014 NCMS, and therefore referenced the older MENC National Standards. These results led LaCognata to determine that future, “investigation and discussion about how new student assessment methods might encourage a more comprehensive curriculum while supporting the goals and objectives of these performance-based ensembles” (p. 126). He further adds, “[a]s a
profession, we are obligated to continue this work as we endeavor to attain one of our most important goals – the improvement of student music learning” (p. 126). In his closing statement, LaCognata implies that one path to the improvement of student music learning is to engage in composition and improvisation in the performance-based ensemble curriculum.

**Improvisation in the Music Classroom**

Similar to composition, the act of musical improvisation is believed to be evidence of higher-order cognitive skills (Azzara, 1999). Improvisation as a skill and/or process has multiple definitions; however, “spontaneity is a central ingredient to most definitions of improvisation found in related research” (Azzara, 1993, p. 329). Coleman (2015) expresses that if, “creativity is faculty, improvisation is creativity in its immediate application” (p. 3). Composition and improvisation are considered to be related as processes that yield a creative product (Holcomb, Nierman, & Smith; 2018). However, the most obvious difference between the two is that improvisation has temporal limitations, and therefore cannot be revised (Coleman, 2015). As a higher-order cognitive skill, improvisation is regarded as the, “manifestation of musical thought… [and that] improvisation means that an individual has internalized a music vocabulary, and is able to understand and to express musical ideas spontaneously” (Azzara, 1993, p. 330).

**Audiation and musical vocabulary.** Azzara (1991) emphasizes Gordon’s concept of audiation as a foundation of improvisation. Gordon believed that, “audiation is to music what thought is to language” (Azzara, 1991, p. 106). Audiation is viewed as a high form of music comprehension where, “sound is not physically present […] to be able to think in that language [of music]” (Azzara, 1991, p. 106). Similar to how patterns
and sequences exist in language, the acquisition of a musical vocabulary allows students to manipulate music in real time just as we use language to spontaneously formulate thoughts and expressions into meaningful verbal gestures (Azzara, 1991; Norgaard, 2017). Musical vocabulary includes musical patterns and sequences such as scales, rhythmic motifs, tonal motifs, or other musical forms of expression. When learning musical patterns, there is a distinction between memorization and developing vocabulary (Azzara, 1999). Acquiring vocabulary (as opposed to memorization) implies deeper learning, and therefore recall of vocabulary demonstrates more understanding than recall of material acquired through rote-memorization. If proficiency in musical improvisation requires one to call upon a large musical vocabulary in real time, then one may demonstrate musical knowledge and ability that spans, “all types and levels of music instruction and curriculum” (Azzara, 1993, p. 330). With this in mind, Azzara (1993) proposes that,

[Asking students to improvise as part of instrumental music instruction would reasonably increase a student’s ability to manipulate mentally the structures of music with purpose and meaning. [Furthermore,] a lack of music recognition and aural understanding would result in a performance with poor music syntax characterized by poor intonation, incorrect notes, and incorrect rhythms. (pp. 330-331)

Improved musical understanding can be refined through improvisational skills by helping students to: (a) “listen intelligently to music,” (b) “develop aesthetic sensitivity and appreciation for music,” (c) “develop the ability to communicate ideas, feelings, and emotion,” and (d) “listen to and participate in musical performances on varying levels of understanding commensurate with individual aptitude, achievement, and interest” (Azzara, 1991, p. 25). “Developing a large repertoire by ear” of musical thoughts,
patterns, and iconic representations is essential to being able to express oneself in improvisatory settings (Azzara, 1999, p. 22).

**Free and structured improvisation.** Two dominant models of improvisation exist: free improvisation and structured improvisation. Free improvisation is, “the most open, non-rules-bound, most learner direct, and, consequently, the least (if ever) approached in schools” (Hickey, 2009, p. 294). Free improvisation, by virtue of its open and rule-free nature, is a messy endeavor. Additionally, free improvisation may be perceived as inappropriate for classroom settings where the classroom dynamic favors order and structure. Hickey (2009) states that free improvisation is more common among younger children who are apt to experiment freely with music, with fewer inhibitions of perceived talent or following musical rules and conventions. Free musical improvisation resembles the process of language acquisition in infants, and therefore plays an introductory role in developing a musical vocabulary necessary to participate in structured improvisation (Azzara, 1999). Similar to Piaget’s theories of constructivism and the importance of learning through play, free improvisation is a musical process that holds immense value to a music learner.

With consideration to creativity as a construct of improvisation, a tension exists between degrees of freedom, and the structures that are put in place for improvisation to work in an organized musical context. Structured improvisation is bound by musical conventions such as form, harmony, tonality, and tempo (Azzara, 1991; Azzara, 1993). Azzara believes that this space of structured musical improvisation breaks from the principles of freedom in creativity due to the introduction of restrictions. Therefore, the spontaneous act of creating musical ideas is a creative activity, but improvisation itself in
a musical setting is governed by structures and conventions that, in turn, restrict the freedom that defines creativity (Azzara, 1999). For Azzara, musical improvisation must have structure to be meaningful. Azzara’s beliefs suggest that free improvisation is more analogous to free musical experimentation in name, and is therefore a different activity altogether than organized improvisation.

**Approaches for teaching improvisation.** The act of improvising is a creative activity that lends itself to the manifestation of a creative product. As such, constructivist approaches such as scaffolding, and learner-centered designs are ideal for teaching improvisation (Buonviri, 2003; Coulson & Burke, 2013; Norgaard, 2017). In addition to scaffolding, Norgaard (2017) suggests creating frequent routines and opportunities for students to experience short solo improvisations during class (such as short warm up activities). Buonviri (2003) suggests the following principles for music educators to consider while teaching improvisation in a classroom regular routine:

- Change just one thing at a time.
- Make each change subtly so that students don’t even realize the progress they are making.
- Refrain from saying “improvisation” or “creativity” at first; let students realize what they are doing when they are ready.
- Don't show preferences for specific student improvisations at first.
- Model, model, and model more!
- Maintain momentum at all times.
- Take yourself out of the picture early and often. (p. 25)

Buonviri’s principles clearly imply a constructivist approach to learning, but offer little detail on procedures. Snell & Azzara (2015) utilized a more prescriptive method of teaching structured improvisation:

1. Improvise rhythms on chord roots.
2. Perform essential voice leading for repertoire by ear.
3. Learn harmonic rhythm using the pitches from Skill 2.
4. Improvise rhythm patterns to the harmonic progression using the pitches from Skill 2.
5. Improvise tonal patterns outlining the harmonic progression of the tune.
6. Combine tonal and rhythm patterns and improvise a melody.
7. Decorate and embellish the melodic material from Skill 6 and improvise a melody. (p. 68)

Snell & Azzara (2015) conducted a study using this method in a seven-week course on improvisation with four undergraduate music majors. Participants indicated that their experience with the method was helpful, and logical. During the seven-week course, participants were, “learning repertoire by ear, understanding the seven skills for learning to improvise, transcribing solos, and arranging repertoire” (p. 73). The scaffolded process helped participants to overcome their fears, and gain confidence in their skills and abilities.

Specifically, participants identified three mindsets important to their musical growth: they expressed the need to (a) be less inhibited, (b) address fear of making mistakes and taking smart risks as part of the learning process, and (c) gain further competence and fluency by immersing themselves in improvisation skills learned in this course. (Snell & Azzara, 2015, p. 77)

**Composition in the Music Classroom Setting**

Strand (2006) conducted an empirical study that documented the use of composition in music classroom settings ranging from elementary to high school. This study also documented the attitudes and perceptions guiding music educators’ inclusion of composition in their curriculum. Strand found that elementary general music teachers were more likely to use composition in their curriculum than high school music teachers. Most of the respondents Strand’s study were elementary general music teachers. High school music educators, particularly band and orchestra teachers, were less likely to use composition at all in their curriculum. Despite the high number of respondents that did
not include composition in their curriculum, music educators still indicated that they held composition in high regard as a worthwhile musical undertaking. Strand reported the following reasons as a rationale for including composition in the music curriculum:

- Children learn more through composing (71.9%)
- I use it to enrich other learning (65.4%)
- I want to incorporate all National Standards (62.2%)
- I use it to assess learning (49.8%)
- It is a fun and creative outlet when time permits (48.4%).

Strand concluded that music educators primarily use composition in their curriculum to reinforce musical skills, or for assessment purposes. Respondents who had used composition in their curriculum rarely reported that they did so for a “creative outlet,” or “teaching students how to compose” (p. 164). Findings indicated that general music teachers were more likely to teach composition for the purposes of addressing all of the National Music Standards, and that secondary level large ensemble directors were “more likely to use composing tasks as an outlet, but they were not inclined to incorporate composition out of a desire to address the National Standards in their teaching” (p. 160). Strand’s findings indicate that if composition is used in high school music classrooms settings, it is not likely to be used for the development of creative aptitude, but rather for reasons such as “a fun outlet when time permits” (p. 159).

**Approaches for teaching composition.** Teaching composition requires specialized skills, training, and strategies for successful implementation in the music classroom setting. Cooper (2005) recommends that music educators consider the following when teaching composition: (a) students should get multiple opportunities to
compose, (b) students should be allowed free experimentation, (c) teachers must guide and scaffold their instruction, (d) teachers must provide encouragement, and (e) teachers must provide a safe environment for students to experiment within. Additionally, music educators should offer a considerable amount of think time, and give students clear assessment criteria such as a rubric to assist in guiding students to a final product (Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015). As many educators may consider composition an individual venture, MacDonald and Miell (2000) recommend social inquiry (group compositions) as an effective approach to teaching composition.

The National Core Music Standards describe four behaviors that guide the artistic process of Creating: (1) imagine, (2) plan and make, (3) revise and refine, and (4) present. The third behavior, revise and refine, is a significant component of this sequence for the development of deeper understanding in the compositional process (Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015; Robinson, Bell, & Pogonowski, 2011). It is in the revision and reflection process where students give and receive feedback, and make deeper cognitive connections that sharpen the, “intentionality” of the creative product (Kokotsaki, 2011, p. 111). Therefore, in alignment with all creating musical behaviors found in the NCAS, authentic experiences in composing must include the experimentation process (imagine), as well as proving and applying critique (evaluate and refine) for a meaningful and authentic process to have taken place. Strand (2006) and Kokotsaki (2011) found that evidence of the evaluate and refine piece of the process was limited in classroom settings, if not missing altogether.
A Comprehensive Instructional Model: The Creative Music Strategy

The Contemporary Music Project, and the Manhattanville Music Curriculum Project (MMCP) of the 1960s inspired the Comprehensive Musicianship movement in music education. Out of this movement came the development of Pogonowski’s creative music strategy (Robinson, et al., 2011). The creative music strategy is a comprehensive process that consequently engages learners in three artistic processes which are foundational to the National Core Music Standards: Creating, Performing, and Responding. The following are steps for incorporating the creative music strategy as described by Robinson et al. (2011):

1. Springboard for the Strategy
2. Develop an Open-Ended Musical Question
3. Large-Group Brainstorm (Aural/Oral Analysis – Set Musical Parameters)
4. Personal Exploration: Aural/Oral Analysis
5. Large-Group Conducted Improvisation/Small Group Planned Improvisation (Composition)
6. Record for Reflection
7. Reflective Aural/Oral Analysis (Robinson, et al., 2011, p. 53)

In the creative music strategy, students are asked to create a new piece of music based on a stimulus which is described in Step 1 as, “Springboard” (p. 53). The stimulus could be a genre of music, a performance technique, a piece of music being studied in class, a generated list of words, a poem, etc. Students are asked open-ended questions as they view the springboard stimulus through any and all possible angles (Step 2). A brainstorming session follows (Step 3) where individual ideas are contributed to a group collective. Social inquiry is used where students are able to support and encourage each other’s contributions. During, “Personal Exploration” (Step 4), individuals are afforded an opportunity to work individually or in groups to design a musical product. Step 5 is, “Conducted and Planned Improvisation,” which is, “merging the students’ individual
musical ideas into a spontaneous and remarkable musical piece” (p. 54). This can take place as a large-scale improvisation involving the entire class, or in small groups as group compositions. Recording the creative musical products (Step 6) follows, to reflect together as a class (again, with open-ended questions). The final step, “Reflective Aural/Oral Analysis,” allows for student choice to refine and adapt their product, or to explore future applications. As this process becomes more familiar to students and facilitators, the entire cycle can be completed in 50-75 minutes depending on how many groups are presenting.

The creative music strategy is grounded in learner-centered pedagogy. According to Pogonowski, “the essence of a creative music strategy is choice. Choice relates to the opportunities students have to create and exercise musical options” (Pogonowski, 1988, p. 16; quoted in Robinson et al., 2011, p. 51). As this learning strategy utilizes both composition and improvisation, higher-ordered cognitive skills are an essential part of the process.

Table 2.1

The Creative Music Strategy as a Comprehensive Model that Aligns with the NCMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Artistic Process</th>
<th>Creating Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Springboard</td>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>Imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Open-Ended Questioning</td>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>Imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Large Group Brainstorm</td>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>Imagine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Personal Exploration</td>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>Plan &amp; Make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conducted/Planned Improvisation</td>
<td>Creating &amp; Performing</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Record for Reflection</td>
<td>Performing &amp; Responding</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reflective Analysis</td>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>Evaluate and Refine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Working in a context of social constructivism, students engaged in the *creative music strategy* are encouraged to work in small groups, and follow an open structure. As a standards-based lesson, the *creative music strategy* elegantly connects students with three Artistic Processes, and ultimately leads to the fourth Process of the NCMS: Connecting. Table 2.1 connects the seven steps of the *Creative Music Strategy* to the three artistic processes found in the NCMS, and the four creating behaviors in the NCMS found under the artistic process of Creating (NAfME, 2018a).

**Obstacles to Implementing Improvisation and Composition**

Despite a thin presence of composition and improvisation in the large ensemble music setting, both positivist and postpositivist studies reveal that most music educators see these activities as essential to delivering a comprehensive music education to students (Kokotsaki, 2011; LaCognata, 2009; Menard, 2015; Snell & Azzara, 2015; Strand 2006; Vitale, 2017). Common themes have emerged from these studies that indicate that a variety of obstacles prevent creative/creating outlets from appearing in the large ensemble classroom.

Perhaps the most prominent obstacle teachers face is a low level of confidence to teach improvisation or composition in their large ensemble settings. Low confidence can be attributed to a perceived lack of teacher training (Azzara, 1999; Kokotsaki, 2011, Menard, 2015; Strand, 2006; Vitale, 2017). In these studies, teachers indicated that they did not feel equipped to teach these skills in their classrooms, either from lack of training, lack of experience from their own experiences as students, or both. Buonviri (2003) and Kotosaki (2011) further suggest that teachers with classical performance training in particular are rarely, if ever, exposed to experiences rich in composition or improvisation.
Snell and Azzara (2015) indicate that improvisation is primarily experienced in the jazz idiom, and therefore jazz musicians may be the only population of teachers with prior experience with (or training in) improvisation.

Azzara (1999) submits that improvisation is happening on a consistent basis at the general music level in elementary K-8 classrooms. However, once those students participate in large ensembles in their high school years, those experiences seem to disappear. Most musicians without a background performing or participating in jazz ensembles may have never experienced improvisation as players and performers, and therefore may have no practical experience to draw from. This self-perpetuating cycle of discomfort continues to feed itself: students do not receive experiences with improvisation or composition in their music programs, some of those students become music educators, and as teachers they do not feel comfortable teaching composition or improvisation.

**Misconceptions about composition and improvisation.** Many teachers in the aforementioned studies indicated that they place a high valuation on composition and improvisation as components of a comprehensive music education. However, many educators, particularly at the high school level, may have misconceptions as to what this means for their programs (Kokotsaki, 2011; Kokotsaki, 2012; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015; Strand, 2006).

Strand (2006) found that many music educators believe that composition is, “not appropriate for the types of classes [they] teach.” This misunderstanding (or ignorance) points to what Coleman (2015) refers to as the, “romantic notion of creativity” (p.2), and a belief that creativity cannot be taught in a large ensemble classroom (Kokotsaki, 2012;
Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015). Alternatively, this belief may be attributed to an impression that composition is more appropriate for a specialized course geared toward music theory, and therefore not addressed in a large ensemble music setting. This belief does not suggest that music educators do not value composition or improvisation, but rather that they only believe it fits in specific contextual learning settings which do not include large ensemble music settings (Kokotsaki, 2011; Kokotsaki, 2012; Strand, 2006). Finally, a belief exists that composition and/or improvisational skills are not important to the large ensemble curriculum because they do not transfer directly to performance skills (Strand, 2006; Kokotsaki, 2012; Stringham, 2010). It is unclear if the source of these misconceptions originates from a lack of training, ignorance, fear, or lack of confidence, or a combination of the four.

**Logistics and time.** Logistical obstacles were also a part of Strand’s findings: *Competing course goals* (56.9%), *Lack of access to technology* (28.2%), *Not enough instruments* (6.5%), and *Time* (9.1%). The barrier of competing course goals arose in qualitative data collected by respondents as well, who indicated that,“there are too many other standards that need to be addressed,” and, “performance comes first” (p. 161). These particular responses indicate a higher valuation of performance in the classroom, which may come as no surprise in a performance-based curriculum. These beliefs are consistent with a traditionalist stance, which is an, “uncritical unwavering commitment to the beliefs and practices of a particular tradition at a particular time” (Bailin, 2015, p. 8).

**Traditionalism and performance culture.** In music education (particularly in the high school band), a dominant culture exists which comes from the large ensemble’s heritage as having a utilitarian purpose (Allsup, 2016; Norris, 2010; Whitmore, 2017).
Menard (2015) describes traditionalism in band as, “performance culture” (p. 123). This utilitarian purpose continues to be a prevailing trope in steering curricular practices in the high school band setting (LaCognata, 2009; Strand, 2006). Obstacles such as the availability of instruments or technology can be remedied immediately with access to more resources. The obstacle of low teacher efficacy is more complicated, but may be addressed with an overhaul in preservice teacher training. A strong sense of traditionalism implies a prioritization of activities, where performance-oriented activities take precedence over process-oriented tasks such as composition or improvisation (LaCognata, 2009; Strand, 2006). Obstacles such as traditionalism, and misconceptions require a paradigm shift, and a critical view of values as evidenced by curricular practice.

Findings by Menard (2015) indicated that after the implementation of a composition curriculum in a performance-based program, teachers and students reported positive reactions. The issues of time and performance culture were cited by participants as two significant barriers to the inclusion of composition in the music curriculum. Menard found that, “adding composition instruction to the curriculum may not diminish a group’s performance, but might actually enhance it” (p. 131). Composition was also found to be a, “valuable partner to performance goals, not as a replacement for them” (p. 131). Additionally, despite a lack of experience, teachers felt successful after teaching composition at the conclusion of the study. This perception may indicate that confronting one’s fears of not possessing enough experience or training may be the best way to overcome them. Snell and Azzara (2015), and Menard (2015) indicate that composition and improvisation can be successfully implemented into a large ensemble curriculum, and that music educators (and students) saw positive results that did not interfere with
performance quality. Additionally, music educators indicated that despite the fears such as a lack of training or experience, they felt successful teaching these skills to their students after immersing themselves in the process.

**Summary: The Act of Creating in the Music Classroom Setting**

In music education, the act of creating a novel and useful product through higher-order cognitive thought is mutually agreed to be exhibited by the acts of composition and improvisation. While these two processes are valued as higher-level cognitive thought, and believed to be an integral part of a comprehensive music education, they are rarely found in high school large ensemble classrooms. Researchers such as Cooper (2005), and Snell and Azzara (2015) offer frameworks and best practices for teaching composition and improvisation (respectively). Robinson, et al. (2011) suggest a comprehensive creative music strategy that addresses all three of the artistic behaviors found in the NCMS (create, perform, respond), as well as all four behaviors within that framework of the artistic process of Creating (imagine, plan and make, evaluate and refine, and present).

When attempting to implement improvisation or composition in a performance-based curriculum, a variety of obstacles are present for high school large ensemble directors. Some barriers are logistical, and resolvable by increased resources, time, improved teacher training, and so on. However, some obstacles are driven by beliefs and values such as traditionalism or misconceptions of what exactly the engagement in composition and improvisation actually means for students. To this end, high school large ensemble directors must critically investigate their own beliefs, and weigh those beliefs and values against their actions as practitioners. Furthermore, studies show that efficacy
in music educators can be raised by immersion in the process of teaching improvisation and composition if a desire permits.

**Professional Development and the Professional Learning Community**

**Music Educators’ Professional Development Experiences**

Professional development (PD) as a means of improving teaching practice has been a trend in education since the Race to the Top initiative in education (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Despite the influx of professional development (PD) opportunities being provided to teachers by their respective school sites, music teachers in the profession have not found these experiences to be extremely helpful (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Conway, 2008; Sanderson, 2017; Sindberg 2016; Stanley, 2011; Verdi, 2016). Battersby and Verdi (2016) attribute this phenomenon to:

[the marginalization of the arts by] school administrators when designing professional development activities. Music educators are often assigned to professional development groups that are tailored to teachers of other subjects. (p.26)

Where isolation remains a significant issue in the teaching profession, it is experienced more heavily by music educators, who are usually (with some exceptions) the only ones at their school site that teach their subject area (Battersby & Verdi, 2016; Conway, 2008, Jackman, 2017; Stanley, 2011; Verdi, 2016).

Due to their experience of subject-specific exclusivity at their respective sites, music teachers may rarely have opportunities to collaborate with other music teachers during designated PD time. As such, PD provided to music teachers by their school sites has been described as a, “one-size-fits-all” approach, with little transferability or
relevance to music educator’s specific teaching assignments (Conway, 2008, p. 15; Sanderson, 2017, p. 34; Stanley, 2011, p. 71).

The quest for solving the, “one-size-fits-all” PD problem faced by music educators has interested researchers such as Conway, Stanley, and Bowles. A non-experimental qualitative study by Bowles (2002) indicated that music educators desire meaningful professional development, suggesting that their PD needs are not met at their respective sites. Bowles reported,

the most frequently chosen topics across all the teaching specialties [N = 456] were technology (66%), assessment (57%), instrument/choral literature (53%), standards (45%), creativity (43%), and grant writing (38%). (p. 3)

With the exception of technology, all of the above PD needs indicated by Bowles are content-specific to music, and therefore are not being addressed in PD provided to all teachers at any particular school site.

A phenomenological study by Conway (2008) investigated music educators’ experiences with professional development [N = 19]. Conway’s findings indicate that collegial, “informal interactions” among music educators is, “the most power form of music teacher professional development” (p. 12). Conway describes informal interactions as (but not limited to) casual conversations between music educators that may take place at conferences, or in social settings outside of school. Conway commented:

We know from the research that music teachers need time with other music teachers in order to reflect on their practice. However, we have no information as to how to design school and music organization programs with these goals in mind. (p. 16)

The available literature demonstrates a necessity to better support music educators’ professional development needs. Additionally, a structure that allows music educators to
interact with one another is an effective model for meaningful PD to support music educators (Sanderson, 2017; Sindberg, 2012; Stanley, 2011; Verdi, 2016).

The Professional Learning Community

By 2004, the professional learning community (PLC) gained popularity as a model for PD at school sites (DuFour, 2004). As the PLC became commonplace in the 2000s, “all combinations of individuals with any interest in schools are now calling themselves PLCs” (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008, p. 82). As such, the misappropriation of the term PLC has caused it to lose meaning in its purest form (DuFour, 2004). By definition, a PLC must be learner-centered and results-oriented as opposed to a self-proclaimed PLC that may only discuss department business or other school-related topics (DuFour, 2004; Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016; Early, 2012). Dufour’s evolving model for PLCs has been widely accepted in the field of education as viable (Sanderson, 2017).

Dufour (2004) identifies three distinctive traits of a PLC: (1) “Ensuring that students learn, (2) A culture of collaboration, (3) a focus on results” (pp. 9-11). When all three of these conditions are met, PLCs may be an effective way to simultaneously improve teachers’ instructional practices as well as student learning (DuFour, 2004; Early, 2012; Stanley, 2011). Six characteristics of a functioning PLC can be further defined as:

(a) a focus on learning, (b) a collaborative culture with a focus on learning for all, (c) collective inquiry into best practice and current reality, (d) an action orientation: learning by doing, (e) a commitment to continuous improvement, and (f) a results orientation. (Solution Tree, 2018)
Where most PLCs are conducted in a face-to-face setting, improved technology has allowed virtual meetings, making PLCs especially effective for teachers with geographical challenges (DuFour et al., 2016).

**Applications: A PLC Model for Music Educators**

It is common for a band, orchestra, choir, or general music teacher to be the only one of their kind at their teaching site. For that reason, isolation is experienced intensely by music educators (Jackman, 2017). PLCs have been proven to break down isolation as an inhibiting factor for teacher growth, which makes them an ideal PD model for music educators. Qualitative-bound studies by Verdi (2016), Jackman (2017), and Sanderson (2017) were conducted with the intent to better understand music educators’ experiences in PLCs, and perceived effectiveness in improving teaching practice and managing isolation.

Verdi (2016) describes a range of PLC classifications that vary in criteria ranging from membership to professional circumstances. School sites may exert top-down initiatives, where administrators decide on a common site goal or problem for each PLC to work toward solving. Or, PLCs may be given autonomy to determine their own goals to reach within their immediate influence. Membership in a PLC may be pre-determined by site administrators, or teachers may choose their own PLC members. When autonomy of membership is available, some teachers may be limited to joining groups at their specific school site. In some cases, music educators are allowed to form PLCs with other music teachers within their district (Verdi, 2016).

Verdi (2016) and Jackman (2017) describe various communities music teachers belong to, and the different types of PLCs music educators participate in. The two
prominent categories are unlike-PLCs and music-PLCs. Music educators often find themselves in an unrelated unlike-PLC, where they collaborate with teachers at their site, with mixed subject specialties such as math, science, or English. Another type of unlike-PLC is the specials-PLC. A specials-PLC might include other singleton content areas such as drama, visual arts, or other music teachers outside of their specialty of band, choir, orchestra, or general music. Specials-PLCs are a consolation of sorts where content-adjacent subject areas at a school site are amassed into a department or group, where some, albeit very little, common ground may be found across content areas.

Music-PLCs are composed of music teachers with any combination of specialties, such as band, choir, orchestra, or general music. Music-PLCs share more mutual content than unlike-PLCs and therefore are perceived as more effective by music educators (Verdi, 2016). Within the category of music-PLC, subject-specific PLCs can be formed (same subject, same grade level), or multi-subject music-PLCs can be formed (music teachers combined who teach different subjects).

Music-PLCs may exist in a vertical configuration where elementary, middle, and high school music teachers (or combinations of these) are members of the same PLC. For instance, a multi-subject music-PLC may be formed vertically with teachers representing elementary orchestra, middle school orchestra, and high school orchestra; or a PLC formed by high school and middle school band. Subject-specific music-PLCs may exist in a horizontal configuration by grade level; such as a PLC of all high school band teachers, or a PLC of all elementary music teachers. Both vertical and horizontal configurations of music-PLCs have limitations. Verdi (2016) suggests that single-subject PLCs may be limited in perspective, since all of the participants teach the same subjects.
and grade level. Vertical configurations of multi-subject music-PLCs may have limitations in transferability of pedagogical practices across grade levels. A possible solution to these limitations may be to formulate a rotation of meetings between vertical and horizontal PLC groups. Despite the limitations, it is suggested that music educators prefer membership in autonomous music-PLCs over unlike-PLCs (Jackman, 2017; Verdi 2016).

**Music Educators’ Lived Experiences in PLCs**

Music-PLCs have been found to be the most beneficial PLCs for music educators for a variety of reasons. Verdi (2016) found a continuum of elementary music educators’ perceived experiences in their participation in unlike-PLCs and music-PLCs. Another of Verdi’s findings was that music educators value autonomy to choose their PLC group members, and the specific results and goals their PLC would work toward meeting. The experiences of alienation, and a lack of pedagogical common ground was commonly found when music educators participate in unlike-PLCs. These experiences left music educators in Verdi’s study with the impression that these configurations were a waste of their time. Music educators reported feeling out of place, and an inauthentic, contrived collegiality group dynamic. Music educators may be assigned to unlike-PLCs for lack of other options, and therefore do not enjoy the autonomy of membership or purpose that they would be afforded in a music-PLC.

In music-PLCs, music educators are more likely to experience a heightened sense of belongingness, relatedness, and meaning (Verdi, 2016). As music educators feel more affectively involved in music-PLCs, they tend to be more supportive of one another, more passionate, and healthy debate or disagreement is more likely to occur (Stanley,
2011; Verdi, 2016). Verdi concluded that autonomous subject-specific music-PLCs are the most supportive and meaningful configuration for music educators.

A study conducted by Sanderson (2017) chronicled the lived experiences of an autonomous, subject-specific music-PLC consisting of three middle school music teachers. This PLC was the best-case scenario according to Verdi; it was self-selected, and had freedom to discuss any issues they desired. Many teacher groups adopt the PLC moniker but stray from the DuFour model, preventing them from reaching a results-oriented mission (DuFour, 2004). This phenomenon was present in Sanderson’s study. In their PLC meetings, the group discussed a significant amount of departmental business, and engaged in a great deal of emotional support of one another described as, “catharsis” (Sanderson, 2017, p. 129). Despite these teacher-centered discussions taking place, the group did feel successful as a PLC due to their implementation of common assessments. In addition, they felt that their participation in the PLC increased mutual accountability as well as sustained change in practice, confidence, and validation in classroom procedures.

The PLC under study by Sanderson also cited areas of need. Members indicated that they had a desire to observe each other teach; however, geographical restrictions prevented them from doing so. Stanley (2011) emphasizes the use of video recordings for classroom lessons, underscoring the power in the deprivatization of instruction for the growth and sustainability of practice. The middle school music-PLC in Sanderson’s study also expressed limitations in the subject-specific configuration, as they saw value in collaborating with their high school counterparts.
Online PLCs

As music educators are usually the only ones of their kind at their particular school site, the logistics of geography and schedule alignment present a significant barrier to forming music-PLCs. For high school band directors in particular, conflicting rehearsal and performance schedules may create a formidable challenge to finding a common time and location for a face-to-face PLC: “[Online PLCs] can emerge as a solution to this problem by offering internet-based platforms for music teachers in different districts who would otherwise have difficulty meeting as a group” (Battersby & Verdi 2016, p. 28).

There are a limited number of studies surveying the effectiveness of online professional learning communities (OnPLC). Bell and Robinson (2014) conducted studies of asynchronous virtual PLCs in a wikispace for novice music educators, where participants posted blogs, comments, questions, and other forms of online communication. The asynchronous environment was found to be supportive and helpful for novice teachers experiencing isolation. Sindberg (2016) facilitated an OnPLC over two years in a multi-subject music-PLC configuration, where PLC members taught music in elementary, middle, and high school. OnPLCs hold great potential for music teachers, as they may address a solution to the barriers of time and location for music teachers in particular. Battersby and Verdi (2016) further recommend future study on the OnPLC platform to determine the, “efficiency, delivery, and success rates of teachers’ professional development and their students’ achievement” (p. 28).
Summary: Professional Development and the PLC

Professional development for music educators has been a point of contention amongst researchers, primarily because the content is perceived by music educators to be unrelatable to their teaching practices. Music teachers face a great deal of isolation at their school sites. To mitigate these perceptions of isolation, collaborative inquiry groups comprised of other music teachers have been a successful support system for improving teaching practice. The professional learning community has been a proven model of success for professional development, specifically for implementing student-centered collaborative inquiry, and improving teaching practices. Many music teachers find themselves assigned to unlike-PLCs, which have been shown to be ineffective in supporting their needs. Music educators who are able to participate in autonomous single-subject music-PLCs report experiencing the most progress, support, and professional growth. Geographical and scheduling limitations may prevent music educators from forming a music-PLC. Therefore, a platform for an online professional learning community (OnPLC) may become a viable solution for music educators seeking more meaningful collaboration.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework model (Figure 2.1) identifies the essential concepts that helped to organize the findings of this study. Improvising, composing, and arranging (ICA) are understood to represent higher-order thinking skills, and therefore these activities are necessary for students to engage in while on their path to a holistic music education (NCCAS, 2014; Schuler, et al., 2014). The role of ICA in music education can be described as Deweyan ends-in-view (Dewey, 1922). Dewey’s conception of ends-in-
view suggests that a target or goal is not a fixed end in itself, but rather a process of pursuit. Ends-in-view are a compass which may lead to multitude of desirable destinations. For Dewey, the meaning of the journey is not arriving at a specific destination, but rather the pursuit itself, along with the messiness of possibilities that present themselves along the way.

The following ends-in-view for creativity in the instructional practices of music educators appear in the reviewed literature: (a) ICA is part of a holistic music education, (b) ICA may cultivate creative potential in students who may or may not know their own aptitude as creators of music, and (c) teaching ICA allows teachers to find balance in instructional practices by including music-making processes as well as making music products.

![Figure 2.1. Conceptual Framework Model: Composition and improvisation in the high school large ensemble setting.](image)

The obstacles of time, student apprehension, teacher insecurity, and teacher attitudes prevent educators from including ICA in their teaching practices. During the delivery of curriculum, obstacles act to distill ends-in-view of ICA into a limited presence
in practice. The limited presence of ICA in teaching settings appears as: (a) an emphasis of a skills-based (performance-driven) curriculum, (b) a smaller contingent of, “elite” students who voluntarily experimented with ICA out of curiosity on their own terms, (c) ICA possibly occurring in call-and-response activities during ensemble warm up times, (d) the perception that instruction in composition, “belongs” in courses like Advanced Placement (AP) Music Theory, or International Baccalaureate (IB) Music, and (e) the perception that improvisation should be relegated to jazz settings. Figure 2.1 illustrates the filtration of educators’ ends-in-view through obstacles, yielding a limited presence of ICA in their teaching practices.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, literature was reviewed in the areas of creativity and creating, the applications of creating music in educational settings. Overall, large ensemble music educators at the high school level describe creating endeavors such as improvisation and composition as important to musical development, but struggle to implement them in their teaching settings for a variety of reasons. A review of the literature concerning professional learning communities suggests that large ensemble music educators may be able to overcome instructional challenges through meaningful collaboration. A conceptual framework was presented to better illustrate the problem under investigation in this study. The following chapter describes the research approach used for this study, including methods of data collection, data analysis methods, and a description of a pilot study. Ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and delimitations are also described in the following chapter.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to work with a cohort of high school music educators to explore the extent to which teachers are able to design and deliver a holistic music curriculum to their students in a large ensemble setting. This study further investigated their perceptions and attitudes toward the role of improvisation, composition, and arranging (ICA) in their large ensemble settings. My methodology drew from the ideals of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as social inquiry, where participants are empowered to generate their own meaningful knowledge. Four high school large ensemble directors participated as a cohort throughout the study as co-researchers alongside the facilitator.

This chapter is organized in the following manner to describe the action research approach: (1) Research Approach, (2) Participatory Action Research, (3) Research Participants, (4) Methods of Data Collection, (5) Data Analysis Methods, (6) Pilot Study, (7) Ethical Considerations, (8) Issues of Trustworthiness, and (9) Delimitations.

Research Approach

The three research questions that guided this study are meant to shed light on the problem under investigation, which grapples with a mismatch between high school large ensemble directors’ desire to deliver a holistic music curriculum to their students, and their perceived lack of ability to implement higher-order creative skills in music such as
improvisation, composition, and arranging (ICA). The research questions that guided this study were the following:

1. Prior to their participation in an Online PLC, how do high school large ensemble directors describe the role of creativity as contributing to a holistic music education?
   a. To what extent do improvisation, composition, and arranging appear in their previous teaching practices?
   b. What obstacles and challenges do they anticipate while discussing implementing improvisation, composition, and arranging into their past curriculum?

2. What instructional strategies can high school large ensemble directors design together in an Online PLC to include improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices?
   a. Which improvisation, composition, and arranging activities do they choose to implement into their teaching settings? What reasons do they give for their choices?
   b. What problem-solving strategies do participants utilize to overcome obstacles and challenges they face?

3. Following their experience in an Online PLC, what measures of success (if any) do participants describe from their participation in a 16-week collaborative process?
a. What measures of success and/or failure do participants describe regarding their implementation of improvisation, composition, and arranging into their teaching practices?

b. What enduring changes, if any, do high school large ensemble directors plan to implement pertaining to the inclusion of improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices?

The research questions ask participants to, “describe” their experiences, “design” instruction, and, “plan and implement” new instructional practices as a result of their participation in the study. The purpose of this study was collaborative in nature, where participants engaged in a quest for meaning within themselves alongside a facilitator (myself). Therefore, this study was grounded in the foundations of social constructivism which, “seek[s] understanding and insight into the world in which [individuals] live and work” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Consequently, social constructivists rely heavily on identifying the views, perceptions, and lived experience of individuals (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2009).

Qualitative methodology is meant to explore and understand the meanings and understandings of participants to describe social phenomena, “from the inside” (Flick, 2009, p. x). To better describe social phenomena in this manner, qualitative data collection usually takes place in the natural environments of the participants in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Since qualitative researchers are interested in constructing meaning from the data that are synthesized from the process, they must engage in a study open to the discovery of new knowledge rather than confirming or disproving a preconceived hypothesis (Flick, 2009). As such, findings from qualitative research are
built from an, “emergent design,” where the, “findings take their own course” (Creswell, 2014, p. 185).

With a goal of developing a, “holistic account […] of the problem or issue under study,” knowledge is constructed both inductively and deductively (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). Data are deductively synthesized by the researcher to guide him/her to discover key findings. To gather vital data needed to generate key findings, the researcher must inductively build a study and construct appropriate data collection tools that will best illuminate features of the problem under investigation. For this reason, qualitative researchers are, “key instruments” themselves (Creswell, 2014, p. 185), as the richness of the data extracted are dependent on their skills at reflective qualitative data collection methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). A researcher’s impact and ability to influence the resulting findings of a study is described by reflexivity (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2009). Reflexivity deals with the degree to which (and awareness of) the researcher’s bias that may affect the interpretation of the data gathered in the study.

Critical reflexivity is necessary on the part of the researcher, where the researcher must step away from the setting from time to time to evaluate their role in the interpretation of the data being collected. Attia and Edge (2017) describe the relationship between the researcher and the data as being prospective and retrospective. Reflexivity in a prospective sense examines how the researcher affects the research. Reflexivity from a retrospective stance examines how the research and setting affects the researcher. A cycle between prospective and retrospective reflexivity exists, where the researcher, “never returns to the same point of origin” (Attia & Edge, 2017, p. 35). Consequently, the researcher must constantly have a reflexive awareness of self by moving away from the
setting only to then more effectively engage the action in a more meaningful manner (Attia & Edge, 2017). Only through a critical reflexive process can one best uncover the truths lived and experienced by the participants.

Qualitative research depends on a diverse array of data collection methods, including (but not limited to) interviews, text, observation, audio/visual materials, and images. By using multiple types of data, researchers are able to gain “multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involves in a situation” (Creswell, 2014, p. 186; Flick, 2009).

**Participatory Action Research**

Action research was an appropriate methodology for this study, as emphasis in action research is placed on, “questioning the status quo and working toward change” among its participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 151). Participatory Action Research (PAR) has an, “emancipatory knowledge interest,” in that it seeks to empower participants to deal with and/or overcome ideologies (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 105). In this case, an ideology is perceived by some high school large ensemble directors in Southern California, where they feel trapped by traditionalism (Whitmore, 2017). Philosophically, this study was post-positivist in nature as it challenged the normative ideological practices of high school large ensemble directors in a localized region, creating a local knowledge that does not necessarily have a, “predetermined end” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 155). As a methodology, action research emphasizes the transformative process of the research over an end result, investigating the salient experiences of both the researcher and the participants that take place.
Action research is a, “systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry” (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990, quoted in Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 40). In addition to acquiring a heightened understanding of the setting through collaborative inquiry, participants in action research are moved to change the setting in which they live and work. What distinguishes action research from other forms of qualitative methods is that inquiry, “is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 4). Action research also stands apart from other qualitative methods of inquiry in that it deals with the concept of reciprocity (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Reciprocity in action research refers to the degree to which both researchers and participants benefit from the local knowledge generated from the study. In this study, participants were tasked to not only critically explore their own teaching practices, but to offer suggestions to others through dialogic collaboration. As a transformative process was meant to take place, both the participants and I benefited from the resulting knowledge generated from this study.

While Participatory Action Research (PAR) usually deals in issues of critical studies and social justice, it has also been a methodology used by researchers to examine educational settings. PAR is distinctive in that the participants become co-researchers alongside the principal researcher, or facilitator. Participants assist in the creation of their own knowledge which, in turn, empowers them to become their own agents of change in their unique settings. A researcher-initiated PAR study involves the researcher:

Working collaboratively with a group to both better understand a social phenomenon, and also deepen participants’ understandings while leading to some kind of action or advocacy to address the issue. (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 122)
Positionality in PAR

Positionality describes the power dynamics between participants and researcher and must be given considerable attention in a PAR study for the management of bias. In PAR, the researcher and participants always find themselves on a continuum of insider and outsider (Herr & Anderson, 2015). As insiders, we are practitioners in our own settings, either communally or professionally. As an insider, I am a member of the community of high school large ensemble directors in Southern California. I have worked for years alongside my colleagues in the profession, and I bring an understanding of their struggles and concerns. Due to my positionality as an insider, I had inevitably earned some level of trust with the participants. The participants in the study were also insiders, as they worked as practitioners to affect change within their own settings throughout the study.

As outsiders, we are visitors to the setting or community that may not be our own. By forming a researcher-initiated discussion group I was an outsider. Instead of my role being equal as practitioner with the other participants, my positionality as an outsider was defined as a facilitator throughout the study. As a researcher, I was challenged to take on many roles on the continuum of insider/outsider: a facilitator, an actor, and an advocate. Each of these roles implied a different stance toward the participants as far as hierarchy and power dynamics are concerned. Keeping in mind my identity had vacillated, I remained vigilant to avoid, “conflicting allegiances or alliances” among the participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 55). As an outsider and researcher, there were instances during the PAR process where I felt it was appropriate to offer guiding decisions to the
participants. Specifically, I offered suggestions from the reviewed literature as I saw fit to better assist the participants on their journey.

**Research Participants: Criteria and Recruitment**

It has been determined by Wheelan (2009) that small groups of three to eight members are ideal for the purposes of group productivity and group development in settings such as PAR. Based on Wheelan’s recommendations, a quorum of three members was required to be in attendance for each meeting of the online PLC (OnPLC). To mitigate meeting attendance conflicts among participants (no-shows), it is suggested to recruit an additional two participants to increase the likelihood of achieving a quorum of three at each meeting (The University of Texas at El Paso, Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning, 2018). Using criterion-based sampling, four participants were chosen for this study.

The Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association (SCSBOA) is the largest professional organization in Southern California for high school large ensemble directors. The four participants for this study were selected from the 2018-2019 membership directory of the SCSBOA. An invitation letter was emailed to 555 High school large ensemble directors teaching in the counties of Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Ventura, and Los Angeles (see Appendix A).

An online questionnaire was attached to the invitation email to determine eligibility as well as to collect demographic information (see Appendix B). Eligible participants for the study: (a) must have been currently practicing as a high school large ensemble director in Southern California in the 2018-2019 academic school year, (b) had five or more years of teaching experience as a high school large ensemble director in
Southern California, (c) participated in at least 30 public performances per school year, and (d) declared an interest in collaboration with other large ensemble directors as part of the study. I received three email responses from educators that indicated that they no longer were teaching at the high school level, and therefore ineligible to participate. I also received some anecdotal email responses from individuals indicating that they were interested, but had to dedicate additional time to extenuating circumstances that prevented them from participating in the study. Some individuals indicated that they had such little knowledge of the subject matter, and therefore did not feel that they had enough to offer the study. The online questionnaire received only 13 responses (a return rate of 2.3%). Of the 13 responses, only six respondents met the criteria for eligibility. Six participants were originally chosen for the study; however, one withdrew prior to the first meeting citing his busy schedule. The remaining five confirmed their intention to participate in the study by completing the Informed Consent and Participant’s Rights electronic form (see Appendix C). Eight weeks into the study, one participant withdrew due to extenuating circumstances.

Methods of Data Collection

Due to the complexity of understanding phenomena and lived experiences, a variety of data collection methods were used in this study. Data were collected in four phases:

- Phase I: Recruitment and Initial Questionnaire (January 2019)
- Phase II: OnPLC Introductory Phase (February – March, 2019)
- Phase III: OnPLC Implementation Phase (April – May, 2019)
- Phase IV: Exit interviews (June, 2019)
The Journey in Four Phases

Recruitment and initial questionnaire. In Phase I, participants completed an online questionnaire and agreed to participate in the study. Participants then met in six synchronous sessions in an OnPLC to discuss their experiences with improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices. At the conclusion of the OnPLC sessions, participants were interviewed individually by the researcher. The OnPLC featured a shared Google Drive that served as a repository of digital resources that included articles, videos, OnPLC session archives (video recordings and transcripts).

Introductory Phase: OnPLC Sessions I – IV. Session I of the OnPLC was intended to be introductory. Participants described their experiences with improvisation, composition, and arranging (ICA) in their teaching practices. Participants also discussed the obstacles they encountered in the past while trying to implement these into their teaching practices. Obstacles described included general perceptions they believed to be shared by their community of band directors and themselves. Participants also described their own anecdotal experiences with ICA.

Session II of the OnPLC was dedicated to professional development. To address the concerns and obstacles discussed in Session I, I provided resources and frameworks for participants to consider for the future development and implementation of lessons in their teaching settings. The National Core Music Standards (NCMS) were presented as a representative research-based practical framework for the implementation of ICA as part of a holistic music curriculum. Other resources presented in Session II were overviews of Pogonowski’s creative music strategy, and synopses of published texts from authors.
Barry Green and Maude Hickey. A complete listing of the digital resources provided to participants can be found in Appendix D.

Participants indicated that the creative music strategy appealed to them, so I arranged for an outside expert to join the OnPLC in Session III as a resource. The outside expert was a university lecturer who specializes in the implementation of the creative music strategy in various teaching settings. Participants were able to interact with the outside expert and ask specific questions. Collective brainstorming took place as ideas developed between the participants, the outside expert, and me.

Session IV of the OnPLC was a brainstorming session where participants were able to collaborate with one another to generate ideas for lesson design. Participants were able to share experiences and ideas with one another, with the intention of developing and delivering ICA lessons for the following sessions.

**Implementation Phase: Sessions V and VI.** Approximately four weeks had passed between Sessions IV and V. Participants returned to the OnPLC for Session V to share recordings of the ICA lessons they implemented in their teaching settings. In this session, each participant had an opportunity to present their lessons and describe their processes and lasting impressions of their students’ work. In this session, each participant presented recordings of student work for the OnPLC to view. Each participant was given an opportunity to dialogue with one another which included asking questions, sharing ideas, and giving constructive critique. Participants were prompted prior to the meeting to address a set of considerations found in Appendix E.

Session VI of the OnPLC took place six weeks after Session V. In this session, participants each presented a second lesson to the OnPLC. The same processes and
procedures from Session V were followed: presenters discussed their method, their process, and their lasting impressions of their students’ work. In this session, participants were encouraged to include video of themselves teaching, in addition to recorded examples of student products.

**Reflection Phase: Individual Interviews.** In this phase of the journey, participants each gave individual interviews reflecting on their experiences as a member of the PLC. Participants discussed their perceived individual growth, as well as an ideal vision for the role that composition, arranging, and improvisation may take in their future teaching practices.

**Data Collection Methods: Strengths and Weaknesses**

This section describes the data collection methods used in this study, including their respective strengths and limitations. The methods of data collection included an online questionnaire, document reviews, transcripts and video recordings of online discussion groups (OnPLC), participants’ journals, and interviews.

**Online questionnaire.** A short-answer online questionnaire was utilized as a method of data collection in the first phase of the study (see Appendix B). Gerber, Abrams, Curwood, and Magnifico (2017) describe multiple advantages of online questionnaires as a convenient method of data collection: (a) online questionnaires are self-administered, (b) they can be taken at any time, (c) they can include multimedia sources, (d) data were stored immediately after completion (and less likely to have measurement errors), and (e) questions can be randomized. An online questionnaire served as a demographic inventory for each participant. Additionally, the online
questionnaire included other pertinent short-answer items that correspond to the criteria for participation.

**Document reviews.** Document review is a more objective method of data collection that serves to strengthen the validity of a study through triangulation. The objective data collected through documents helps the researcher to contextualize the subjective data collected through journals and interviews (Gerber, et al., 2017). Documents will be collected from participants that will include course syllabi (or a student handbook), as well as information published online (calendars, fundraisers, program infrastructure).

The advantages of document review lie in the convenience factor for the researcher. Creswell (2014) describes the ease of attainability for most documents, and that they take a relatively little amount of time to interpret. In addition, Creswell (2014) claims another advantage to the review of documents is that they, “represent data that participants have given attention to” (p. 192).

**OnPLC meeting recordings and transcripts.** In alignment with participant action research (PAR) as a method of inquiry, a discussion group is an appropriate method of data collection to address the transformative intention of this study with its participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In this study, the discussion group was an online professional learning community (OnPLC) cohort made up of four participants and a facilitator. Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been a proven successful model for educators who seek to improve their teaching practices through social inquiry (Verdi, 2016). Therefore, the discussion group used in this study was fashioned from the three distinctive tenets of an effective PLC: (1) “Ensuring that students learn, (2) A
culture of collaboration, and (3) a focus on results” (DuFour, 2004, pp. 9-11). Due to the unique challenges inherent in the schedules of the participants in this study, this discussion group met in a synchronous online space (Battersby & Verdi, 2016).

Six synchronous meetings took place online, and were recorded using cloud-based software. Meetings ranged from 50-80 minutes in duration. Recorded meetings were transcribed by an online transcription service. As co-researchers with the facilitator, participants were able to member-check the recorded meetings as the collected data, and contribute to the development of emergent findings. Meeting dates and times were flexible to accommodate each participant as unexpected conflicts arose. An online scheduling tool was used to determine mutually convenient times for all participants.

Participants agreed at the outset of the study to utilize a group text, “chat” as a communication tool throughout the study. A quorum of two participants, plus the facilitator was required for each meeting (Wheelan, 2009). Two meetings had full attendance, three meetings had one absent participant, and only one meeting had a minimum quorum for attendance (see Table 3.1). Members who missed scheduled online meetings were asked to view the missed recorded meeting(s) and contribute their relevant thoughts and ideas to the group in the form of text message, email, video, or an uploaded document as commentary. Despite being asked to contribute, absentees did not submit additional, “make up” commentary to the group. In consideration of the improvisatory nature of PAR as a method of inquiry, meeting protocol was determined one meeting at a time, to meet the relevant needs of the participants and the group as a whole.
Table 3.1

*OnPLC Attendance by Session*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Session I</th>
<th>Session II</th>
<th>Session III</th>
<th>Session IV</th>
<th>Session V</th>
<th>Session VI</th>
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<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
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<td>Andrew</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
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<tr>
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**Journals.** I maintained a facilitator’s journal throughout the duration of the OnPLC study. Herr and Anderson (2015) stress the importance of a facilitator’s journal in PAR to, “monitor their own change process and consequent changes in the dynamics of the setting” (p. 69). The facilitator’s journal also serves as a resource to document ongoing thinking processes, and to best determine the subsequent directions the study may take throughout this phase. Entries from the facilitator’s journal informed the exit interview protocol for the final phases of the study.

Participants were asked to contribute journal entries which may be, “potentially rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 157). If and when appropriate, journal prompts may also include commenting on shared documents or journaled ideas from other participants. Participants were encouraged to choose their own method of journaling such as video, emails, typed documents, or voice memos. Participants were given critically reflective prompts after Sessions I and II of the OnPLC to assess their discoveries as co-researchers. Only two participants contributed written journal entries after Sessions I and II. Due to inactivity following Session II, I ceased to request that participants contribute journal entries between each session.
Interviews. Interviews took place at the conclusion of the OnPLC phase. The protocol for the final phase of interviews can be found in Appendix F. Interviews were between 45-80 minutes in length, and were conducted in settings that were comfortable for the participants, such as their home, office, or a local coffee shop chosen by them (Creswell, 2014; Kvale, 2007).

Data Analysis Methods

The variety of data collected throughout the four phases provided, “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning,” and therefore increased the study’s validity through triangulation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 72). In PAR, participants become co-researchers and therefore have a stake in the direction of the study. This unique scenario brings unpredictability into the plan of the study and give way to what Herr and Anderson (2015) describe as, “designing the plane while flying it” (p. 85). This issue of unpredictability in PAR inspires Kemmis’ cycle of inquiry model (Figure 1.3), where the researcher is constantly in a state of planning, observing, acting, and reflecting. For these reasons, the search for emergent themes happened simultaneously through the online discussion group phase of the study.

Two of the unique precepts of PAR as a methodology are catalytic change and reflexivity among the participants and the facilitator. For these reasons, data were coded and synthesized in real time for the first two sessions of the Introductory Phase. As new meanings were formulated throughout the cycle, the direction of the study changed. Therefore, a frequent analysis of changes throughout the study in the participants (and the researcher) were necessary to best describe the study’s unique journey.
At the conclusion of each OnPLC Session, recordings were posted to a shared Google Drive. Transcriptions of each recorded session were added to the shared drive as soon as possible for member checking. A group text chat was utilized for convenience, where participants could voice their ideas for future meetings, and to confirm meeting agenda items. At the end of the study, individual interviews were recorded, transcribed, member-checked, and coded.

I used hand coding as my technique for data collection from the group and individual transcripts (Creswell, 2014). During the OnPLC sessions, open coding was used to summarize group discussions. Summaries for Sessions I and II were posted to the shared drive for participants to reference as they developed their ideas for future teaching lessons. The shared drive featured resources that emerged from Sessions III and IV for participants to reference. After Session V, I included a brief summary of the ideas shared, as well as suggestions for considerations for the final round of lessons for Session VI.

After all data were collected, and transcriptions of all individual interviews were available, I began a new process of hand coding. Saldaña (2016) submits that coding take place in multiple stages. Following Saldaña’s recommendations, I utilized a combination of first cycle coding techniques which included open coding, structural coding, and *in vivo* coding (Saldaña, 2016). Open coding is a provisional method where the researcher is searching for a “starting point to provide […] analytic leads for further exploration” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115). Structural coding, “both codes and categorizes the data corpus to examine comparable segments’ commonalities, differences, and relationships” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 98). Structural coding is restrictive as a deductive approach that searches for codes based on research questions. *In vivo* coding, by contrast uses, “participant voices”
to derive meaning from transcripts that is more inductive in nature (Saldaña, 2016, p. 109).

As initial codes were assigned to the data, the data was transferred to a spreadsheet for further analysis, with time and session codes to indicate the context in which the data emerged. Secondary, provisional codes were used when appropriate to find immediate connections to the literature review and conceptual framework (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Coded data were then sorted into categories based on the research question(s) they addressed. Some coded data fit into more than one research question. In some cases, non-conforming codes were kept in a miscellaneous category for further investigation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2014).

Table 3.2

Data Collection Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Collected Data</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. Prior to their participation in an Online PLC, how do high school large ensemble directors describe the role of creativity as contributing to a holistic music education? | • Questionnaire Responses  
• Review of Documents  
• OnPLC Transcript, Session I  
• Participant Journals  
• Interview Transcripts |
| 2. What instructional strategies can high school large ensemble directors design together in an Online PLC to include improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices? | • OnPLC Transcripts, Sessions II-VI  
• Interview Transcripts  
• Review of Documents  
• Facilitator’s Journal |
| 3. Following their experience in an Online PLC, what measures of success (if any) do participants describe from their participation in a 16-week collaborative process? | • Interview Transcripts  
• OnPLC Meeting Transcripts  
• Facilitator’s Journal |
Second cycle coding was used to find deeper connections and further categorize the data to show clear connections and themes. Axial coding was utilized to find relationships between the codes, as they were sorted into emergent categories and sub categories related to research questions (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). The cycle of collapsing and streamlining data continued over two to three processes per research question group until findings and themes emerged with more clarity. Table 3.2 displays the collected data as they correlate to each research question guiding this study.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted in June of 2018 with three participants. The participants were all high school band directors with at least five years of teaching experience. The interview protocol for the pilot study can be found in Appendix G.

Interviews were transcribed and coded to reveal emergent themes in the participants’ responses. The following key findings emerged from the pilot study: (a) participants had an extremely high volume of performance commitments (well over 30), (b) participants perceived a lack of available time for other classroom activities outside of performance preparation, (c) participants expressed a desire for individual teacher development for the purpose of improved practice, (d) participants exhibited a vague understanding or awareness of the National Core Music Standards, (e) participants revealed little to no influence of standard-based classroom activities, (f) participants employed a participation-based grading system, (g) participants perceived themselves as being in isolation, (h) participants exhibited a limited variety of individual student grading practices, and (i) participants expressed that their curriculum exhibited a
deficiency in universal access to creative experiences such as composition and improvisation in their classroom (Fleischmann, 2018).

The pilot study confirmed that high school band directors in the Southern California region may exhibit many of the teaching practices and perceptions found in the reviewed literature, and therefore would generate an appropriate participant sample to address the problem statement guiding this study. The pilot study also exposed flaws in the interview protocol such as redundancy, and questions that led to invalid findings that were unable to address the research questions. Ultimately, the pilot study helped me to narrow the scope of this study. The research questions guiding this study were revised and informed by the key findings of the pilot study.

**Ethical Considerations**

This study had minimal risks to the participants. Precautionary measures were taken to give the participants anonymity in the publication of this study. Participants and their places of employment were given pseudonyms. The participants’ roles as co-researchers in PAR carried a risk in maintaining anonymity throughout the study. Participants were not bound by IRB protocols, therefore there was a potential risk that anonymity could have been breached either intentionally or unintentionally by the participants. To comply with IRB protocols of preserving the confidentiality of vulnerable populations (high school students), all recorded teaching demonstrations used in the discussion group had recording devices positioned strategically to avoid capturing students’ faces. All recorded lessons were screened by the facilitator before they were viewed by the OnPLC. Video editing software was used to either crop out or blur all student faces to preserve anonymity prior to their presentation to the OnPLC.
All collected data were encrypted and stored in a cloud-based Google Team Drive. One encrypted folder was accessible by all participants and was a repository for all group meeting transcripts, video recorded meetings, resources, and other artifacts shared by the participants throughout the study for transparency and member checks. Individual participant journals, and the facilitator’s journal were kept in separate encrypted locations, only accessible by the facilitator. All recordings of interviews and meetings were destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

Studies grounded in positivism are concerned with validity, reliability, and generalizability. Post-positivist approaches may instead substitute credibility (validity), dependability (reliability), and transferability (generalizability) to determine the trustworthiness of a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Herr and Anderson (2015) suggest that “action research should not be judged by the same quality or ‘validity’ criteria with which we judge positivist and naturalistic research [...] a new definition of rigor is required that does not mislead or marginalize action researchers” (p. 65). Therefore, Herr and Anderson suggest a set of validity criteria specific to the trustworthiness of an action research study: (1) outcome validity, (2) process validity, (3) democratic validity, (4) catalytic validity, (5) dialogic validity.

**Validity Criteria for Action Research**

The collaborative and cyclical nature of action research present unique challenges to conducting a trustworthy study. As participants engage in the PAR process through critical self-reflection, and the cycle of inquiry themselves, they become co-researchers.
Participants had an active role in generating their own knowledge, applying that knowledge in practice, and reflecting on the outcomes in their own teaching settings. Due to the situatedness of participants as co-researchers themselves, Herr and Anderson (2015) prescribe unique criteria for determining validity in action research:

(a) **Outcome Validity** describes the extent to which the study addressed the problem, or a modified version of the problem that emerged during the study.

(b) **Process Validity** is similar to internal validity in that new knowledge (or findings) are truly correlated to the data collected, and not subject to bias.

(c) **Democratic Validity** is the extent to which, “multiple perspectives and material interests [of all participants] are taken into account in the study” (p. 69).

(d) **Catalytic Validity** is the extent to which participants and researchers are, “open to reorienting their view of reality,” and consequently make efforts to make changes within their own setting (p. 69).

(e) **Dialogic Validity** concerns the acceptance of the findings within the community of practice.

The design of this study allows space for four of Herr and Anderson’s (2015) criteria for action research validity. Outcome and Process Validity was observed by the artifacts that participants brought to the OnPLC such as video and lesson plans. The lessons were developed by participants for their unique teaching settings. My positionality as a facilitator conducting a PAR group as a structured dissertation study compromised the degree to which Democratic Validity could be achieved. As a facilitator, I was seen as an outside expert at times, and disseminated research-based materials and expertise based on the topics being discussed. However, measures were taken to address Democratic Validity by observation of participants’ comments and concerns throughout the OnPLC. Participants’ access to review recorded OnPLC materials and transcripts, and opportunities to discuss emergent themes also contributed
to the Democratic Validity of the study’s findings. By examining the potential for participants’ transformative experiences, Catalytic Validity was observed in the progression of the OnPLC sessions as well as through individual interviews in the final phase of the study. Dialogic Validity will not be observable until well after the study has taken place. It is possible that the interviews in Phase IV may have revealed some degree of Dialogic Validity, although a more reliable test of Dialogic Validity will require a follow-up inquiry months or years after the study.

**Credibility, Dependability, and Transferability**

Credibility was established in this study by the triangulation of a variety of data collection methods (Creswell, 2014; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The collection of multiple methods of data collection provided a robust source of data. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) suggest that, “prolonged involvement in the field” over time increases the credibility of a study (p. 163). In this study, the OnPLC met over the course of 16 weeks with the same participants, which contributed to the credibility of the generation of knowledge throughout the study. The duration of this study elicited a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the four participants who fully completed the study.

My own biases and assumptions were addressed during the study through critical reflexivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Critical reflexivity can be defined as, “a deep awareness on the part of the researchers of their own preconceptions and assumptions and reflection on their roles and emerging understandings while engaged in the research process” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 153). To best address my positionality, a facilitator’s journal was kept and periodically
reviewed to better examine my own prospective and retrospective relationships to the data (Attia & Edge, 2017).

Qualitative-bound studies focus on the generation of specific, local knowledge. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), transferability, “is about how well the study has made it possible for readers to decide whether similar processes will be at work in their own settings and communities by understanding in depth how they occur at the research site” (p. 164). In the case of PAR, the intention is to, “generate local knowledge that is fed back into the setting” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. xiii). While this study dealt with the transformative experiences of four high school large ensemble directors, “local community knowledge” may implicate transferability to other high school large ensemble directors with similar interests and struggles.

**Delimitations**

The intention of this study was to investigate the possibilities of how improvisation, composition, and arranging may be present in large ensemble settings. This study intentionally avoided the ambiguity of the assessment or measurement of creativity. While assessment and evaluation have a presence in the research findings, methods of assessment and evaluation were not the focus of investigation as a whole. Instead, this study intended to document the variations of lessons generated by the participants featuring creative products (improvisation, composition, and arranging).

Anecdotal student data were used to describe students’ experiences during the study. However, this study focused on the lived experiences of music educators, and not the lived experiences of their students. Therefore, this study did not attempt to investigate students’ perspectives on improvisation, composition, and arranging.
Finally, the effectiveness of a professional learning communities as professional development for music teachers has been documented in recent studies. Although participants described their growth as a participant in an OnPLC, this study did not intend to investigate the causality as to why the OnPLC was perceived to be an effective tool for professional development.

**Chapter Summary**

As a facilitator, I selected four participants to take part in a cohort to address three research questions. Social constructivism best suited the research questions; therefore, a qualitative method of inquiry was used for this study. Specifically, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used to best address the journey to be undertaken by the study’s participants as a cohort of co-researchers. Data were collected in four distinct phases which included journals, interviews, an online questionnaire, document reviews, and an online discussion group (OnPLC). My methods for contending with the unique issues of trustworthiness inherent in PAR were described as they pertain to this study. The findings of a pilot study aided the researcher in revising the purpose of the study, problem to be addressed, and the research questions guiding this study. Additionally, the ethical considerations and delimitations of this study were expressed in this chapter.

The following two chapters present the significant findings that resulted from the analysis of the collected data. The final chapters feature a discussion of the relevant findings, a suggested framework for the implementation of improvisation, composition, and arranging in large ensemble settings, and final conclusions.
Chapter IV

PARTICIPANT PORTRAITS

The purpose of this study was to work with a cohort of high school large ensemble directors to explore the extent to which they were able to design and deliver a holistic music curriculum to their students in a large ensemble setting. This study further investigated possible indications of their evolved perceptions and attitudes toward the role of creative processes in their curriculum (such as improvisation, composition, and arranging), and whether/how they evolved during and after their participation in a PLC.

This chapter will present individual portraits of each participant of the study. Within each portrait I present (a) relevant background information describing each participant and their teaching setting, (b) a description of each participant’s previous experience with improvisation, composition, and arranging (ICA) in their curriculum, (c) descriptions of the two lessons that each participant designed and implemented during this study, and (d) the obstacles that each participant expressed as concerns for implementing improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practice. Each portrait closes with each participant’s final thoughts and opinions on improvisation, composition, and arranging at the conclusion of this study.

Gary

Gary, The Traditionalist

Gary grew up in Southern California, and had participated in a highly prestigious band program in his high school years. His high school band routinely earns high marks
at competitive marching band events, and earns the highest ratings at concert festivals.

Gary attended a well-known university in Southern California for his undergraduate degree in music education, where he was a member of one of the most prestigious university wind bands in the area. He has since begun the process of pursuing a master’s degree in music education which remains unfinished at the time of this study.

Gary has over 15 years of teaching experience in Southern California as a band director. His current teaching assignment is at a high school situated in a suburban setting. The total enrollment of his site is approximately 2,142 students, of which approximately 88% are classified as minoritized, and 79% are classified as, “economically disadvantaged.” His current teaching setting has a well-established competitive field-show-style marching program, two levels of concert band, indoor percussion (winter drum line), indoor color guard (winter guard), a pep band, a parade band, chamber ensembles, string orchestra, mariachi ensemble, jazz band, and a musical theater, “pit orchestra” to accompany annual drama productions. His program routinely participates in over 50 performances per academic year. His program typically serves between 100 – 125 students.

During the competitive, “field season” for marching band (August – November), students commit to after school rehearsals three to four days per week. In addition to home football games, the marching program committed to nine separate performances in either a competitive or exhibition setting. During the, “indoor season” (December – April), color guard and drum line students meet after school twice per week for extra evening rehearsals which are facilitated by booster-funded walk-on staff. A jazz band meets after school twice per week in the spring semester. In April, rehearsals for the
spring musical are squeezed into the schedule to avoid conflicts with the regularly scheduled jazz band rehearsals. Spring break is impacted with rehearsals for the jazz band, the spring musical, and regular winter guard and winter drum line rehearsals. Selected students also participate in a district honor band that takes place in the last two weeks in January. The concert program appears at five concerts, and one adjudicated concert festival throughout the school year. Gary’s students also appear at various other community events that are interspersed into the performance calendar throughout the year. Less than a week after the final day of classes for the school year, students in the marching band report back to begin summer rehearsals for the following school year.

Gary’s Prior Experience with ICA

Gary entered this study expressing that he had very little experience with ICA in his teaching practice. During Session I of the OnPLC, he expressed that he was, “always interested to find new ideas and new ways to collaborate and get some new things to [his] students,” and that he was interested in, “keep[ing] an open book idea” with his approach [Session I]. He believed that ICA was important in developing students’ ability to, “think musically” [Session I]. He indicated that he was fairly comfortable teaching composition and improvisation but had not found practical ways of introducing them into his large ensemble settings. For Gary, improvisation was, “no problem” to apply to a jazz band setting. In Session I, when the OnPLC initially discussed applications for improvisation in the large ensemble setting, he was wide-eyed for a moment, and had to clarify the purpose of the study: “We’re looking at the full band, like wind ensemble setting? because I know we can do this in the jazz band, no problem, but you're looking - big scale” [Session I].
After we explored (and re-defined) what improvisation might entail, Gary realized that he had, in fact implemented some call-and-response warm ups with his concert band: “Instead of going through my chorales or scales […] maybe I’m doing a different type of warm up.” He believed that asking students model or mimic call-and-response exercises was important to, “get them to break that shell a little bit…” and to encourage them to, “try something new” [Session I]. In addition to encouraging students to, “break out of their shell,” Gary described his belief that ICA contributes to the development of versatile, “well rounded” musicians. He specifically elicited the importance of exposing all students to ICA because it, “teaches students that it’s a viable career option in music […] we always talk about performance or education, but students can actually learn composition as a career” [Session I].

He went on to describe the importance of creating a safe environment for students in his program, and that exercises like the call-and-response were good for students: “The band room should be the safe place where they can make a mistake. They can take risks” [Session I]. He believes that the classroom culture that he has cultivated has always fostered a safe environment, and that creating a safe environment may be, “a lot more important” in what we do as music educators: “I think maybe it’s just the kind of program we run […] [students] understand that [it is important to] work for each other, and with each other” [Final Interview]. Gary also observed that certain students surprised him in how naturally ICA came to them. When describing one student in particular who unexpectedly stood out, he mentioned:

Maybe I can give him something else or maybe he wants to try more. Maybe he's got a real good idea about songwriting or, you know, … we should be fostering [that]. We shouldn't be like, “Oh no, go do that somewhere else.” [Final Interview]
For Gary, ICA has potential to reach students’ talent that they may have never known had existed previously. By inserting ICA lessons into the curriculum, he believes that those students may have a space to develop their musical talents and interests beyond performing.

Table 4.1

Lesson Summary - Gary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Design</th>
<th>Lesson #1</th>
<th>Lesson #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensemble description</strong></td>
<td>Band, advanced</td>
<td>Strings, all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher preparation time</strong></td>
<td>45 Minutes – 1 Hour</td>
<td>&lt; 45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class time used</strong></td>
<td>3 Days (3 Hours)</td>
<td>1 Day (1 Hour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student creating time</strong></td>
<td>2.5 Hours</td>
<td>20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of notation</strong></td>
<td>Fully notated/sketches</td>
<td>Fully notated/sketches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence of student work</strong></td>
<td>Live in-class performance, notated parts</td>
<td>Live in-class performance, notated parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of collaborative groups</strong></td>
<td>Groups of 4-5</td>
<td>Groups of 4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method of group formation</strong></td>
<td>Student choice</td>
<td>Student choice (with parameters for instrumentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-presentation feedback</strong></td>
<td>Teacher-led debrief, peer to peer comments</td>
<td>Teacher-led debrief, peer to peer comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graded evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Not graded, participation only</td>
<td>Not graded, participation only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICA Implemented</strong></td>
<td>Improvisation, Composition, Arranging</td>
<td>Improvisation, Composition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lesson #1 Designed by Gary**

Gary’s first lesson was prepared in under one hour, and was delivered in March to the advanced band. One of the pieces of prepared literature the Wind Ensemble was learning utilized motivic variation on Beethoven’s, “fate” motive from Symphony No. 5. Students were tasked to form groups, and to compose their own variations/arrangements of Beethoven’s, “fate” motive, to gain deeper understanding of how their concert
literature was composed. This was the first time that this particular class had been exposed to a lesson using improvisation, composition, or arranging.

Gary presented a short lecture discussing the concept of motives, and how students may develop motives in various ways. Students were asked to get into groups of four to five and to compose their own variation on the, “fate” motive. Some students chose homogenous instrumentation, and some chose mixed instrumentation. Students were given manuscript paper and asked to notate their individual parts to turn in at the conclusion of the lesson. Some students were unable to accomplish this, and turned in notated, “sketches” instead. Some students elected to use notation software on their district-issued devices. Students were given approximately two and a half class periods (approximately 2.5 hours of time) to compose and work on their own. Each student group presented their compositions to the class in a live performance setting.

Following the student performances, a group discussion took place. Gary led the discussion with questions, and students were able to give feedback to one another. Typical discussion questions included prompts such as What worked well? What didn’t work? What did you like?

Lesson #2 Designed by Gary

This lesson was prepared in under 45 minutes, and was executed within one class period (one hour). The goal of the lesson was to have students design their own short musical gestures over a bass ostinato (to be composed by the students). This lesson was designed for a beginning strings class, consisting of all grade levels. As this is the only strings class, there are varying levels of student ability. Most students in this class were beginners in September of the same school year. This lesson was presented near the end
of the school year in May, and this was the first time this particular class was exposed to a lesson using improvisation, composition, or arranging. Students had limited prerequisite knowledge of terminology such as ostinato, melody, harmony.

Students were asked to group themselves in groups of four to five, where each group required a bass instrument of some sort to provide an ostinato layer. Students worked together to compose their own layers of music, and assumed responsibility for contributing a melody or a harmonic support. Each student was only responsible for contributing approximately four measures of music. Students were given a limited range of notes to use from the D major scale, parameters were set in place by Gary that would make this assignment successful for all students. Gary referred to his strategy as a, “just add water” approach to ensure student success. Students were given a piece of manuscript paper, and were responsible for submitting their manuscript paper at the end of the lesson. Some students used notation software on their district-issued devices. Some students were unable to notate their music properly, and submitted incomplete, “sketches” instead. Students were given 20 minutes to work together before presenting. Each student group presented their compositions to the class in a live performance setting.

Following the student performances, a group discussion took place. Gary led the discussion with questions, and students were able to give feedback to one another. Typical discussion questions included prompts such as What worked well? What didn’t work? What did you like? Table 4.1 summarizes the two lessons designed by Gary during this study.
The Problems of ICA for Gary

Gary’s program has an incredible number of rehearsal and performance commitments. Gary’s questionnaire response to obstacles faced while trying to include ICA was only: *There are too many other things to teach in my concert ensemble classes (not enough time)*, leaving all other options unchecked. He initially believed that to teach composition was, “a class in itself,” and therefore did not have time to teach all of the skills associated with composition in his large ensemble setting. He mentioned AP Music Theory as a logical class setting where composition could be taught, and that he had never really thought about teaching composition in his large ensembles. Gary seemed preoccupied in his reflections that his students needed skills in notation: “That was my biggest thing is making sure they know the tools of … how to notate” [Session V, Lesson 1 Reflection]. Despite ICA being unfamiliar territory for his students, he believed that, “the notation thing I think is the biggest [challenge] …Playing the notes, I don't think is the difficulty” [Final Interview, Lesson 2 Reflection].

Gary’s students are well-versed in meticulous performance preparation. When they were introduced to ICA, Gary mentioned that some of his students had a difficult time focusing on the process. In his final interview, he described that throughout his lessons he observed that some students seemed “hung up” with the quality of the final product or making a good grade which, for those students, created some anxiety. He had to reassure these students that it was all about the process, and not to worry about the product as much.

In his final reflections, Gary also described a large number of extracurricular performance commitments that he believed high school large ensemble directors typically
encounter in Southern California: “Our calendar is not gonna change. We’re not going [to] […] all of a sudden not have football season or not have a field show […]we are going to go to festival. We all have our concerts – nothing there is going to change” [Final Interview]. He described what he perceived to be a shared sentiment among his colleagues in the field of music education, that they are all too busy to be interested in adding anything else to their already-too-busy schedules. While discussing the National Core Music Standards that are in process of being adopted as California’s new standards for music, he humorously shared his colleagues’ expected reactions to being asked to apply ICA: “When anything is new or different… you’re always in your head like, ‘Oh, how’s it gonna make my band better?’” [Final Interview]. He believes that band directors tend to be resistant to top-down initiatives that imply changes to their teaching practices: [sarcastically] “We see these trends and we freak out like, ‘Oh, here we go again,’ or ‘What's gonna change now?’ or ‘What do I gotta call it now?’ or ‘What do I gotta fill out now?’” [Final Interview].

Gary, The Traditionalist Turned Visionary

At the beginning of this study, Gary had doubts about how he might include ICA in a large ensemble setting. At the end of the study, Gary envisioned ICA as becoming part of the culture of his music program. He cited possibilities for future opportunities for implementing ICA. He mentioned practical ideas such as, “breaking up” his class for variety and capitalizing on short, “pockets of time” [Final Interview] within a typical rehearsal period in order to, “make it happen.”

He believes that ICA should, “become a part of what we do,” and that there is great potential for ICA to be integrated throughout the school year [Final Interview].
Despite his impacted schedule, he envisions that ICA lessons could be implemented at least once per academic quarter, and possibly more often for his advanced classes. He sees ICA working in all of his classes, regardless of the students’ skill level. He sees, “pockets of time” existing in his regular rehearsals, which he described as 15-20 minutes that could be used for ICA. He believes that he could leverage those pockets of time to spread a single lesson out over a week, giving students multiple encounters with ICA:

I think it’s just getting creative with how I can get it, but it can get in – absolutely… If my class is an hour, maybe the first half hour [is] mine, you know, and a warm-up and I work on what I want to work on and then the last half hour to get them to go work on their small group or their composition. [Final Interview]

Gary also believes in the value of collaboration with others as a future resource to help him in his future journey with ICA. He expressed an interest in expanding his horizons and reaching out to other teachers and resources. Watching others teach was inspiring for him. By watching others, he sees how he could take a lesson and adapt it for his use: “I would try to find some other tools… sometimes the best stuff that we do is stuff we’ve borrowed” [Final Interview]. Gary’s final thoughts:

You’re here to get [kids] exposed to music and getting an enjoyment out of music. So, I think it's just one of those things, like, “How do I fit it in?” “Yes, you can fit it in.” It's just a matter of where, you know, you can find it. And then, just trying [...] you don't know until you try. You might have all these doubts or these concerns but you don't know until you actually just go and try it. [Final Interview]

Richard

Richard, The Nonconformist

Richard was raised in Southern California, and participated in a well-established music program as a high school student. He attended a local community college, where
he participated in a very prestigious and well-known marching band which has
performance credits internationally. He went on to study music education at a prominent
state university situated in Southern California, where he studied with a prestigious
percussion instructor who also performs in a professional local orchestra. Richard
participated in the exclusive large ensemble at his university, and performed under a
highly respected wind band conductor. Following his undergraduate degree, Richard
completed a Master’s degree in Music in Instrumental Conducting. At the time of this
study, Richard is considered a veteran teacher, with almost 15 years of teaching
experience in Southern California, primarily as a band director.

Richard teaches at a suburban high school in Southern California that celebrated
its sixth year of existence at the time of this study. Richard was the first music director at
this school, and had to build the program from the ground up. Building a new program
included establishing traditions and an overall identity for the program. His high school
has a student enrollment of approximately 1,661 students, of which 83% are classified as
minoritized, and 69% are classified as, “economically disadvantaged.” Richard’s program
includes a competitive marching band, two levels of concert band, jazz band, a newly
formed orchestra, pep band, percussion ensemble, indoor color guard (winter guard),
chamber ensembles, and a musical, “pit” orchestra for drama productions. He has
approximately 90 students in his program. He indicated that his program participates in at
least 50 performances per school year.

Aside from his marching band and indoor color guard programs, Richard’s
students do not participate in annual adjudicated events, which is not the norm in
Southern California. All of his ensembles participate in a variety of local community
events, or events on his campus. His teaching site was established to be a magnet school for musical theater, which consequently attracts many students away from instrumental music. Richard has a booster-paid assistant that is present for after school music rehearsals for the marching band or concert bands. The assistant functions as a clinician to complement Richard’s teaching. His program also has an extracurricular component for private lessons, where outside coaches are brought in to provide students lessons once or twice per month. It is common in Southern California to leverage booster-paid walk-on staff for the marching band. While he has a small booster-paid marching band staff, most of his staff are utilized as coaches for private lessons or for his concert ensembles.

**Richard’s Experience with ICA**

At the beginning of this study, Richard indicated that he was uncomfortable teaching composition to his large ensemble classes, and that his students were rarely exposed to composition. Improvisation existed in the jazz band only for Richard, and he was comfortable teaching improvisation in jazz settings. He indicated that the study was interesting to him, and he was curious to see where it would take him in his teaching practices. He was interested in developing ICA on a, “larger scale, and beyond just jazz band” [Session III]. From his point of view, most band directors in Southern California would say that they are only teaching composition in AP Music Theory, and improvisation would only appear in their jazz bands.

Despite his indication that improvisation had no presence in his large ensembles, he realized that he did some call-and-response style warm-ups from time to time, and had not previously considered those types of activities to exemplify improvisation by his immediate definition. Richard indicated that in the past he had some students voluntarily
arrange or compose music for themselves, or a small chamber ensemble made up of their peers. These were isolated cases where students had interest, and composed or arranged on their own time. Richard felt it was important to encourage those students, and to help them with their voluntary projects. But he had never introduced composition as a unit or a lesson to his large ensemble classes. Richard is interested in the notion that all humans possess an innate musical ability, and an imagination for sound. In his view, experimentation with ICA can help to develop students’ imaginations for sound in ensemble settings, specifically in regard to the overall effect that each unique instrument brings to a sonic texture.

Lesson #1 Designed by Richard

This was Richard’s first attempt at implementing a lesson using improvisation, composition, or arranging in a large ensemble setting. He implemented this lesson concurrently with two of his band classes, his advanced band and his beginning level band. This lesson was slightly differentiated for the lower level group. The following description of Richard’s lesson details the procedures used for the Wind Ensemble.

The Wind Ensemble was preparing a piece of music utilizing the pentatonic scale in variations. Richard wanted his students to design a composition based on the pentatonic scale so that they could gain a deeper understanding of their roles in performing their concert literature. For the lower level band, he wanted his students to have experience composing, using the limitations of a pentatonic scale.

To introduce the lesson, Richard began with a short discussion of what it means to compose, and to inform students that they were going to partake in the process. To prepare the students, Richard discussed the context of the pentatonic scale as it related to
the repertoire being prepared. Students were guided through identifying the notes of the pentatonic scale as they were utilized in their repertoire. As a group, students then played each of the pitches. Parameters for the assignment were explained. Students were given manuscript paper and asked to compose a 16-measure original melody using the notes from a B-flat pentatonic scale. Students were allowed to use octave transpositions if they wished. After approximately 20 minutes of individual experimentation, students performed a first draft of their compositions individually for Richard in his office. They were each given formative feedback, and then directed to find a partner to work with.

Table 4.2

*Lesson Summary - Richard*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Design</th>
<th>Lesson #1</th>
<th>Lesson #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensemble description</strong></td>
<td>Band, advanced &amp; intermediate</td>
<td>Band, intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher preparation time</strong></td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
<td>45 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class time used</strong></td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student work time</strong></td>
<td>60 - 90 Minutes</td>
<td>60 - 90 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of notation</strong></td>
<td>Yes, fully notated/sketches</td>
<td>Optional sketches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence of student work</strong></td>
<td>Live private performance, notated parts</td>
<td>Live in-class performance, notated parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of collaborative groups</strong></td>
<td>Individual work, then pairs</td>
<td>Yes, 4 - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method of group formation</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Teacher selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-presentation feedback</strong></td>
<td>Teacher-led debrief, peer to peer questions</td>
<td>Teacher-led debrief, peer to peer questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graded evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Not graded, participation only</td>
<td>Not graded, participation only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICA Implemented</strong></td>
<td>Improvisation, Composition</td>
<td>Improvisation, Composition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once students found a partner, they were tasked to combine their two original lines of music to make a two-part composition within the same parameters. Students were given approximately 40 minutes of class time to accomplish this. Pairs of students then
performed for Richard in his office, and received feedback. At the conclusion of the performances, a group debrief took place. Richard asked critically reflective questions, emphasizing the students’ experiences throughout the process in which they had just participated. Students also asked one another questions that were generally focused on problem-solving. They were mostly interested in how their peers, who encountered similar problems, were able to overcome those problems.

Lesson #2 Designed by Richard

Richard introduced the lesson by discussing minimalism, its qualities, significant composers, and other musical elements. They listened to a variety of recordings featuring minimalism. Richard then described vocabulary such as motives and how they work. Parameters were given for the assignment which included, length, and key. Richard separated students into groups of four to five students. Each student had approximately 30 minutes to compose their own short musical motive. As soon as they were ready, the pre-selected groups worked on combining their individual motives together to make a minimalistic piece of music similar to what they heard earlier. After a rehearsal period of approximately 30 minutes, groups performed for the class, and received feedback. After all groups had performed, a debrief session was held similar to the previous lesson. Students were asked questions pertaining to their process that led them to arrive at their final products. Students were also able to ask one another questions that tended to gravitate toward problem solving. Table 4.2 presents a summary of Richard’s lessons designed for this study.
The Problems of ICA for Richard

Richard’s questionnaire response to obstacles faced while trying to include ICA was only: *There are too many other things to teach in my concert ensemble classes (not enough time)*, leaving all other options unchecked. Throughout his lessons, he encountered student insecurity as a common issue. He elaborated on the issue of time, and the feeling of being overwhelmed with managing an active program:

This job is what it is and we all know that. It’s 4,000 different things, all at the same time and everybody thinks theirs is the most important. And sometimes we forget about - those things that, you know, maybe aren't as obvious to us. [Final Interview]

Additionally, he described his students’ insecurity as obstacles during his lessons for this study. Richard encountered students who could not overcome a sentiment of, “but mine's wrong” [Final Interview]. He sarcastically described an exchange between one of his struggling students and himself:

RICHARD: “How do I know what's wrong? I don't know what's in your head.”
STUDENT: “Well, but it doesn't sound good.”
RICHARD: “Well then change a couple of notes until you think it sounds good. And then if you think it sounds good, why don't I think it sounds good? […] as long as you can articulate to me or you can prove to me that that’s what you want to do, I can’t argue with you.” [Final Interview]

Richard also described observations of his students’ fear: “I see that as roadblock for a lot of students doing this […] if they're just gonna be afraid to try.” [Final Interview]. In addition to consoling students in the process, he believed that students’ ability to properly notate music was another issue. He had to explain to some students struggling with note stems: “Well, that needs to be this way” [Session V]. He referred to notation as a, “basic musicianship/theory” issue [Session V].
Another issue that stood out to Richard was his own confidence level, upon reflecting on his journey during his final interview, he recalled thinking, “I don’t know if I can do this.” He continued: “but it was really like [sardonically], ‘Oh, this is something new’ and, ‘I don't know how this is going to turn out at the end but, you know, let’s get on this train and let’s see how it comes out’” [Final Interview].

**Richard, The Curious Nonconformist**

Richard had doubts about the practicality of applying ICA in his large ensemble settings. From the beginning, he saw value in ICA as a contributor to a holistic music education, but lacked the resources to, “make it happen.” He stated at the end of the study that he now has less doubts about his students’ ability to do ICA, and that he now has confidence that he can make ICA a part of his future students’ large ensemble experience. Richard described gaining, “a whole new perspective on how these things could be incorporated into a daily, or even not daily, but just the [over]-arching curriculum that you could use in a regular ‘Band class’” [Final Interview]. Despite his trepidations at the beginning of the study, he never recalled experiencing a moment where he wanted to give up.

Upon reflecting in his final interview, he described how exposing students to ICA may, “cast a wider net,” and encourage more students to become composers. He is concerned with a striking lack of diversity in the field of composition. And most importantly, that music educators shouldn’t hold back just because they may be uncomfortable teaching something like ICA. He explained:

We need more diversity, so how do we do that? Well, we have to cast a wider net. You know, if we're not making all of our students do that, you know, how are they gonna go ahead and then decide to go to college and want to do that?
Diversity is important and we're part of that. And whether it’s, “what instrument do they want to play?” or whether it’s, “should they go down a road of composition or jazz improv?” We shouldn’t, you know, for our limitations of not wanting to do the assignment. […] it’s gonna hold them back from possibly being the next big thing, you know? [Final Interview]

He believes that his future teaching practices will include ICA in his large ensemble settings, stating that, “it is going to be hard to argue to *not* do it anymore [after seeing] how it affected the students” [Final Interview]. Richard believes there are many opportunities to include ICA in his large ensemble settings. He specifically mentions time between concert cycles: before winter break, before spring break, and at the end of the school year.

Like his colleagues, Richard saw the value in collaboration with his peers as a support system and repository for new ideas. He wants to have more people around him using ICA so that he can collaborate with them, and receive feedback, as, “a central place” where people can talk about ICA [Final Interview]. He sees value in problem-solving collaboratively, because, “we all do it different ways.” Moving forward, Richard also mentions the future applications of technology that may a tool that can assist him and his students in the future. Richard’s final thoughts:

[ICA] isn’t difficult. I think more than anything else people just think it’s difficult. You don’t need to be a composer to do this. You don’t need to be, you know, a, “jazz improv guy” to do this. You just need to be able to be willing to let your students experience it. And I think that’s part of what we - now that we’ve done this can get the students to do is--or get that the teachers do… you know, give it a shot.

[We all had to take that leap of faith and just go, “This is important so let’s do it.”] And once you do it once, you’re like, “Oh, okay, I can see why; I can see why we’re doing this. I can see where the benefits are.” [Final Interview]
Henry, The Inexperienced Optimist

Henry grew up in Minnesota, and pursued his undergraduate education at a prestigious east-coast conservatory as a jazz drum set player. He then earned his Master’s degree of Music Education from a university on the east coast. Following his graduate studies, Henry relocated to Southern California where he pursued a performance career, and decided to obtain his California teaching credential. Henry taught part time at the elementary level, and moved to the high school level on a full-time assignment once he completed his credential program. At the time of this study, Henry was completing his seventh year of teaching at the high school level in Southern California.

Henry teaches at a suburban high school in Southern California. His school has a student population of approximately 1,569 students, where 95% enrolled are classified as minoritized, and 84% are classified as, “economically disadvantaged.” Henry’s program includes a competitive marching band, two levels of concert band, concert percussion ensemble, an indoor percussion ensemble (winter drum line), an indoor color guard (winter guard), chamber ensembles, jazz band, and an International Baccalaureate (IB) music class. His students participate in at least 30 performances per school year, and there are over 150 students who participate in his program. Henry’s concert program has a long tradition of excellence. The concert ensembles are routinely invited to perform at exclusive audition-only experiences internationally, and recently for the California State Music Education Conference (CASMEC).

The competitive marching band has enjoyed tremendous success under Henry, routinely receiving high marks, and regularly qualifying for state championships. Despite
the high percentage of overall students at his teaching site who are identified as, “economically disadvantaged” (84%), the students and booster club raise an exceptional amount of funds to supplement private lessons for the students in the top concert ensemble, as well as financing biennial international tours. Students seem to exude a great deal of pride in their accomplishments in the marching band setting, but even more so for their accomplishments on the concert stage.

**Henry’s Experience with ICA**

Henry entered this study with very little experience incorporating ICA in his large ensemble settings, citing that he only sometimes included these activities. He also indicated that he was fairly comfortable teaching improvisation and composition, likely due to his conservatory training as a jazz musician. In his final interview, he reflected on his initial state of mind, explaining that he started the study feeling nervous because he did not, “currently have any curriculum in place,” and that he did not know, “if what [he] would be contributing would be substantial enough.”

Before participating in this study, Henry had a difficult time finding practical curricular applications to the large ensemble setting, or in his case, the wind band setting. The only composition instruction he was providing was in his International Baccalaureate (IB) Music class, and the only instruction in improvisation he could identify (such as call-and-response) was occurring in the jazz setting. In Session I, he recognized the absence of ICA in his students’ music experience: “now I’m trying to rack my brain, like - how do I fit these things into the large band setting? And, yeah, [this is] interesting.”

Henry believed from the beginning of this study that ICA had value to students as a part of a holistic music education. He suggested that students’ involvement with ICA
might make, “the performance of composed music a little bit more meaningful” [Session I]. In Session I, Henry also described his belief that ICA was good for students because it, “give[s] students obviously, a more holistic view of the facets of music. Not just the performance aspect, not just the ‘competition’ aspect, or the ‘technique’ aspect.” He continued, “there’s other ways that a musician and music can be valued other than the understanding that you need to be a good player in order to be a valued musician.”

After delivering two lessons, Henry recognized in Session VI that ICA: could be an advantage to those kids that maybe don’t play first chair, but may be able to express themselves a little bit easier than, you know, some of the first chair players. Maybe that opens up some new ideas for them in terms of their musical ability, [and] gives them a little bit more confidence. [Session VI]

He continued to focus on the students who may not always get the most attention in his ensemble due to their technical abilities: “Maybe you find that that kid who’s not the greatest technical player in the world but, he or she is, you know, has a real talent for composition” [Session VI]. Henry also focused on the notion that we should be doing more ICA in our large ensemble settings to appeal to the students who may have an aptitude for composition, and may need an outlet to develop their skills: “A lot of the new composers for our medium are not coming out of the conservatories, but they are rather coming out of the band room” [Session I].

Lesson #1 Designed by Henry

This was Henry’s first attempt at implementing a lesson utilizing improvisation in one of his concert bands. The ensemble that was chosen was his lower level concert band. He chose this group on purpose because very few of them had jazz experience. He briefly prepared a notated ostinato figure to hand out to the band students. He wanted his
students to have a new experience, and to try to stay within a specific framework of four measures, and use only five notes. His goals, in his own words, were merely to, “see what happens.” This lesson took place in April, just before his school went on spring break.

To begin the lesson, he had the students play back five notes to build a traditional pentatonic scale. Students were able to write the notes down as a point of reference. He allowed the students to experiment with the five notes on their own briefly before setting up an improvised jam session. The ostinato figure was played by selected students in the ensemble, and provided a simple harmonic support for students to improvise over. With a metronome on, and selected students playing the ostinato he provided, Henry went around the room, where each student improvised for four measures before moving on to the next student. The parameters were fairly strict, only five notes were allowed, and only four measures were allowed per student. He found that some students went beyond the pre-established limits.

After each student had an opportunity to improvise, Henry led a group discussion. Questions in this discussion were mostly centered around receiving student feedback on their experiences from the process such as: What did you think? How did you feel? What made some improvisations sound better than others?

Lesson #2 Designed by Henry

This lesson was designed for the advanced wind band, and was implemented in May, between a final concert and graduation. Students were tasked to compose original music in the style of concert literature they had encountered throughout the year. Students were encouraged to draw from any material they wanted from the academic year as inspiration. For these students, this was the first time that they were given a task to
compose music in a large ensemble setting. Due to their advanced performance skills and experience, Henry had to trust that they could complete the assignment successfully.

Henry assigned groups of four to six students each. Henry created a detailed handout of musical considerations to give the students. The purpose of the handout was not to give the students limits, but rather to provide an extensive list of considerations to help students construct original music such as melody, meter, mode, tempo, and form. The only detailed parameter given to the students was a minimum musical duration of 30 seconds. Students were given approximately 45 minutes to compose in groups, and would present the following day during class. Students were given opportunities to work on the piece outside of class time if they desired. A classroom computer with notation software was available to them to use. Students were not required to use notation, or to turn in notation. Students presented their group compositions in class.

Table 4.3

*Lesson Summary - Henry*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Design</th>
<th>Lesson #1</th>
<th>Lesson #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensemble description</strong></td>
<td>Band, intermediate</td>
<td>Band, advanced</td>
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<td><strong>Class time used</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Student work time</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use of notation</strong></td>
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<td>Optional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence of student work</strong></td>
<td>Live improvisation</td>
<td>Live in-class performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of collaborative groups</strong></td>
<td>N/A – Individuals</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method of group formation</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td><strong>Post-presentation feedback</strong></td>
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<td>Teacher-led debrief, peer-led debrief, written student feedback to the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graded Evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Not graded, participation only</td>
<td>Not graded, participation only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ICA Implemented</strong></td>
<td>Improvisation</td>
<td>Improvisation, Composition, Arranging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following each performance, Henry led a discussion asking students questions such as: *What did you like about it? What would you do differently? What surprised you? Did the absence of a grade affect the quality of your work?* Students were also given opportunities to give comments to one another following the performances. Students were then asked to complete an online survey to give feedback to the teacher. The online form asked students to elaborate on their experience with the assignment. Table 4.3 presents a summary of the two lessons that Henry designed for this study.

**The Problems of ICA for Henry**

In his initial questionnaire, Henry selected two obstacles from the list: *There are too many other things to teach in my concert ensemble classes (not enough time)* and *There is not enough access to technology*. Regarding the issue of time, Henry humorously described how busy he is: “There is less stuff. Less more, do you know what I mean?” [Final Interview]. Similar to other music educators in Southern California, he keeps a busy performance calendar with extracurricular commitments. For Henry, another aspect of time as an obstacle was lesson preparation. He was concerned that he might not be able to develop, “something meaningful” for his students [Final Interview]. Although he indicated that a lack of technology was an obstacle, this obstacle did not surface for him until later in the study. He mentioned in his final interview that it would be ideal to have access to multiple keyboards to use as a tool to teach composition.

The issue of ICA being, “appropriate” to a wind band setting was explored by Henry. He mentioned that, “we talk a lot about composers” and described composition and improvisation as, “not really conducive to a wind band setting” [Session I]. He later expressed a concern that a lack of ICA in literature is a challenge:
You know – There’s not a lot of wind band music out there that encourages [ICA]. It’s a different genre than say, jazz band music, than say - even big band music has room for improvisation, but not a lot of literature in the wind band setting does. [Session I]

The discussion in Session I turned to the rare instances where students encounter aleatoric passages in their literature, and the struggles that ensue when specific notation is removed from the equation. Henry humorously expressed frustration with his attempts to teach his students one such aleatoric passage:

The kids - they don’t know what to think about it, saying, “What? I don't have notes in front of me. What am I supposed to be doing?” […] I had to literally tell kids, “you can't play it to a pulse or a beat, you have to randomly click the rocks” and they were so dumbfounded by that, you know what I mean? It’s interesting that they’re so programmed, that exactly what they see on the page is exactly what they’re supposed to play and nothing else, like there’s no other type of contribution that they can make. [Session I]

Another student concern that Henry experienced while he was teaching his lesson was students’ battling with their own perfectionism. At the high level that his students routinely perform at, they have a sense of pride in how they sound, and that his students are the kind that, “need to do things ‘right’ in their minds […] they want to make things better naturally” [Final Interview]. For that reason, Henry found the openness and the ambiguity of an ICA lesson to provoke anxiety for some of his students.

Henry found that students’ limited knowledge of notation was an obstacle that his students had to overcome in his second lesson. He originally wanted his students to write out a full composition:

Then I went back and said, “Well, you know what, some of the kids don’t even know which side of the stem the note goes on or when it goes up or down.” Even though they’ve been looking at it for six or seven years, they don’t know how to notate it. [Final Interview]

He had to modify his lesson to accept, “sketches,” which he had not planned for initially.
Finally, Henry described teacher-oriented challenges such as a deficiency in his training, and a perceived absence of resources or models to which he could refer. He emphasized that band or orchestra directors are trained for different purposes:

We are trained as band directors or orchestra directors on the – mechanical musical side of things. How do we get kids to have good tone quality? How do we get them to play the right notes? Play the right rhythms? And all these things. And, a lot of times, I think, there’s a lack in our profession of the knowledge that is needed to effectively teach composition and improvisation. [Session I]

Henry is always open to finding resources that can help him to become a better teacher, and therefore providing his students a better experience in music. Despite his own insecurities, he approached this study with a great deal of interest and openness.

**Henry, A Risk-Taking Optimist**

Henry entered this study optimistic that it was possible to incorporate ICA into his large ensemble curriculum, he just never put thought into how he could accomplish it. In his final interview, he stated, “I think I’ve developed some interesting ideas about the way to implement composition and improvisation into the classroom. So, I definitely gained knowledge as to how to initiate it.” He further elaborated on his vision for the future, which will include more purposeful planning and a longer unit focused around individuals composing. He also expressed a desire to incorporate ICA lessons more frequently, with more time and effort into putting a week-long structured unit together. He does not want ICA to be a, “one-off thing,” but rather sees it as being woven into his curriculum to help with, “the performance aspect” as well:

I think knowledge of theory, knowledge of things that are based outside the performance discipline, helps with the overall musicianship of a student and thereby increases the chances of success for performance. I really do. [Final Interview]
He sees, “front loading” and student-led discussion as areas where he can improve upon his teaching practice:

I think I would give them more information at the beginning of the unit than what I did to help them be more successful. And I think that at the end of my lessons, I would give more time for responses within the whole group. I wanted other kids to hear what other kids have to say about their own compositions and their peers’ compositions. I’d want a little bit more peer group discussion, group interaction. [Final Interview]

Additionally, Henry mentions the potential that recordings of his students’ work could bring to the reflection process for his future ICA lessons. He believes that students will have a new perspective from reviewing recordings of their own work. He also would like to explore more of the assessment materials offered by NAfME as guiding feedback for his students throughout the process.

Henry believes the most valuable resources that will help him realize his vision for ICA is collaboration. He sees a great deal of value in seeing how other teachers are approaching ICA, and how he might be able to adapt their solutions to his students. He is now inspired to, “do more research so that [he has] more weapons in [his] arsenal” [Final Interview]. Henry’s final thoughts:

I would say to my peers, “just start it, it’s going to work. You're going to be learning as you go if you haven't had the background.” But - The first step is to just get it going and the more you do it, I think the easier it's going to become. […] It’s been an enjoyable experience. I’m glad that I did it. […] I learned a lot from [my other colleagues]. […] It was very interesting - eye-opening - a lot better than I thought it would be. [Final Interview]
Andrew

Andrew, The Experienced Optimist

Andrew grew up in the midwestern United States, where he was a part of his middle school band. He decided not to join band in high school. Instead, he pursued his own studies in popular music and jazz music. Andrew received a Bachelor’s of Arts degree in Geography, and moved to Southern California to pursue a Master’s in Music Education. He has been teaching in Southern California for the past 15 years, where he has taught all levels of music.

Andrew teaches at an upper class suburban high school where the total student population is approximately 2,000 students, of which 22% are classified as minoritized, and 8% are classified as, “economically disadvantaged.” Andrew is one of two instrumental music directors at his school site, where he instructs approximately 150 students in his ensembles. He teaches three levels of jazz band, guitar, the orchestra, and the middle level of band. Andrew is also involved with directing the musical, “pit orchestra” and shares the direction of a non-competitive marching band with his counterpart. The marching band only appears at home football games and one parade. Most of the activity in Andrew’s music department is centered on large ensemble tours, trips, and performance opportunities in his community. The jazz bands are the only competitive element of the program. There is an active booster club, and five walk-on staff specialists in the music department who focus on specific areas of performance expertise such as jazz, guitar, or accompanist.
Andrew’s Experience with ICA

Compared to the other three participants, Andrew participated in this study bringing a great deal of past experience with ICA. Without a preconceived model of what high school band was, he built his own model over the years, which included making room for ICA in his teaching practices no matter what age or skill level his students were. Over his career, he had experimented alone, without a great deal of help or guidance from the outside world: “I started with, you know, being curious. […] It’s just been like, ‘Oh, this might work, and, ‘I’m interested in that,’ [and then] bringing it to my students” [Final Interview]. Even though he had previous experience, and some level of confidence, he was still interested in participating in this study to expand his knowledge, and hoped to gain some additional training and expertise.

Andrew sees ICA as being able to, “connect with different kids in different ways” [Session I]. Specifically, he says that he likes using ICA to connect his kids to the “creative side of things that [are not] emphasize[d] enough” [Session I]. Andrew thinks that in music education, skills-based instruction is emphasized too much, and that there are more ways of cultivating students’ musical potential. He eloquently stated a casual observation: “The creative and the technical don’t always overlap, which I find very interesting.” He observed in his lessons that some of his students that were the, “best” players in his ensemble were not necessarily the, “best” composers or improvisors. With a smile, he stated, “you never know from looking at a kid, or even talking to them, what their inner musical life is” [Final Interview].

Andrew cited a few examples where he had broken up his large ensembles into small groups to compose, and other times when he tried larger groups: “I’ve done various
things over the years, whether it’s having them write short little compositions for themselves of four measures, giving them a starting point, or having them do a group improvisation or a group composition, to various degrees of success” [Session I]. He acknowledged the messiness of his past attempts trying ICA with large groups:
“[chuckles] it depends on – you know – I’ve been doing it with the whole group and it can be messy. Then I’ve been doing it with sections. Like I had the trombones do one day, one day I had the percussion, did the clarinets [another day]” [Session IV].

Problem-solving, and, “thinking differently about music” are also important things that Andrew believes ICA brings to his students. Andrew observed his students during his ICA lessons, and expressed that he was, “surprised at how they kind of invented their own solutions to the problem.” He continued to elaborate on the significance of musical problem-solving, and a need for a more significant presence of it in large ensemble settings:

It’s such a different thing from sitting in an ensemble and playing and contributing something bigger than yourself versus, your musical mind working on a problem that you’re trying to solve. I feel like those are different things and that we don't give kids that individual problem-solving challenge enough other than when they’re practicing. [Final Interview]

Lesson #1 Designed by Andrew

This lesson was prepared in approximately one hour, and was designed for the lower-level band that he instructs, which is made up of intermediate-level students on brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments. This was an improvisation lesson that was not designed to support any repertoire in particular that the group was preparing. Students in this class had participated in these sorts of improvisation games before, and were
vaguely familiar with the process. This lesson took place in April, just before students went on spring break.

Students were able to choose groups of five to six members each, with varying instrumentation. Andrew described making minor adjustments to certain groups if he believed that behavior would be an issue. Students were tasked with performing a rehearsed improvisation on their instruments and worked within a small number of pre-established parameters. There were no limits to key, length, or notes to use, etc. Student groups were given a basic framework to follow, where students agreed on predetermined points where they would enter the texture, and communicate with one another throughout the process to exit the texture. After 15 minutes of experimentation time, each group performed their rehearsed improvisation for the class. Due to the openness of the assignment, improvisations varied in length and complexity. Following all of the performances, a group discussion ensued where students could make comments to one another, and discuss their experience. Additionally, students gave written feedback to Andrew.

**Lesson #2 Designed by Andrew**

This lesson was prepared in approximately one hour, and was designed for the orchestra, which is made up of advanced students on stringed instruments. The goal of the lesson was for each student to compose an original melody in the style of a familiar melody from their prepared concert repertoire. In the past, Andrew has exposed these students to exercises using improvisation, composition, and arranging. Therefore, students had prior experiences to draw from that helped them to formulate a vision for their final products with very little explanation from the teacher. Consequently, Andrew
trusted his students to complete the task without limitations imposed on them such as pitches or length of product. Students had complete freedom. Lesson #2 was presented toward the end of the school year in May, after the class’ final concert took place.

The teacher gave each student a notated melody from a piece of music that was performed at their previous concert. He gave a brief 15-minute lecture describing the melodic elements present in the melody they were studying to exemplify concepts such as contour, intervals, and antecedent/consequent relationships. Students were actively engaged throughout the short lecture by playing back short excerpts from the melody that pertained to the concepts being described by Andrew. Students were then given 15 minutes to work individually to compose their own melody. Students were not given manuscript paper, but some made their own, “sketches” on notebook paper. Students each performed their melody for the class individually.

Andrew initiated a brief discussion after each piece, and students were allowed to ask questions and comment on what they heard. Sometimes comments or questions were only facilitated by the teacher, student participation was optional. Andrew had intended to allow students to revise their piece after the discussion period to improve upon their original work. The intention was for students to present a second time after revisions were made, but this did not take place as he ran out of time. Table 4.4 presents a summary of the two lessons that Andrew designed for this study.

The Problems of ICA for Andrew

In his initial questionnaire, Andrew indicated the options obstacles on the initial questionnaire: There are too many other things to teach in my concert ensemble classes (not enough time). In the same question, he also selected the option for: Not Applicable: I
feel confident teaching composition and improvisation in my concert ensemble classes. Andrew is a veteran of using ICA in his classes, but still recognized that time was an issue. With a high number of performance commitments, it is still difficult to leverage class time away from performance preparation. In Session I, Andrew acknowledged that for him, the preparation to plan an effective lesson, and, “willingness to follow through [...] so that it’s a good experience” is still difficult. In his final interview, he described his perception that the reason why most band directors in Southern California do not want to plan and implement ICA is their perception that, “the group needs to be perfect, and there’s too many details to perfect, so [they] would never compromise [their] time.”

Additionally, Andrew believes that convincing other Southern California band directors to implement ICA is, “a bit of a sales job” and that other band directors may, “do things the way they do them” without wanting to upset the status quo [Final Interview]. Part of the issue, according to Andrew, is the lack of teacher training. He expressed that there was no model for him to emulate as a preservice teacher for implementing ICA in large ensemble settings, and that it makes him feel like, “a pioneer out on the ocean hoping [he is] going to land” [Session I].

He described a problem of band directors and students being, “unwilling to experiment or go outside of their comfort zone” [Final Interview]. In this statement, Andrew acknowledges that music educators’ fear of the unknown, may not be so different from students’ fears of the unknown. Just as teachers are unskilled in ICA, and feel uneasy, students likely will feel the same: “We’re probably all relative novices when it comes to these things in general anyway. So, how do we teach the kids when we’re we are supposed to be the experts?” [Session I]. The management of students’ insecurity is a
concern for Andrew, and creating a safe environment for them to work within is a high priority for him.

Table 4.4

Lesson Summary - Andrew

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<th>Lesson Design</th>
<th>Lesson #1</th>
<th>Lesson #2</th>
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<td><strong>Ensemble description</strong></td>
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<td>Teacher-led debrief, some peer to peer comments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ICA Implemented</strong></td>
<td>Improvisation</td>
<td>Improvisation, Composing, Arranging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Andrew, The Renewed Experimentalist

Andrew is interested in developing longer units for his students to explore individual composition projects. He envisions himself dedicating more time to refining his lessons with more structure. This study inspired him to put more thought and design into longer units of composition for his large ensemble classes. Andrew mentions the possibility of prioritizing his composition units by planning his concerts around them.

He believes the NAfME resources such as the National Core Music Standards (NCMS) and Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs) will be useful models for him in designing lessons that will be meaningful to students’ musical growth. He specifically
cites the usefulness of the rubrics provided with the MCAs to not only guide his lesson design, but also as a feedback tool for students to be able to track their progress. What he describes resembles a portfolio unit where students could track their progress over time. To make his composition units more educative, Andrew also describes an interest in recording student ICA products for students to use for the reflection process. He sees multiple applications and possibilities for ICA in his future teaching practices. Andrew’s final thoughts were centered on his collaborative experience. He entered the study with a great deal of experience and confidence, and hoped to come away with more tools and ideas at his disposal:

When it came to this, I was just intrigued to see the other lessons that people did, and I think, with the number of music teachers out there in the world, how many great ideas there must be [...] that I could then borrow from, because I know that I don’t have all the answers and nobody does. There’s gotta be so many great ideas that we could borrow, you know, to benefit the kids. I mean, I’ve definitely enjoyed being part of it and working on it - and I hope it manifests into something great. [Final Interview]

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, four participant portraits were presented. Each portrait described the unique individual journey each participant experienced as a part of this study. Most participants described limited to no experience with ICA prior to this study. Portraits also included obstacles experienced by each participant before and during their engagement with this study. Participants identified a common obstacle of not enough time in the questionnaire, and described various other obstacles such as teacher training and student apprehension as being detractors to implementing ICA in their past teaching practices.

Each participant committed to designing and implementing two lessons using ICA for this study; an overview of these lessons was described in each portrait. Participants
designed a variety of lessons that incorporated multiple combinations of ICA. The lessons designed were all designed and implemented in a relatively short amount of time. In their lessons designed for this study, participants used variations of the *creative music strategy*, where students engaged in individual exploration and/or collaborative work to improvise, compose, or arrange.

Each portrait closed with final thoughts from each participant, where they described newly discovered possibilities for ICA in their curriculum. Participants commonly shared a perception that their colleagues in the field are fearful and/or negative about implementing ICA in their own large ensemble settings. All participants shared a story of success during the study, citing that ICA was easier for them to implement than they had previously imagined.

This chapter is concerned with the individual opinions, attitudes, and experiences that participants held prior to, during, and after their participation in this study. The following chapter chronicles the collected experiences shared by each participant throughout the study.
The purpose of this study was to work with a cohort of high school large ensemble directors to explore the extent to which they were able to design and deliver a holistic music curriculum to their students in a large ensemble setting. This study further investigated possible indications of their evolved perceptions and attitudes toward the role of creative processes in their curriculum (such as composition, arranging, and improvisation) and whether/how they evolve during and after their participation in a PLC. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Prior to their participation in an Online PLC, how do high school large ensemble directors describe the role of creativity as contributing to a holistic music education?
   a. To what extent do improvisation, composition, and arranging appear in their previous teaching practices?
   b. What obstacles and challenges do they anticipate while discussing implementing improvisation, composition, and arranging into their past curriculum?

2. What instructional strategies can high school large ensemble directors design together in an Online PLC to include improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices?
a. Which improvisation, composition, and arranging activities do they choose to implement into their teaching settings? What reasons do they give for their choices?
b. What problem-solving strategies do participants utilize to overcome obstacles and challenges they face?

3. Following their experience in an Online PLC, what measures of success (if any) do participants describe from their participation in a 16-week collaborative process?
   a. What measures of success and/or failure do participants describe regarding their implementation of improvisation, composition, and arranging into their teaching practices?
   b. What enduring changes, if any, do high school large ensemble directors plan to implement pertaining to the inclusion of composition, arranging, and improvisation in their teaching practices?

In the previous chapter, I described the role of ICA in participants’ individual experiences leading up to this study. In this chapter, I will review the outcomes of participants’ experiences in an OnPLC, and their described measures of success. Six key findings emerged from the coded data: (1) the creative music strategy met participants’ criteria for practical lessons, (2) participants were able to identify and overcome four significant obstacles, (3) small groups are ideal for ICA, (4) carefully designed parameters are key for student success, (5) educative assessment strategies encourage student engagement and critical thinking, and (6) participants enjoyed personal success and satisfaction with their ICA lessons.
Finding #1: The Creative Music Strategy Met Participants’ Criteria for Practical Lessons

As a collective, participants were able to brainstorm a myriad of practical premises upon which ICA lessons could be based. The resulting ideas for lessons were commonly based upon source material from the literature that students were preparing for performances. Participants desired lessons that could be implemented in a short amount of time (one to two hours of class time), had potential to be repeatable, and had more practicality than a one-time, “exercise.”

A Desire for Lessons with Intrinsic Value - No Exercises

Participants indicated a desire for a lesson model that could be completed within a short time period of one to two days, and that had musical relevance beyond a typical theory exercise. After Session II, Henry was looking for something, “that would give [students] necessary tools to have them begin composing short pieces that had real intrinsic value to them and the listener (no ‘exercises’)” [Henry – Journal Entry]. In Session II of the OnPLC, Pogonowski’s creative music strategy appealed to the participants as a practical framework to consider as a method of teaching ICA.

With limited direction, participants were able to design lessons that utilized most of the steps found in the creative music strategy, as described by Robinson et al. (2011). In their modified versions, participants omitted one element from the seven-step strategy, Record for Reflection. While participants technically recorded their students’ products for presentation to the OnPLC, they did not use the recordings as Pogonowski intended, to share with students as a part of the reflection process. Pogonowski’s framework combines individual exploration with group exploration of some type. Also to be noted,
the second step of the framework, *Design an Open-Ended Musical Question*, was universally replaced by lecture in all participants’ lessons.

Half of the lessons presented from this study utilized a personal exploration period for the students, and only five utilized a student-directed group element of some sort. Table 5.1 illustrates how participants made use of Pogonowski’s seven steps for the *creative music strategy* model on their own to design their lessons:

Table 5.1

*Participants’ Use of the Creative Music Strategy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Henry #1</th>
<th>Henry #2</th>
<th>Richard #1</th>
<th>Richard #2</th>
<th>Andrew #1</th>
<th>Andrew #2</th>
<th>Gary #1</th>
<th>Gary #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Springboard (related to repertoire being studied)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop an Open-Ended Musical Question (LECTURE)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Large-Group Brainstorm (Aural/Oral Analysis – Set Musical Parameters)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Personal Exploration: Aural/Oral Analysis</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Large-Group Conducted Improvisation/Small Group Planned Improvisation (Composition)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Record for Reflection</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**In Search of a Springboard: Designing *In the Style of***

While brainstorming ideas for their lessons, participants were able to generate a diverse set of ideas. With repertoire as a starting point, participants described multiple ideas as a springboard. These ideas all universally addressed the question: *What makes this piece of music unique?* Answering this question for various pieces of literature led participants to think in terms of designing a lesson that would ask students to compose, arrange, or improvise *in the style of***.

Many springboard ideas revolved around choosing scales and modalities unique to the pieces being performed. Participants thought that by using scales and modes, limiting students to use certain pitches may help as a guiding parameter. For instance, using pentatonic scales, blues scales, or whole tone scales to compose *in the style of***.

As a model for lesson design, the *creative music strategy* appealed to participants who were trying to design lessons that were both practical for their students, but could also be completed within one or two class periods, or one to two hours of class time. Once brainstorming began, looking to repertoire as a springboard for a lesson gave the participants fertile ground for harvesting ideas. Improvising, composing, and/or arranging *in the style of*** was a helpful entry point for participants while designing their lessons.

**Finding #2 – Participants were Able to Identify and Overcome Four Significant Obstacles**

Throughout the OnPLC, participants cited four prevailing obstacles that were perceived to prevent large ensemble music educators from implementing ICA in their
teaching settings: (a) time, (b) student apprehension, (c) teacher insecurity, and (d) teacher attitude. As they experienced these obstacles, participants developed their own solutions to overcome them.

Time

Each participant indicated in their initial questionnaire that time was an obstacle for them when they considered ICA in their own teaching practices. Many participants described a general perception that high school large ensemble music educators have impacted extracurricular calendars, and therefore have too many performance commitments to prepare for. The perception was that planning ICA lessons would take too much preparation time for the teacher, and that there were too many other things to teach during class time.

“We all have pockets of time.” After implementing two lessons in their curriculum over the semester, participants found that ICA lessons do not take as much time to develop or to implement than they had originally thought. Each participant was able to implement a full lesson using one or two hours of class time, and still feel that the lesson was successful. In their final interviews, participants made their own suggestions. Gary explains that, “you can get creative” with how you find your own, “pockets of time.” Henry suggests, “If time is an issue, you can still do a lesson that’s one to two class periods per [lesson], and maybe you spread those out within a month’s time.” While other participants used 40 or more minutes, Andrew has found that a condensed, “chunk of time, 15-20 minutes max” has worked for him.

For participants, class time is always available, even during intense periods of performance preparation. Participants shared a perception that, at times, they experience a
point of diminishing returns in their performance preparation. Consequently, if they are actually looking for these, “pockets of time,” then they can find them. Richard makes a generalization that in ensemble settings, music educators often teach by rote and repetition, and that scenario empowers students to, “get away with doing it until it’s right.” He is suggesting that these rehearsal practices train students for this eventuality, and that he can sacrifice some of that rehearsal time. Andrew senses a point of diminishing returns in rehearsal practices when we teach for repetition: “X is not gonna be perfect in that piece of music, you know, that trombone line, is – is just what it is, and so I’m not going to stress over that.” Gary observed a great deal of these opportunities in his rehearsals, where he may ask himself, “Do I need to run this section again, or can I try something different?”

Not only did participants find that there are always pockets of time when they are actively looking for them, they also described ICA as a welcome change from, “the routine.” Gary believed that the change, and, “breaking up the system” or, “breaking the structure” was a positive outcome for them and their students. Richard thinks it is good to periodically take a day or two away from performance music, giving the students, “the opportunity to digest the information.”

Participants discovered a variety of options in their lessons to deal with the issue of time. Most of them only used one to two class periods, or approximately one to two hours. Gary and Andrew both see potential in breaking up portions of lessons in 20-30-minute increments. To further combat the obstacle finding time to implement ICA as detracting from rehearsal time, participants perceived positive potential returns for their students’ performance quality.
It does not interfere with performance quality, but probably enhances it.

Upon reflection of their experiences, all participants stated that taking the time away from performance preparation to work on ICA lessons did not interfere with their ensemble’s performance quality. Surprisingly, three of them specifically added that it probably made the ensemble perform better. Andrew stated, “I think it doesn’t take away – I think stuff like this only adds.” And Richard described ICA as, “not as disruptive as one may think.” Henry thinks the shorter length of his lessons made ICA a positive use of his time away from performance preparation:

I think they were short lessons, they only lasted a day. I still think if they were longer lessons, I don’t think that it would get in the way of quality of performance. [...] I don't think so. I truly don’t think so. I think that um, I think that if anything, it would enhance the performance aspect of things. [Final Interview]

According to participants, not only can ICA lessons be planned and implemented in less time than they originally thought, but taking the time to cultivate students’ musical understanding through exposure to ICA may actually improve the quality of their ensemble’s performance.

Student Apprehension

Students may not have buy-in. Participants shared common fears that students may not be interested in learning about ICA, and therefore may be resistant to participating in lessons. According to participants, students’ resistance may lead to, “wasted time.” Early in Session I, participants described a perceived fear that students may have insecurities which may lead to bad attitudes toward participation in ICA lessons. Participants recognized that there is a spectrum of student interest that exists in
most music programs, some students are highly invested, and some are, “just there to play” [Session I].

Gary and Andrew both experienced student immaturity during the lessons they implemented in this study. They both described their experiences as isolated incidents, and that they did not reflect on the group as a whole. Andrew observed a small group laying on the floor, “trying to be creative – overly creative and couldn’t get focused” [Session V]. Gary observed one student that played his composition with his group, and for some reason was not happy with the performance. The student finished the performance by adding some random noises on his instrument, that Gary likened to, “throwing a bucket of red paint on a beautiful painting” [Final Interview].

It was discussed that students may act out in an immature way as a mechanism to detract from the idea that they did not perform to a high standard. Gary suggested that out of embarrassment, they may adopt a mantra of, “if they are laughing with me, they are not laughing at me.” However, the norm was that students were incredibly engaged, to the surprise of all participants.

“Kids don’t want to do it because they’re afraid.” Participants discussed a tension that exists in our art form with regard to a culture where it is so important to be, “right,” which breeds a fear of being, “wrong.” In school settings, students are preoccupied with a binary notion that things are either, “right” or, “wrong,” resulting in students transferring this mindset when interacting with music. Richard feels that students are, “locked into [a mindset of] ‘If I don’t get this right, I don’t get a good grade’ in most of their classes.” Andrew made an interesting observation that we have a, “natural expressiveness that is innate in us,” and that it gets, “drummed out of us through
socialization.” During Session I of the OnPLC, Henry shared an amusing story of his students’ past reactions to encountering aleatoric passages in their music. Some students froze without specific notation to guide them, and didn’t know what to do. Something that was seemingly simple came across ridged and inauthentic without precisely notated instructions.

The fear of subjecting their students to uncomfortable experiences was shared by all participants. To combat this issue, participants described the importance of cultivating a safe environment for their students. That includes creating an environment where risk-taking is safe and students have clear parameters within which to work. After implementing their two lessons for this study, participants discovered specific strategies that seemed to manage student fears of engaging with ICA.

“You can’t be afraid” about what students may think. Despite some fears going into the study, participants were pleasantly surprised to find that their students showed a high level of investment during their ICA lessons. Andrew described his students as, “super responsive” which he was not expecting. He reflected in Session VI: “I was definitely pleased that they took it seriously and for the kids who got through it, that they were able to do something meaningful in that short amount of time.” Richard described one student in particular that exuded a, “spark that maybe hadn’t been there before.” Henry reported that his students were, “genuinely interested” and, “excited to do it.” He says, “you can’t be afraid to do a lesson and think to yourself ‘what if the kids think it sucked.’ We all think that, obviously” [Final Interview].

Not only were students invested, but many of them got so invested that participants described their reactions as being, “surprised.” In some cases, students went
“above and beyond” what their teachers expected. Richard had anticipated that his students might be resistant to his first assignment, and was not only surprised at how much they enjoyed it, but humorously commented on the, “gusto” with which, “most of the students threw themselves into the assignment” [Final Interview].

In his second lesson, Henry set a deadline for his students to perform their composition the following day. He observed that students worked in his room during lunch and after school, and some students were using notation software to create a clean looking score. His students took a great deal of pride in their work. He also humorously recalled that they surprised him with the depth of the explanations they provided for their work, and that [laughing], “one composition was about communism.”

Andrew, who has more experience with ICA, is generally impressed with his students, specifically how creativity, “just spills out of them.” He was surprised how seriously some of his students took his lesson, and how one student was able to improvise an entire AABA variation after only 15 minutes of preparation.

Not all students approached the lessons with so much vigor and enthusiasm. Participants described a range of student investment in their lessons. Where some students took their work very seriously, some students struggled. In some cases, some students reacted with immaturity as described by Gary and Andrew. Richard described a bell-curve of student investment which was also perceived by the others. He elaborated: “I got them to be willing to do it - some more than others and some - liked it more than others, but that’s kind of what every standard happens to be” [Final Interview].

For participants, this, “bell curve” of student enthusiasm and engagement was not only acceptable, but surprisingly successful. Participants’ fears that students would not be
responsive to these lessons were diminished by their observations that their students enjoyed the lessons. In some cases, students demonstrated so much investment that they went above and beyond what was asked of them to create something of which they were proud.

“How can we break the shell?” Participants described the importance of developing an environment where it is safe for students to take risks in front of their peers. Gary discussed the importance of a safe environment in Session I: “The band room should be the safe place where, they can make a mistake. They can take risks like that and feel easy to do that.” Each participant described different elements of a safe environment, and what it looks like in their teaching settings. Gary described promoting respect for one another’s ideas. Andrew emphasizes the importance of rapport:

> It’s all about the relationships we have with our kids and our ability to communicate with them - whatever it is we’re trying to do, and to make them feel comfortable enough to try and take the leap and try something even though they don't really know what they're doing. [Session V]

Andrew promotes a collegial culture in his ensemble by encouraging his students to applaud after someone performs, to show support and honor their contributions:

> “Sometimes it’s spontaneous and sometimes I have to lead it … There’s a good energy” [Final Interview].

The rapport between teachers and students was identified as a key element to providing a safe environment for students. Participants also described using humor and humility to make their students more comfortable. Smiling, Gary explains, “We joke, ‘It’s not gonna be good,’” [laughs] like, we just want it presentable. […] I think that’s kind of the rapport we have so I think we’re in good shape out there” [Final Interview].
Participants attempted to manage their students’ anxiety and insecurity by creating a safe environment, where students were reassured that taking risks was acceptable, and as Andrew stated, “we’re all friends here.” Creating a safe environment includes building peer to peer rapport, and also between students and teachers. For participants, creating a safe environment also included setting up a lesson in the way that was not intimidating to students.

**Lesson design can be critical to managing student intimidation.** Participants found that designing a lesson with student success in mind can also weather the level of student fear and intimidation. If the lesson is too open-ended, then students can feel overwhelmed with the seemingly infinite possibilities. This prospect may be intimidating to students who are already concerned with being, “right” or, “wrong.” Andrew emphasizes the importance of lesson design, and honing in the expectations for students with clear parameters so that, “it’s not overwhelming,” and that there are, “clear steps that [students] can make where [they] feel like [they’re] progressing.” Instead of calling their lessons, “assignments” or, “tests,” Gary and Andrew described their ICA lessons as, “activities” which seemed to add more levity for students by their account.

One way that participants made ICA lessons feel more like activities was the absence of evaluative grading. Students received feedback, but letter grades were not given to student work. Andrew believes that when grades are unattached to creative work, “you’re freer to invent solutions.” For Gary, taking away grades was, “huge” for his students.

Participants observed that the nature of group work helped to create the safe environment necessary. All participants used group work for at least one of their lessons.
Richard observed that the safe environment in his classroom manifests itself in the peer to peer interactions. He observed many of his students being supportive to one another and reassuring one another. Gary observed that students can be shy or intimidated when you ask them to play by themselves in front of the class, but the group dynamic helped his more introverted and shy students. Gary discovered that opportunities exist in small groups for students to double their parts, which can provide more security for shy students. The students he would usually classify as shy or introverted seemed to be comfortable working and performing in a peer group setting. Gary described students being *too* shy to participate in ICA as a, “nonissue.”

To better weather the obstacle of student insecurity with ICA, participants recognized a need for creating a safe environment that promotes risk-taking. They felt like they were able to provide that safe environment by establishing a rapport of trust, designing lessons with clear parameters that set students up for success, removing grades from the equation, and utilizing group work.

**Managing Teacher Insecurity**

“It’s like nobody has any training in this stuff.” Participants described fear and insecurity within themselves when they initially thought of teaching ICA. Participants felt uncomfortable teaching ICA, mostly because they feel like they have not been prepared or trained to teach these subjects in a large ensemble setting. They also recognized that there is no obvious model for them to follow.

**The National Core Music Standards as a model.** All participants (including Andrew) believed that they were, “relative novices” with ICA at the beginning of the study. By the end of the study they were able to point to specific resources that helped
them to deliver successful ICA lessons in a short amount of time. The only formal training I administered during the OnPLC took place Session II. This training was an explanation of the National Core Music Standards (NCMS), the Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs), and a presentation of some practical research models for ICA curriculum. The reason for this training was twofold: (1) at the time of this study the NCMS were in the process of being adopted by the State of California for state-wide implementation in the following academic year (2019 – 2020), and (2) the NCMS provide a research-based framework for educators to reference when designing their curriculum. Some participants indicated that they had seen the NCMS, but no one had taken a deeper look to really try to understand them.

According to participants, the NCMS were a helpful resource for designing the lessons that they delivered during this study. Henry preferred the NCMS to the older state standards, and described them as, “more succinct” and, “comprehensible.” Richard did not use the standards to design his lessons, but did reference them retroactively to ensure that his lessons met the standards. Henry, Andrew, and Gary also affirmed that they would refer back to them in the future while designing lessons.

**Collaboration with your peers is very important in order to “make it happen.”** Participants described the benefits of collaboration in a PLC setting as valuable resource for them. Not only did they indicate that they benefitted from the shared ideas and resources brought to the group, but that they also benefitted by observing others teach. Andrew specifically observed, “tone of voice… how [teachers] interact with students… and the language used” as being helpful to him. Henry joked, “I like to steal ideas, you know, ‘Great artists steal,’ Stravinsky said that right?”
As participants previously indicated that they felt like, “relative novices” as practitioners of ICA, they described the OnPLC experience as beneficial to them as it reassured them that they were, “on the right path.” Henry described how the model of this study may help him in the future:

I think it would be very advantageous if I was talking to say, the high school directors of my district, and trying to get something like this going. I think it would be very advantageous to have a base curriculum that we all brainstormed about [...] [We could take that] group of ideas, go and do them, come back, conference, say what worked, what didn’t - so that it's a malleable, elastic, curriculum. [...]Two heads are better than one. [Final Interview]

Richard also agreed with Henry’s sentiment: “The collaboration effect is so important. Because, we don’t all think the same” [Final Interview].

In a group of participants where all considered themselves to be, “novices” with regard to teaching ICA to their students, all participants found value in the resources and training provided by collaborative settings such as a PLC. Specifically, participants found value in the sharing of resources and ideas, watching others teach, and the reassurance that they were, “on the right path” by comparison. The National Core Music Standards were also cited as a resource that helped participants design their lessons.

Composition is a class in itself. In Session I, participants described their perceptions of what they believe their students must know how to do before they can compose. Henry teaches an International Baccalaureate (IB) Music course which is the only place composition was taught in his program. Gary eluded to a perception that his peer music educators likely share a view that, “[composition is] a class in itself.”

In Sessions I-IV of the OnPLC, participants described a variety of prerequisite knowledge that they believed students must possess before composing music. They listed music theory, knowledge of harmony, orchestration (including instrument limitations),
and complicated vocabulary. Andrew was the only participant that did not dwell on notation, or even require it as part of his lessons that he designed for this study. The barrier of traditional notation as a prerequisite skill for students was also a popular topic of conversation for the other three participants throughout the study.

“They don’t need your theory textbook.” While participants were reflecting on their journey at the end of the study, they agreed that students have enough natural intuition to create something meaningful without the necessary prior knowledge of music theory, harmony, orchestration, or even notation. Gary stated, “They don’t need your theory textbook, [...] I think they have to have some type of background on their instrument. It does not have to be at a super advanced level. It can be at an entry level” [Final Interview].

Henry added, “I think maybe a lot of them had an instinctual ability to recognize what worked and what didn’t work on that basic level, you know what I mean?” He surprised himself by being able to design a lesson that covered a great deal of theory without having to teach the students all of the vocabulary and techniques. Andrew attributes student success to the experiences that they already arrive with: “You don’t necessarily have to have a lot of knowledge of composition in order to get kids started on it, because I think through their experience of playing music they already have a lot of knowledge.” Participants found that they were able to bypass the obstacle of students’ absence of prerequisite knowledge in the areas of harmony, theory, or vocabulary by watering down terminology to meet the students at their particular level of expertise. Gary describes a specific instance where vocabulary was simplified to meet his beginner students at their level of understanding:
We didn’t talk about phrasing. But we did talk about the continuity of line, without telling them that’s what I said. You know - I told them, “Maybe do not make big jumps, and big leaps between things a lot, but look for lines that kind of are smoother and more connected.” I used more general terms for them, instead of the music theory terms. [Session V]

At the beginning of the study, Andrew had already found extensive applications for ICA lessons for all varieties of instrumentation and experience levels. By the end of this study, the other three participants also believed that it would be possible to differentiate ICA lessons to meet any student’s skills or prior knowledge. Richard emphasized the need to do what is, “within their level.” Gary was assured that his lessons would have, “absolutely worked in other classes.” He gave examples of the differentiation he had in mind for the lessons he designed for his students such as asking advanced groups to notate more, or to add layers or length.

At the outset of the study, participants listed a variety of obstacles that possibly make ICA difficult to implement in large ensemble settings. One participant, Andrew, came into the study with previous experience implementing ICA, but still validated the obstacles perceived by the other participants through his own experiences. To that end, participants speculated that many of these obstacles not only influenced their reluctance to teach ICA in the past, but were likely shared by their colleagues in the field of music education. Throughout the duration of the study, participants realized that these obstacles were surmountable, starting with a commitment to, “making it happen.”

Teacher Attitude

“It’s a bit of a sales job.” All four participants in this study volunteered for this study, and therefore began the journey with a positive mindset toward ICA. Despite their fear or discomfort of the unknown that lay ahead of them, they were all willing to learn,
and willing to try something new. By participating in this study, they were seeking assistance to improve their own teaching practice. Throughout the discussions and interviews, participants made assertions and generalizations based on their perceptions of their colleagues in the field. They described a community that is extremely committed to extracurricular events, including a great number of performances. They also described a community that is ideologically committed to teaching the skills-based performance aspects of music, and that reserve CIA as, “other activities” that belong in jazz band or a music theory course. But possibly the most significant obstruction for ICA within the community of large ensemble directors is a perceived unwillingness to change teaching practices in favor of holding up traditional ideologies.

A commitment to, “making it happen.” Richard eloquently stated that overcoming a negative stance toward ICA may be a matter of self-reflection with the intention of benefiting all students. In Session I, Richard turned the conversation inward:

> It’s holding a mirror up to ourselves and going, “You know what? That is something we need to do.” It is a standard that we should not just relegate to jazz, we do need to actually add it in. And - Even if there isn’t literature that’s specifically written for it, we do need to figure out - how we can get those students to access it in other ways.

Adopting an overall mindset and commitment to, “making it happen” was shared by all participants. It became a mantra of sorts that permeated sessions and individual final interviews.

After participants had implemented their ICA lessons, they shared out their experiences with the collective group, and reflected on their journey. Under the guise of giving advice to those resistant to change in their final interviews, participants believed that sharing their stories and encouraging others to trust themselves and their students
could be sufficient. Henry believes it is important to reassure others that, “any teacher has the ability to do this […] it’s not as difficult to start as you think it is.” Andrew humorously suggests that even though, “nobody knows what they’re doing when it comes to [ICA], […] let the kids’ interest guide it.” Gary suggests that we re-orient our views and definitions of what, “composition” or, “improvisation” is, suggesting that we have monolithic expectations and definitions for those terms: “You think the word composition and you think, like, the Holst Suite, or you think a full, you know, a symphony, or you think a whole major work or something like that.” Gary is suggesting that asking students to compose the Holst Suite is unrealistic, but to carry out shorter, “bite-sized” tasks is very realistic for students.

The obstacle of teacher attitude may manifest itself negatively among music educators as being resistant to change and questioning whether ICA has a place in a large ensemble setting. Participants believed that, “holding a mirror to themselves” to validate their priorities, and trusting themselves (and their students) with a commitment to, “making it happen” was enough to overcome their perceived obstacle of teacher attitude. Furthermore, participants believed that their testimonies to others, reinforcing the possibilities and benefits they experienced, may be enough to convince others to follow the same path.

**Finding #3: Small Groups are Ideal for ICA**

Of the eight lessons presented by participants, six lessons utilized students working in small groups of four to six students (See Table 5.2). With some reservations, all participants believed that the dynamics of collaborative small group settings was a successful model for ICA lessons under certain conditions.
Who chooses groups?

For the dissemination of students into groups, Gary was the only participant to allow students to form their own groups. He believed that allowing the students to choose their own groups was, “key.” He elaborated: “They just picked whoever they wanted to work with and then it was fun because then they got to learn how those instruments work or ‘If I play this note, what does that sound like on yours?’ and stuff like that.” The other participants methodically selected the members of each small group with the intention of balancing what they perceived to be a mix of personality, experience, and talent.

Andrew received feedback from his students regarding their desire to choose their own groups. He believed that their reasoning was sound, but still preferred to choose his students’ groups:

There was a lot of reaction regarding who they were working with. I gave them a reflection afterward. […] One of the general comments was, “We think it might have been a lot different had we been able to choose our groups” for example, or, “If we had had a different selection of instruments that were in our group.”

[Session V]

Andrew’s reasoning for influencing group choice is twofold. He decides to do so for classroom management reasons, to manage student behavior by not grouping certain students together, thereby keeping the groups more, “productive and balanced,” but still likes to, “let friends go together” as long as they can stay productive. The other reason Andrew selects student groups is to balance students’ perceived talent ability. For a student who may not be as, “talented” as another, they can still learn from more advanced members of their group. Andrew stated of his less advanced students, “even watching somebody else do the work can be really informative.”
Henry also managed his students’ group selection for similar reasons. He described spreading out his, “alphas” to, “lead the charge” for each group. He described this method of group selection as, “a slippery slope […] because maybe these compositions are just being produced by one or two kids […] that’s the danger.” Richard also chose to select his students’ groups for them, in a similar manner to Henry and Andrew. Gary’s method of allowing students to self-select groups worked well for him. He did not find any significant behavioral issues, or students collectively not participating by being allowed to work with their friends. Both models worked well for each participant.

Table 5.2

*Participants’ Use of Small Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Henry #1</th>
<th>Henry #2</th>
<th>Richard #1</th>
<th>Richard #2</th>
<th>Andrew #1</th>
<th>Andrew #2</th>
<th>Gary #1</th>
<th>Gary #2</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students Created Individually</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Created in Small Groups</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collaborative Problem Solving**

Students were observed using a variety of problem-solving strategies on their own in the collaborative environment established by participants. Richard described his student groups interacting and problem-solving as a, “community thing.” Communal problem-solving through trial and error was a common observation among participants. Gary described his students’ collaborative process:

Obviously, a lot of experimenting like, “Let me play this,” or ”Let me get this lick or this idea and then how do I write that down?” Then they would write it down and they’d be like, “No, that's, that's not an F, it’s a B-Flat.” [Session V]
“Hey, what are you playing? Okay, then when you play that I’m going to play this. And then as we’re playing this then you’re going to play” […] “Okay, you're going to play that and you’re going to keep that going, […] you’re gonna do that four times and then […]” [Final Interview]

Oftentimes, students were not only sharing ideas with one another, but also supporting one another when one group member struggled. Andrew recalled one such instance: “They help each other like, ‘Hey, try playing this, make it simpler,’ or whatever the case is” [Session V]. There was no formal discussion within the OnPLC sessions as to which method for group selection was better, but each participant seemed to have their own preferred method that worked for them.

A Balance of Leadership and Democracy

Henry described the balance of students assuming roles as leaders or followers to be a, “slippery slope.” By intentionally spreading out, “the alphas,” a potential advantage may be the insurance of group productivity. However, considerations must be taken to avoid students being dominated, or not participating. Participants observed a mixture of group dynamics where students were either taking charge as leaders, or assuming the roles of followers. Andrew observed that some of his student leaders would naturally, “take charge,” which to him was, “reassuring to see them take it and run” [Session V].

Henry had described his method of group selection as a distribution of, “alphas” into separate groups whom he expected to, “take charge.” He found that even in a scenario with a predetermined, “alpha,” students were inclined to share responsibility more democratically than he had imagined. He shared his epiphany:

There was a lot of collaboration going on, more than I thought, I guess. I figured the way that I had my group set up that it would just be kinda like one or two guys running the show, and the rest of them [would be] taking a backseat. […] Some
students were kind of taking charge [...] but generally, it seems like when an idea was brought up, the entire group was kind of democratic about, “Yeah, that’s cool,” or “maybe,” “maybe not,” or, “maybe we could try something else.” [Session VI]

Gary observed that leaders did emerge naturally in each group, and that the, “better” groups worked more democratically in his opinion. In some cases where a leader took a domineering role in the group, and chose to do all of the work themselves, “the kids didn’t buy into it:”

There was a clear leader in every group, every group had that one kid who was, “I’m going to be the guy.” And then – and Then when they started struggling, then the other people would be like, “Well, no, we could do this, or let’s try this.” Honestly, the better groups were the ones that were all working collaboratively and working together; the groups that - were like, “Let me just go write something at home and bring it to you,” they weren’t overly successful because the kids didn’t buy into it. [Session V]

The Tensions Inherent in ICA Group Work

Participants all agreed that group work was beneficial to their students. However, participants also observed scenarios where group work may be a hindrance in ICA lessons. In the student-teacher feedback form that Henry administered to his students, some students indicated that, “working with people” was one of the most difficult parts of the activity for them.

In Session VI, Richard reported that despite the, “safety in numbers type of thing” some students were more reserved, and less willing to experiment because, “they’re thinking that other people are watching, or listening, […] or mak[ing] judgements.”

Richard’s lessons included a solitary element, where students could work alone and experiment before joining a group. He observed that certain students were more comfortable in the solitary experimentation because, “they didn’t have someone looking
over their shoulder, or reacting to what they were doing.” In Session VI, Henry connected Richard’s observations to his students’ feedback about group work being more difficult at times.

There was some conversation among participants in Sessions V and VI about the appropriateness of using groups to compose. Andrew described composition as, “solitary in nature,” and presented an argument that composition in groups may not be authentic to composition as a musical discipline. His argument was that professional composers work alone, and that group work is more appropriate for improvisatory-based exercises which implies interplay between musicians. Henry validated Andrew’s opinion, agreeing that true creative compositional freedom can best take place in solitary scenarios. Andrew and Henry expressed interests in developing future longer-term units for students to compose, but they still see the value of group work in scenarios that lend themselves to rehearsed improvisation where students’ creating time is limited.

Group work appeared in a majority of the ICA lessons that were implemented by the participants in this study. There was a divide amongst the participants as to how the groups were selected (student-selected or teacher-selected). Participants found that the collaborative nature of group work helped students to problem-solve together, and that a positive, democratic balance was observed overall among students. Some groups had taken on roles of leaders and followers, but even within those emergent student roles, democracy was observed with regards to participation and agency. There was some variability in the amount of dominance students took over others in certain group settings. The prevailing observation from all participants was that most students worked well while participating in collaborative group settings. However, some students found that
working in groups was difficult for them, and in some cases may have hindered their creative output. In the opinion of two participants, longer, more developed composition units may be more successful when students compose their own material.

**Finding #4: Carefully Designed Parameters are Key for Student Success**

Participants designed lessons where students were asked to work within a wide range of parameters. Lessons with high levels of student freedom were oriented toward minimum requirements in mind, while lessons with less student freedom were oriented toward establishing limits as parameters.

**Designing a Lesson with Success in Mind.**

Participants agreed that establishing clear parameters was important in designing successful lessons for their students. In Andrew’s opinion, a, “blank page – fill it up kind of thing” may be too intimidating for students to work with, especially for students who do not have extensive experience with ICA [Session V]. Participants designed parameters and limitations with student success in mind.

Parameters and limitations were important to all participants; however, participants developed lessons where students were asked to work within varying degrees of limits. Andrew, the most experienced with ICA, designed lessons with very few limitations, but rather established minimums as points of entry for students. The other participants designed lessons that were more restrictive with the intentions of streamlining options for student success. Gary described his second lesson as a, “just add water” approach. He gave the students a very specific framework where they could, “fill in the blanks.” Students were able to choose their role in their groups, and design their
individual contributions. Gary felt this was appropriate for his students who were beginners on their instruments:

The goal was really, you know, “Stay in the key of D major, stay in 4/4 time. Here’s your role, here’s your role, here is your role, and let’s put it together.” So, it was kind of like, “Just add water,” like, “Make this composition, but don’t think like you have to try to do everything. You only have to worry about this piece of the puzzle.” [Session VI]

In their first lessons, Richard and Henry also emphasized limitations as parameters. Both imposed limitations for note choice and the duration of the assignment. In Session V, Richard explained that students could only use notes of a pentatonic scale, and specifically stated, “I let them use octave transpositions […]. I also allowed them to use either 4/4, 3/4, or 6/8 as their time signature” [emphasis added]. Henry’s first lesson was also designed with a limitation of five notes.

For their first assignments, both Richard and Henry were fairly strict about only using five notes. Richard also had restrictions on rhythmic note values (whole, quarter, eighth and their corresponding rests). Richard describes:

The students, as they started doing it a little bit, asked, you know, “Can we use dotted rhythms and stuff like that?” I said, “As long as they fill up the entire bar, and we’re not leaving strange parts left uncompleted.” [Session V].

Students also asked if they could compose something longer than the 16-measure limit, he responded, “and actually, for this one, I said, ‘No you've got to have it end.’ So, um, I gave them that parameter as well” [Session V].

In his first improvisation lesson, Henry found that some of his advanced students wanted to venture outside the five-note limit and in his words, “fail:”

I’ve got a couple of kids that are in the jazz band … that are, obviously, more used to it or have been exposed to it, and so you know - they try to be cool and do something that’s a little bit more advanced but still within, hopefully, those five-note parameters. And I think what you actually hear is some of the jazz band kids
fail because they can’t keep it within the five-note parameter. They’re trying to do chromatic stuff, and I’m like, ‘Wait, you know - this is your, this is your limit.’” [Session V, emphasis added]

In their first lessons, students working within the established limits was very important to Henry and Richard. When students worked outside of the established parameters, even as an extension, it was perceived that they, “failed.” Another parameter that surfaced from Henry, Richard, and Gary was the requirement of hand-written notation. Their students were asked to write out their assignments on manuscript paper, and to turn them in. Some students had access to notation software, and chose to use that as a resource.

**Notation: “That’s Where These Guys Struggled a Bit.”**

The three participants requiring notation as part of their lessons seemed surprised at how difficult it was for their students to properly notate music. Gary acknowledged that, “playing the notes” was not the difficulty, but stated, “actually putting it on paper, that’s where those guys struggled a little bit” [Session V]. It was important for Gary that his students had, “the skill set to write correctly” and mentioned his surprise that note stems were on the wrong side of his students’ work. Henry also expressed similar surprise:

It’s interesting to see, these kids have been playing for few years now, six, seven years. And there will still - When they go to write it, it’s like a whole different ballgame, you know. There’s stems that are on the wrong side […]. Even though they see those notes, they see that stuff every day. [Session VI]

Andrew believes that notation can help the overall student product in the ICA process, but he did not make notation a requirement for students in the lessons he developed for this study. He believes that when students are putting notation down on paper, it helps them to collaboratively correct errors: “It tends to be a better product,
because they collaborate on, ‘Wait a minute, that's not the right number of beats,’ or ‘these need to line up’” [Session VI]. He acknowledges that if he were to ask his students for a, “higher level product” such as a formal composition that he would need to take the time to teach his students proper notation.

Henry’s second lesson included stricter notational parameters. Similar to Andrew, Henry believed that notation could help his students’ work. He observed that the endings of his students’ compositions tended to, “fall apart,” and suggested that, “the lack of notation maybe had a hindrance on how they ended – how they started the piece and how they especially how they ended the piece” [Final Interview].

As students struggled with traditional notation, participants found that students turned to, “sketches” that may not have been properly notated, but effective enough to use for the completion of their assignment: “I guess for those sketches, if a professional musician looked at it, or I guess anybody looked at it, they could - you could play it” [Henry, Session VI]. After his experience with his stricter first lesson, Richard specifically set up his second lesson to be, “sketch-based” and more open-ended in duration. Henry had conceded to his students’ solution to create sketches, recognizing that a, “rehearsed improvisation” met his criteria.

Andrew is much more open in his parameters concerning requirements for standard notation. He describes one of his student’s use of a sketch as merely a, “solution to her memory problem”:

You saw the one girl sketch it out on just notebook paper […]. And, for this particular assignment, I didn’t give them staff paper, I didn’t say they needed to write it down. I don’t even think I even said they could write it down, it was just – it was her solution to her memory problem was to write it down. [Session VI]
Gary asked his students to use full notation for both of his lessons, but was flexible in allowing students to turn in sketches instead. In his final interview, Gary reflected, “I think they could get rid of the notation. […] I think they can do it. I just haven’t, I haven’t tried that.” He still sees value in his students knowing the, “rules” of notation for ICA, but perhaps may not prescribe strict notational guidelines in the future: “There’s rules, but no rules - you learn the rules so you can break the rules” [Final Interview].

“I Didn’t Want to Put a Lot of Parameters on the Process”

Some participants approached parameters of their lessons with minimum requirements instead of establishing limitations. In these lessons, students could make their own determinations, and student products were more diverse. Outside of notation, Henry purposefully allowed for more student freedom in his second lesson: “I told them it had to be a minimum of 30 seconds. […] maybe put a cap at two minutes but I wasn’t really too worried about if the piece extended longer than that” [Session VI].

Andrew was more open in both of his lessons about the product length, he trusts his students’ instincts: “they get a sense of it if, whether it’s too long or not” [Session V]. After his improvisation circle lesson, Andrew described the level of student choice involved as an example of using minimum requirements instead of limits:

Go around the circle however many times you want. […] They just created the length themselves. […] I definitely had to give them a little bit more help with, “Hey, you should keep going around, so that it develops into something.” [Session V]

In this lesson, Andrew afforded his students with a great deal of freedom, and agency in their process:
They had to make a couple of determinations, one of which was, what key area are they going to be in, and parameters they could create for themselves, whether it was going to be, you know, a pentatonic scale, a major scale, a minor scale, a certain group of notes they wanted to limit themselves to. So, that was one of the choices they had to make. The second one was, how they were going to end it. And sort of, in this format, the typical way to end would be, they drop out one at a time, in the same order that they started. [Session V]

Similar to Andrew, Richard’s second lesson also allowed students freedom to design some of their own parameters. He recognized that in his second lesson, “they got to participate too, so it wasn’t just me setting out what the parameters were, but they actually got to add to it” [Final Interview]. He was impressed by his students’ ability to take a small amount of starting information and make it their own. He said of his minimalism lesson:

I didn’t give them the thing that they should stay within a certain number of motives away from each other. But they decided to do that on their own and it was like in their discussions, “we want to do it that way.” So, they did it that way. [Final Interview]

In his second lesson, Richard discovered that by leaving things more open, his students had surprisingly designed quality outcomes for his lesson in minimalism that he had not expected:

The way they started was completely different too than what I had thought they were just gonna […] just […] enter in after the-the repeated metronome note […] but they decided, “Okay. We’re gonna wait this many times.” […] I thought they were all going to answer at the same time. And then when they said, “No, we decided to do that.”

I was like, [humorously] “Oh. Oh, yeah. That’s good, that’s cool. I hadn’t thought of that. “More power to you.” You know, “that makes much more sense than just starting with cacophony.” So, you know, I was, “Okay, yeah, go for it, guys.” [Final Interview].

Participants universally believed that parameters were necessary for student success by eliminating the daunting prospect of starting with, “a blank slate.” Gary’s,
“just add water” approach worked well for him and his beginners, but the end result was that most of the students’ products sounded similar. The other three participants used a combination of minimums and limitations that managed to keep students focused and on task. Richard, Henry, and Gary all included written notation as a requirement. After seeing students’ struggle with standard notation, all three minimized the role that notation played as a requirement, and allowed the use of sketches instead. The second lessons of Richard and Henry featured more open-ended opportunities for students to design their own solutions without the imposition of more stringent limitations.

Finding #5: Educatice Assessment Strategies Encourage Student Engagement and Critical Thinking

Participants applied a variety of assessment strategies throughout each lesson. All participants used teacher monitoring, coaching, as well as a group discussion or, “de-brief” period as formative assessments. Unanimously, participants decided against summative evaluations.

“Hey, Does Anybody Need Any Help?”

Each lesson featured a creating period where students worked independently, or in groups. The class time used for this creating period ranged from 15 minutes to two hours. During this time, participants found it helpful to guide their students with advice, clarification, and reassurance. By monitoring and coaching their students during this period, participants were able to not only help struggling students, but to also more easily assess individual students’ understanding. The ICA activities introduced a new perspective, which revealed new information about student skills. Participants found that
coaching afforded their students with an opportunity for guided self-discovery. Gary believed that his presence, “bouncing from pod to pod,” was helpful to his students:

I would just go hang out with them for a couple of minutes, you know, “Hey, does anybody need any help? What are you guys working on?” You know, and just, I would ask them questions or listen to what they’re doing. [Final Interview]

As students got, “bogged down,” Richard found that students may have needed him to help them get started: “I was going around the room while they were doing it said, ‘You just got to start in a place. Pick a note. One of them, it doesn’t matter. Go up, go down. And then we’ll start from there’” [Session V]. Henry also found that he was able to give suggestions to his students during the creating period, and could give advice on which notes, “work” in certain scenarios. Gary found his role to be similar, and also sought to find teachable moments for his students:

They got worried. There was, you know, “Well, we can’t play an F and a G next to each other?” I said, “Why not? Maybe you go here, you know, and then you go to these notes” and then they could learn what works together and what’s not working together. [Session V]

Gary and Richard both described students with a great deal of anxiety and struggled with being “wrong.” They found that they were able to coach and console their struggling students throughout the creating period in small groups by offering suggestions and reassuring them, [laughing], “it’s going to be fine” [Richard, Final Interview].

“What Did You Like, What Didn’t You Like?”

Participants engaged their students in a discussion or “debrief” period following their students’ presentations. Many prompts for discussion included student reactions to the process as well as their impressions of the presentations. Andrew acknowledged the
importance of allowing students to speak and ask questions: “We can sometimes just talk too much instead of letting them hear music or letting them ask questions or discuss so I thought that was great” [Session VI]. Most questions in the discussion sessions were teacher-led and included prompts such as: *What did you like? What didn’t you like? What went well? What didn’t go well?* Some participants engaged their students in peer-to-peer discussion, where students could ask one another questions and make comments on the presentations from their peers. Henry was able to go a little deeper and asked follow-up questions such as: *Why did you think that?*

Andrew and Henry allowed their students an opportunity to give written feedback to their teachers. Written feedback enabled participants to gather individual responses, which may not occur in a group discussion. The written feedback served as a reflective learning tool for Andrew, and wished that he had done a similar follow-up lesson designed with student feedback in mind. He saw this as a missed opportunity, but he found that his students’ feedback was still helpful in designing his second lesson which was very different in nature.

Henry used a digital survey form to poll students’ overall interest in the assignment, and to elaborate on their personal experiences in the process. He was able to ascertain how his students, “felt” about the assignment. Specifically, he was able to gain a student perspective on, “what some of their limitations were, and what some of the things that they enjoyed […] and were happy with” [Final Interview]. Henry’s electronic survey for his students contained the following items:

- *What was the inspiration for your piece?*
- *Did you enjoy the composition process?*
- *Are you satisfied with the end result?*
- *What was the hardest part of the process?*
• What did you like best about the piece?
• What would you do differently next time?
• Are you interested in doing more composing as part of the band curriculum?
• Have you ever composed music on your own?
• Do you think learning composition is an important part of studying music as a whole?

Participants utilized three different modes of formative assessments at the conclusion of their lessons: (a) teacher-led discussion, (b) student-led discussion, and (c) written feedback. Table 5.3 shows the combinations of discussion and methods of feedback that were utilized by each participant.

Table 5.3

Participants’ Use of Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Henry #1</th>
<th>Richard #1</th>
<th>Andrew #1</th>
<th>Gary #1</th>
<th>Henry #2</th>
<th>Richard #2</th>
<th>Andrew #2</th>
<th>Gary #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proximity and Coaching</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Group discussion (teacher-led)</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual student-to-teacher written feedback</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grading Student Work: “You Did it, or You Didn’t”

Participants decided not to assign grades to their students, but, rather, gave them credit for participation. Participation is part of their overall grading system, and their students have come to expect this as part of the grading culture. In some cases, even though letter grades were not given for quality of work, Gary, Richard, and Henry asked
that their students still submit something as evidence of student work. Gary elaborated on his, “you did it, or you didn’t” grading philosophy:

I didn’t do anything about quality of work. They really just got graded on, you know, preparing something and presenting it and how they work with one another. It was not about, “did it sound good?” and stuff like that. We tried to make it as friendly and as fun as possible so that they didn't feel threatened.

[Session V]

Participants believe that creative work such as ICA should not be evaluated with letter grades. Gary recognizes the stress that students carry from their other courses, and does not want his students to bring those concerns into a music class: “I don’t think holding a grade [over them]… benefits me at all” [Final Interview]. Andrew says he, “does a lot of participation grades,” and that he would need to design a clear rubric for his students for feedback purposes. Andrew elaborates: “I just hate, you know, ‘A,’ and then no feedback. I feel like the grade is to reflect they've done some work and met whatever standard [it] is that you’re asking them for” [Final Interview]. Andrew is interested in doing a longer unit, where he might include graded assignments for objective areas such as music theory, but not for ICA which he views as too subjective in nature to evaluate.

Richard was very animated while talking about grading for ICA, he sees the tension in critiquing subjective work such as ICA to label what is, “good” or, “bad.” Keeping in mind that he was cultivating a safe space he argues, “to subjectively say, ‘your composition was not as good as somebody else’s,’ I felt like I didn’t want to do” [Final Interview].

Participants also gained an awareness of their students’ views on grades for ICA. Andrew believes that his students “don’t seem to be motivated by the grade [with] these activities” [Final Interview]. Henry specifically asked his students whether or not the
absence of grades affected their motivation and quality of work. The majority of his students indicated that the absence of a grade did not affect their effort and motivation to produce a well thought out composition. However, one of his students responded that they did not put forth as much effort on the assignment because they were not receiving a grade. In Henry’s words, his students felt that, “it just freed [them] up to be a little bit more creative now that I didn’t have a grade hanging over my head” [Session VI].

Richard, Henry, and Gary all required students to turn in a written product from their students to receive participation credit for their overall course grade. Andrew, by contrast did not ask his students to submit anything physical such as notation or a sketch. All participants awarded their students with a participation grade for completing the lesson. Henry did not require his students to submit anything in writing for his first lesson. Table 5.4 shows the student evidence collected by each participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Henry #1</th>
<th>Henry #2</th>
<th>Richard #1</th>
<th>Richard #2</th>
<th>Andrew #1</th>
<th>Andrew #2</th>
<th>Gary #1</th>
<th>Gary #2</th>
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<td>Written notation – Fully notated</td>
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<td>Written notation - Sketch</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Participants all made themselves available to students during the creating period to coach struggling students, providing them comfort and motivation. They offered valuable information to students that included suggestions, affirmations, and/or clarifications. At the conclusion of student presentations, group discussions took place where students could receive feedback from their teacher and/or other peers. In some
instances, participants allowed students to give their teacher written individual feedback. Most participants required students to turn in some sort of written product to receive credit for their participation in the assignment. However, none of the participants believed it was appropriate to evaluate the quality of their students’ creative products through a summative assessment or a letter grade.

**Finding #6: Participants Enjoyed Personal Success and Satisfaction with their ICA Lessons**

Despite various levels of comfort and previous experience, all participants believed they achieved success after they each implemented two ICA lessons in their large ensemble settings. Participants’ measures of success were determined by their anecdotal stories of positive student experiences, as well as their overall expectations being met. Success was further determined by participants’ perceptions that their students were able to meet the three anchor standards for the artistic process of Creating found in the NCMS.

*“Can We do This Again?”*

While reflecting upon the lessons they presented throughout the study, participants often described their experiences with smiles on their faces. All participants were not only satisfied with the lessons they created, but also expressed excitement, recalling the reactions and responses from their students. Henry believes his students experienced their own personal victories, and enjoyed the process:

> At the end of the day, I did ask them, “Did you enjoy it?” I got a big, “yeah.” […] I thought they made the compositions a lot more personal than I originally had thought that they would. And that’s probably what surprised me the most. [Final Interview]
Andrew observed his students’ genuine excitement at the end of his first lesson as they discussed revisions they would have liked to make in a follow-up scenario. They wanted to keep working on the assignment. He proclaimed: “I’m definitely excited to keep working it and see how it develops” [Session V]. He had the impression that his students wanted to expand on his improvisation lesson and do a, “more formalized […] compositional activity, versus an improvisational activity” [Session V]. Gary recalled a shift in his students’ opinions on participating in ICA. He comically described his students’ initial reactions to his lesson as, “a joke” they did not take it seriously. As the lesson continued, they were asking him, “can we do this again?” [Final Interview].

Students seemed to not only enjoy the lessons, but also surprised themselves in the process. Henry recalled that, “a lot of them were able to do it at a higher level than they had anticipated. […] A lot of them were pleasantly surprised” [Final Interview]. Andrew observed that his students were not only surprised with their own achievement, but that they, “showed their surprise and everybody else’s [work] sort of like, ‘wow that sounded really good!’” [Final Interview]. Anecdotally, participants also discovered that some students had taken to the lessons with more enthusiasm than others.

**Meeting Expectations and the Standards**

All participants indicated that their overall expectations were met after delivering their ICA lessons. Gary stated: “I think my [expectations] were met because we try to keep it very simple” [Final Interview]. Richard does not know if his students’ expectations were met because they did not know what was going to happen, and, “they were trying to figure it out as they were going along” [Session VI].
Henry and Gary indicated that some of their students may have struggled with the messiness of ICA. Three participants indicated that their students were possibly suffering from a bit of insecurity by not having the time to make the presentation of their final product more polished. Richard described certain students becoming “frustrated” because “they want it to be perfect,” and that “they don’t know how to sift through their ideas yet” [Final Interview]. Henry affectionately referred to his students as overachievers, and therefore he did not think that all of them met their own expectations. They wanted more time to work, to better fine-tune their creative products. Gary’s students had a similar experience, and he explained to them the difference between the hours and weeks of performance preparation, and their 20-minute ICA lesson:

I think if we’re saying they met their goal, I think they probably didn’t. Where I was more than fine with what they put together. [...] We said, “how much time did we put on the field show stuff? Okay, we put this together in an ounce of that time.” So, you know, and then once they understood that they were like, “Oh, I get it.” [Final Interview]

Andrew, by contrast, did not report any issues where students were insecure about their creative products. At the conclusion of the study, all participants indicated a belief that their students met the National Core Music Standards within a range of Novice to Intermediate for each of the three anchor standards for the artistic process of Creating (See Tables 5.5, 5.6, 5.7).

In spite of their differences in teaching settings and experience with ICA, all participants completed the study with a perception that their lessons had outcomes of success for their students as well as for themselves as educators. Participants indicated that their expectations were met, and that students (with some exceptions) either met or exceeded their own personal expectations after experiencing in ICA in their large
ensemble setting. Participants also unanimously shared a perception that their students met the NCMS for the artistic process of Creating.

Table 5.5

*Fulfillment of Anchor Standard #1 as Perceived by Teachers:*
Generate musical ideas for various purposes and contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Novice</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
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<td>Richard</td>
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Table 5.6

*Fulfillment of Anchor Standard #2 as Perceived by Teachers:*
Select and develop musical ideas for defined purposes and contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Novice</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
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<td>Richard</td>
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<td>Andrew</td>
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<td>Gary</td>
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Table 5.7

*Fulfillment of Anchor Standard #3 as Perceived by Teachers:*
Evaluate and refine selected musical ideas to create musical work that meets appropriate criteria. Share creative musical work that conveys intent, demonstrates craftsmanship, and exhibits originality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Novice</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Accomplished</th>
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<td>Gary</td>
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Chapter Summary

In this chapter, six findings were presented that were representative of participants’ collective experiences during and after the study. As four participants designed and delivered two lessons using improvisation, composition, and arranging, they grappled with and surmounted a multitude of issues. Participants desired to design lessons that contained relevance to the literature they were studying, could be carried out in a relatively short amount of time, and were meaningful experiences beyond, “one-off” exercises. Pogonowski’s 7-step creative music strategy was a popular choice among participants as a framework that was versatile enough to meet their desired criteria for ICA lessons. Participants encountered four major obstacles in their approach and delivery of their two lessons. The obstacles of time, student apprehension, teacher insecurity and teacher attitude were all managed successfully by all four participants. Obstacles were not entirely eradicated from participants’ teaching settings, but instead minimally affected participants and their students.

Participants found that small group work was ideal for students working with ICA for a variety of reasons, most notably for peer to peer support. Participants described different methods and rationales for how they formed student groups. A tension among participants’ ideals exists between when and how to utilize small groups for composing versus the authenticity of composing individually. Although all participants agreed that group work was ideal for shorter lessons that were more improvisatory in nature such as the creative music strategy.

For lessons involving improvisation, composition, and arranging, participants found that establishing clear parameters was integral to ensuring student success. Giving
students a blank slate may be too daunting, and may fail to focus students’ efforts productively. At first, three participants resorted to stricter parameters which bound students to a restricted menu of options such as note choices, rhythmic choices, or composition length. The same three participants were able to set up parameters with more student freedom in mind by giving students minimum requirements to work from as a starting point. Approaching parameters from a stance of establishing minimums (as opposed to limits) increased student freedom, and yielded more diverse student products.

Formative assessment was widely used by all participants. During the creation period, where students were working on their own, participants all tended to take on the role of coaching where they would move between groups to provide assurance and expertise. To encourage students’ critical thinking, participants all engaged their students in discussions as follow-up activities to their lessons. Some participants also administered short surveys for their students to provide them with individual written feedback. All participants agreed that grading their students for participation was ideal for them, as they did not assign letter grades or administer evaluative assessments.

Finally, all participants believed that their experience was successful. They stated that their expectations were met, and that many of them were pleasantly surprised at the student outcomes they observed. All participants also described a general positive sentiment of student success from their students’ comments and behavior following their lessons. However, participants also described that some students were not satisfied with their final products due to the unpolished nature of the rushed presentation. In these cases, students are accustomed to weeks (and sometimes months) of performance preparation, creating and presenting a musical piece after only one to two days’ time was
difficult for them. All participants believed that their students met the three anchor standards for the artistic process of Creating, as found in the National Core Music Standards.
Chapter VI
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to work with a cohort of high school large ensemble directors to explore the extent to which teachers were able to design and deliver a holistic music curriculum to their students in a large ensemble setting. This study further investigated possible indications of their evolved perceptions and attitudes toward the role of creative processes in their curriculum such as improvisation, composition, and improvisation; and whether/how they evolve during and after their participation in a PLC.

Four participants were selected to take part in a 16-week Online Professional Learning Community (OnPLC) with the goal of implementing improvisation, composition, and/or arranging (ICA) into their large ensemble settings. Six significant findings emerged from the collected data to address three research questions: (a) the creative music strategy met participants’ criteria for practical lessons, (b) participants were able to identify and overcome four significant obstacles (time, student apprehension, teacher insecurity, and teacher attitude), (c) small groups are ideal for ICA, (d) carefully designed parameters are key for students’ success, (e) educative assessment strategies encourage student engagement and critical thinking, and (f) participants enjoyed personal success and satisfaction with their ICA lessons. In this chapter I will show relationships between the research findings and relevant literature.
Creating Solutions: Overcoming Obstacles

Where There’s a Will, Create a Way - The Obstacle of, “Us”

Possibly the most significant obstacle described by participants was teacher attitude. All participants described sharing their experiences with ICA as, “convincing others,” or a, “sales job.” Participants’ perception of their peers in the community of high school large ensemble directors in Southern California is that many of them are resistant to change. Furthermore, they would need to be, “sold” on ICA as not only possible, but worthwhile. The participants in this study were volunteers, and therefore were more open to exploring ways in which ICA could exist in their large ensemble pedagogy. For those reasons, teacher attitude was not a significant obstacle for the individual participants in this study.

All participants had the same resounding message: If band directors want to make it happen, they can do it. Over all of the obstacles that were discussed, the willingness to, “make it happen” may be the most important obstacle for directors to overcome. At first, three participants were apprehensive and almost fearful of ICA as it was unknown (or undiscovered) territory in their teaching practices. The obstacles of time, student apprehension, and teacher insecurity were non-issues.

Participants unanimously expressed a message that anyone can do this, and that anyone’s students can do this, and that, “it is not as hard as you think.” Menard (2015) suggests that teachers will feel successful teaching composition just by, “doing it.” The participants in this study shared the same experience. Perhaps overcoming this ideology of ICA as impossible or invaluable is merely a matter of confronting one’s fears or insecurities directly, and just, “making it happen.”
The Role and Presence of ICA in the Large Ensemble Curriculum

In Session I of the OnPLC, participants discussed the appropriateness of ICA, possibly suggesting that it does not fit in the large ensemble setting (Kokotsaki, 2012; Kokotsaki, 2015; Strand, 2006). Participants cited that it is more common for them to use ICA in other teaching settings such as jazz, or music theory (Buonviri, 2003; Kokotsaki, 2011; Snell & Azzara, 2015). The lack of repertoire available that requires students to call upon the skills of ICA possibly makes it irrelevant in a performance-centric curriculum (Strand 2006, Kokotsaki, 2012, Stringham, 2010). Additionally, participants indicated that in the rare instances they used improvisation in their large ensemble settings in a warm up context, usually taking the form of a call-and-response activity. Norgaard (2017) suggested that this may be a very practical (and obvious) method for music educators to include improvisation in their large ensemble settings.

As music educators in Southern California, the participants’ previous experience with improvisation, composition, and arranging aligned with the current research findings available in the literature. Participants believed that ICA was an important element in the overall music education of their students, but did struggle with its implementation in their teaching practices (Cooper 2005; Norgaard, 2017; Norris 2010; Vitale 2017). With the exception of one participant (Andrew), the others all reported that they rarely (if ever) included ICA in their teaching practices. The aforementioned literature addresses the perceived attitudes of music education as a whole, at all levels. LaCognata’s (2009) study focused on high school large ensemble directors, and reported that most high school large ensemble directors do not include ICA in their large ensemble settings because they do not feel that it is important enough in the large ensemble setting, which is contradictory to
the opinions expressed by the participants in this study. This suggests that the participants in this study may not represent the *status quo* in the greater community of high school large ensemble directors.

**The Power of Collaboration for Creating**

Participants’ advice to other high school large ensemble directors was to have trust in themselves, to have trust in their students, and to, “just do it,” or, “make it happen.” Participants also found that outside collaboration of some sort is advisable for band directors struggling with incorporating ICA. Conway (2008) described, “informal” interactions as professional development are the most valuable ones that music educators can have. In his final interview, Richard described a sense of isolation he felt, and how the OnPLC helped to support him. Many researchers have reported the effectiveness of PLCs for music educators as a practical professional development solution for music educators who feel they are in isolation (Battersby & Verdi, 2016; Conway, 2016; Jackman, 2017, Stanley, 2011; Verdi, 2016).

Andrew and Henry particularly recognized gains in their own development by watching video of other participants teaching. They mentioned how valuable video can be as a collaborative tool for others to improve teaching (Stanley, 2011). All four participants also alluded to the advantage of borrowing ideas from one another, adding to their, “bag of tools.” All participants described the benefit that the OnPLC gave them, not only as a support system, but to see other models at work. All participants described the potential power of simply showing other band directors *how* it works, and *that* it works. For them, seeing finished student products, viewing others teach, or even hearing a testimony of their peers’ own experiences was extremely impactful.
Participants indicated in Session I of the OnPLC that they believed that the preparation time to develop ICA lessons may have been an obstacle in their past teaching practices. While participants discussed the overwhelming extracurricular commitments and responsibilities that infringed on their time, none of them actually mentioned a deficit of available class time to dedicate toward ICA. Strand (2006) reported that one of the major obstacles faced by band directors and their implementation of composition was not available class time but rather competing course goals, which implies an issue of prioritization, similar to LaCognata’s (2009) findings. Andrew shared his impression that his colleagues have, “too many details to perfect, so [they] would never compromise [their] time” [Final Interview]. Participants reported that they were always able to find, “pockets of time” if they were so inclined to look. All participants reported that it was easier than they would have originally believed to find the time to not only plan these lessons, but to implement them in their classes. In particular, Gary and Andrew described a common scenario that they experienced where they reach a point of diminishing returns in their rehearsals: “the clarinet run will only be so good.” Participants discovered that the necessary class time was always there for ICA, they just had to look for it.

At first, a severe lack of training in ICA, or relevant models of ICA to replicate, was an overwhelming sentiment among participants. Participants’ reported concerns were consistent with the obstacles reported in the current literature. Pre-service teacher training is not providing adequate resources for ICA in large ensemble settings, and there are no widely known functional models of how ICA functions in large ensemble settings (Azzara, 1999; Kokotsaki, 2011; Menard, 2015; Strand, 2006; Vitale, 2017). Additionally, participants described a shared sense of intimidation toward ICA in Session
I of the OnPLC. Some did not possess what they perceived to be a high level of knowledge of improvisation since they did not come from a background in jazz performance in their university training; or possess what they perceive to be a high level of knowledge of compositional techniques since they did not hail from a background of composition beyond their required music theory courses in their undergraduate training (Buonviri, 2003; Kokotsaki, 2011; Snell & Azzara, 2015).

After viewing some models of ICA lesson plans, and the creative student products, participants re-defined what knowledge they needed to hold in order to design and deliver ICA lessons. Consequently, participants discovered that the necessary tools for teaching ICA were always there within themselves. To their own surprise, participants were able to rely on their own teaching experience and training to successfully facilitate an ICA lesson.

De-Mystifying the Grandeur of Creating

Gary admitted that when he first thought of composition, he associated it as a process that would lead to, “the Holst Suite” or, “a whole symphony.” Henry described composers as musicians he, “espoused to” because of a perceived super-musical talent. If these are the common associations with composition, it is no wonder that most band directors would see composition as an impossible feat to add into a performance-based ensemble setting. A more approachable view of a creative product is simply: evidence that a process of creativity has taken place (Coleman 2015; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015; Okida, 2015; Sawyer, 2015; Webster, 2016). At the outset of the study, participants generated a daunting list of skills and knowledge that they believed that students must possess to be successful composers such as theory, harmony, and orchestration. This
impression shared by participants can be attributed to the romanticizing of composition and improvisation as something that only the best, and, “most creative” musicians are capable (Coleman, 2015). This notion may naturally lead music educators to view ICA as out-of-bounds for many of their students, and therefore educators may only indulge an elite few who show interest in ICA (Hickey, 2012). This was also the case among participants in their previous encounters with ICA prior to the study. All participants indicated that they experienced isolated cases where their students volunteered to compose or arrange something for their peers. Or, that they had extremely talented improvisors in their jazz bands that were utilized to coach their peers during call and response warmups.

Toward the end of the study, many participants indicated that some of their students surprised them based on previous assumptions they had held of students’ musical ability. Students whom participants may not have assumed would be good improvisors or composers demonstrated that they had an affinity for ICA. Participants also discussed anecdotally that some students surprised themselves, they had no idea that they could be, “good” at ICA. This may challenge educators to consider how many students have gone through their programs without even knowing they had a talent for ICA.

Participants indicated in Session I that the highest levels of improvisation happening in their programs occurred in jazz settings for improvised solos. Coleman’s (2015) definition of improvisation as, “creativity in its immediate application” (p. 3), and Azzara’s (1991) applications of audiation to music as a language suggests that improvisation is not limited to soloing in a jazz setting. But rather, that improvisation
includes the playful, “noodling” that students may naturally do in the first moments they assemble their instruments, or the process of students experimenting to learn the melodies of their favorite popular music. Similar to changes their viewpoints on what it means to compose, participants had to re-orient their view of what improvisation is. When one considers improvisation to be more than just soloing in a jazz context, more possibilities emerge as to how one may teach improvisation.

After engaging with ICA lessons, participants expressed that, “anyone can do this,” and that, “it is possible.” Participants reported that sufficient teaching knowledge for composition and improvisation was always there within them; they just had to re-define their expectations and challenge their assumptions of the possibilities inherent in process and products.

Creating With Technology

Strand’s (2006) findings indicated that a lack of access to technology was a significant obstacle many music educators faced while designing lessons in composition. This issue of access to technology referenced computer lab settings with keyboards and notation software for composing. Since Strand’s study, access to musical notation software has grown exponentially. At the time of this study, participants found that pencil and paper was adequate for their lessons, while some students chose to use the technology available to them (such as notation software). Other similar studies exploring collaborative student compositions did not require the use of technology for success (Burland & Davidson, 2001; Hopkins, 2015; Kastner, 2014).

Richard and Gary both expressed interest in expanding their future lessons to include a technological component using notation software. Henry expressed interest in
expanding future lessons using digital keyboards as Strand’s study described. All participants in this study each enjoyed the affordance of a 1:1 teaching setting with technology, where each student is given a device such as a small laptop or tablet for educational purposes. For educators such as Richard, Gary, and Henry, who were preoccupied with the semantics of hand-written notation, and taking time to teach students, “which side of the note the stem goes on,” access to notation software may be a time-saving solution. They observed students who were capable of successfully navigating the notation software for the purpose of completing the ICA lessons they were a part of. A range of technology was available to the participants’ students in this study; however, access to technology did not play a role in the lessons developed in this study.

**A Safe Environment for Creating**

If one is, “creative,” they typically embody the following: (a) messiness, (b) spontaneity, (c) non-conformity, (d) risk-taking, (e) tolerance of ambiguity, (f) willingness to fail, (g) ability to overcome a fear of failure, and affinity for questionposing (Bailin, 2015; Sawyer, 2015; Webster, 2016). Two of the major concerns shared by participants in this study were students’ ability to handle ICA lessons from an interest/maturity standpoint, and also from the standpoint of their own ability to deal with their insecurity. Of the preceding list, participants did not believe in their students’ abilities to be risk-takers, tolerant of ambiguity, willing to fail, or to overcome their fear of failure at first.

After delivering their ICA lessons, participants seemed surprised to find that most of their students (with some exceptions) exemplified all of the above traits that were assumed at first to be deficiencies. There were some isolated incidents were students
were afraid to fail, or were intolerant of the ambiguous nature of being asked to engage in ICA, which is extremely unfamiliar to them. The safe environment established by each participant naturally managed student insecurity without a great deal of extra effort. Weidner (2005) attributes this to a regularly occurring safe environment that exists in most high school large ensemble settings which is a combination of a, “musical space, a social space, and an extramusical space” (p. 77).

The importance of establishing a safe environment was discussed at length among participants throughout the study. Participants recognized the courage that it takes for students to be, “creative.” Participants also honored an observed culture among their students, where they perceive their students to be afraid of making mistakes. Being, “creative” asks students to not only be risk-takers in front of their peers, but also encourages them to make mistakes during the process, and to be accepting of those eventualities. Therefore, a safe environment is critical to student success with ICA lessons (Hickey, 2012; Pogonowski, 1989; Weidner, 2015).

Participants believed that their students were able to successfully navigate these challenges themselves, and with the assistance of their teacher-as-coach throughout the lesson. Establishing a classroom culture of risk-taking, making mistakes, and inquiry was important for the participants. Designing lessons with structure and parameters were also contributors to a safe environment for ICA (Hickey, 2012). A well-organized lesson with boundaries is also essential in managing student anxiety (Hickey, 2012).

Participants also believed that their rapport with their students which had been established over time allowed them to be successful. Building a healthy rapport with students is widely recognized as a part of effective teaching (Battisti, 2007; Bauer, 2001;
Strouse, 2003; Weidner, 2015). A positive peer-to-peer rapport may have also played a role in the perceived success of participants’ collaborative lessons (Burland & Davidson, 2001; Hopkins, 2015; MacDonald, Miell, & Morgan, 2000; Weidner, 2015).

At some point, all participants described how they used humor to bring levity to stressful or intimidating situations. For the students that exhibited reluctance in participating in ICA, participants describe their overall experience as a victory in overcoming their insecurities simply by finishing the task.

Hickey (2012) and Snell and Azzara (2015) recommend that multiple encounters with ICA lessons may also help to weather student insecurity over time. Participants indicated a desire to implement ICA lessons multiple times throughout an academic year, so that students might better acclimate to them. They believed that with time, students would be less inhibited or reluctant to participate (Cooper, 2005; Norgaard, 2017; Snell & Azzara 2015). Participants agreed, expressing a desire to implement these lessons multiple times, with a belief that the students would acclimate to ICA lessons easily over time.

Participants were fearful of students’ ability to engage in ICA lessons at the beginning of the study, and consequently were sensitive to their students’ emotional needs by developing a safe classroom environment for them to work within. Participants did not need to change anything about their personalities as teachers, but rather relied on their already established rapport and classroom environments to make their students feel successful.

Participants were also genuinely surprised at how their students thrived (with few exceptions) as risk-takers, overcoming fear of failure, being willing to fail, and being
tolerant of ambiguity. Many participants described students who were fearlessly invested, and enjoyed the messiness of ICA as a stark contrast to regular rehearsal environments.

Many students were observed putting forth effort that was described as, “above and beyond.” With regard to how Bailin (2015), Webster (2016), and Sawyer (2015) describe, “creative people,” participants’ students were more closely aligned as, “creative people” than they had originally anticipated.

Summary: Creating Solutions

The findings of this study yielded four obstacles experienced by the participants throughout the study. The obstacle of, “us” (teacher attitude) is possibly the most important to overcome. Essentially, the external obstacles and problems perceived by participants were never really present to a debilitating degree. While isolated incidents arose, participants did not find any obstacles prevented them from carrying out successful lessons in ICA. Keeping in mind participants in this study had at least five years of teaching experience, they were able to rely on their experience to overcome many obstacles.

Collaboration and minimal training from an outside expert was important to these veteran teachers, but can be possibly even more important to newer teachers to the profession. Participants found natural, intuitive ways of navigating through (or around) the external obstacles by either re-defining the problem, or by discovering that their willingness to succeed was enough. They had come to the study with all of the tools they needed. Re-defining the problem was a result of collaboration. By seeing possibilities beyond their assumptions, participants were able to design solutions quickly and efficiently. Participants believed that replicating the highlights of their OnPLC
experience could help, “sell” others on ICA, and help them to succeed at implementing ICA into their curriculums. The participants in this study might say that it starts with the desire to, “make it happen,” and a leap of faith to trust yourself and your students.

The issue of a lack of technological resources arose in a study by Strand (2006), participants did not view this as a significant obstacle in this study. However, some participants indicated a desire to take advantage of the technological resources available to them for future lessons.

Participants believed that their teaching settings already exemplified a safe environment with a built-in sense of trust, rapport, and risk-taking. Additionally, participants were able to challenge their assumptions, and redefine what a creative product is. Therefore, they were able to see more obvious possibilities in front of them that were not in view previously. While the OnPLC was a significant factor as a support system, participants did not require any drastic additional training or counter measures to overcome obstacles for them (or their students) to feel successful at implementing ICA lessons in their large ensemble settings.

**Creating More Openness Through Experience**

**Navigating an Ideology of High School Band**

In large ensemble settings, traditionalism may be described as the emphasis placed on utilitarian performance goals, where educational goals are primarily skills-based and product-based (Allsup, 2016; LaCognata, 2009; Menard, 2015; Norris, 2010; Strand, 2006). This culture of traditionalism favors a master-apprentice dynamic of education (teacher-centered), and encourages student behaviors such as obedience, timeliness, and conformity (Allsup & Benedict, 2008). Sawyer (2015) describes these
settings as, “instructionalist” where knowledge is bound by authority. Creativity, the act of creating, thrives in, “boundaryless” spaces which are supported by learner-centered structures (Bailin, 2015; Custodero, 2015; Webster, 2016). Whitmore’s (2017) findings point to an ideology of instructionism as a baseline of practice in Southern California band programs.

As a culture, high school band in Southern California could be viewed as an instructionalist culture. In this culture, teachers would naturally emphasize conformity and limits for their students as they prepare for adjudicated events where they are given a score or a rating as a reflection on how effectively they executed performance skills. Preparing for adjudicated performances in this manner could easily become the norm for teachers and students, alike (Allsup & Benedict, 2008; Heuser, 2015). Three of the participants direct programs that are fairly competitive and participate in adjudicated events.

Of the four participants, Andrew was the only one who did not participate in adjudicated performances with his marching band or large ensembles. Andrew was also the only participant that did not participate in a high school band program when he was a student, therefore his high school music experience was much different when compared the high school experiences of Gary, Richard, or Henry. Andrew did not design his program on a previous model of what he perceived high school band ideology to be in Southern California. Instead, he created a program based on his own musical ideals and values. Andrew was also the only participant that expressed that he had tried to infuse ICA into his program as much as possible over the years. He felt isolated in his ideals,
and invented his own strategies without any formalized training, hence his interest in this study.

When compared to the other three participants, Andrew’s lessons were the most open-ended in terms of parameters. He never assigned limits within which students were required to work, but instead asked students to work from minimum requirements. Andrew allowed for the most student choice, and had the most trust in his students as evidenced by the open-endedness of his parameters. It is also possible that his trust in himself and his students, as evidenced by his open-endedness is related to his experience of implementing ICA lessons over time. In relation to the other three participants, Andrew had a significant head start with ICA. This may suggest that high school students who are products of these competitive and performance-driven programs are indoctrinated into this ideology early, thereby creating a self-perpetuating cycle.

**A Liminal Space for Creating**

Paradoxically, creative endeavors require parameters. Designing lessons that are too open can be overwhelming when considering infinite possibilities, and designing lessons that are too closed can greatly limit the possibilities of creative outcomes (Hickey, 2012). Giving students a blank slate may be too daunting for students engaging in ICA, therefore it is recommended that lesson design should include scaffolds to better guide student work (Hickey, 2012; Jones, 2015; Kastner, 2014; Sawyer, 2015). Andrew managed to design more open lessons that had parameters based on minimum requirements. Richard, Gary, and Henry all began by designing lessons that strictly limited the musical materials available to students. For example, *only use five notes*, *only use eight measures*, etc. In their first lessons which were more restrictive in nature, Henry
and Richard both observed that they had some advanced students try to work outside the
given limits. When an advanced student worked outside of a 5-note limit in an
improvised solo, Henry specifically described this as, “failure” because they didn’t
follow the rules. At the conclusion of Session V, as the facilitator, I had challenged all
participants to trust in their students more, and to attempt to design a lesson that was
more open, with fewer limits.

A change in approach was evident for Richard and Henry between their first and
second lessons. Henry’s second lesson was a *creative music strategy* that was extremely
open-ended. His first lesson, by contrast, limited students to only using five notes in four
measures of improvisation. Henry showed the most drastic growth in openness between
his first and second lessons. Richard’s first lesson featured limits of only using five notes
and sixteen measures to compose within. His second lesson, by contrast was more open-
ended in length, and had no limitation on the notes used (other than his encouragement to
stay in a certain key). Richard also demonstrated a great deal of growth between his first
and second lessons. He was much more receptive to student input, he described being
surprised (and impressed) at how students were able to find unique solutions to the lesson
that he had not foreseen. His students were not only effective problem-solvers, but
effective problem-finders.

Gary’s lessons were both similar and allowed for student flexibility. Of the four
participants, Gary is arguably the most indoctrinated in the ideology of high school band
in Southern California. He attended a notoriously competitive high school, which was
known for its successful competitive marching band. He currently directs a very active
program in various competitive areas (marching band, winter drum line, color guard, jazz
band), and keeps a very active calendar of adjudicated events. Yet, Gary instinctually designed one very open-ended lesson for his advanced students. His second lesson, was arguably somewhere in the middle. The parameters yielded musical products that were similar, yet his beginning students were able to personalize them. He knew his students best, but perhaps he may have been surprised with the students’ results if he opened up the parameters more. Compared to the other participants, Gary exists in a liminal space between designing parameters closed with narrow limits and open to student choice.

Notation is widely viewed as a necessary skill for composers, but students’ lack of training in traditional notation should not prohibit their participation in ICA (Hickey, 2012). The artistic process of Creating in the National Core Music Standards (NCMS) asks students to use traditional notation as a means of preserving their work, thereby making it reproducible (NCMS, 2018a). Jones (2015) found that using traditional notation in informal music settings such as ICA improved students’ understanding of rhythm. As a parameter, Richard, Gary, and Henry all asked students to notate their music, but discovered that incomplete sketches may have been a more realistic goal for student output. They seemed preoccupied with the idea that composed music should be written down. However, all three stated in their final interviews that they believe that the element of notation as a requirement could be removed entirely from the parameters of their lessons, and their lessons would still retain the same amount of integrity. Andrew, by contrast, did not require written notation of his students in either lesson. He allowed students to use written notation, or sketches, if they wished. As Hickey (2012) suggests, educators should implement composition in their curriculum regardless of their students’
ability to properly notate music. Instead, educators should meet students at their level of expertise, and allow for students to work with sketches.

**Summary: Creating More Openness Through Experience**

When observing the various degree of openness and learner-centered designs of the lessons that were a part of this study, an evident progression had taken place in two of the participants toward a more constructivist scheme. It could be argued that as a result of experience, high school large ensemble directors may be able to design more open, leaner-centered lessons in ICA on their own, with minimal direction. Andrew, the solitary participant without a traditional high school band experience to draw from, was accustomed to designing learner-centered lessons. Andrew entered the study with the most experience designing ICA lessons of the four. Henry and Richard showed a great deal of growth over time. And Gary, who directs a program which is an ideological representation of high school band in Southern California, designed lessons in the liminal space of parameters between limits and minimums.

**Assessment Strategies for Creating**

**The Creative Music Strategy as Educative Assessment**

Wiggins (1998) describes educative assessment as (a) utilizing performance tasks that are authentic, (b) providing quality feedback where, “teaching [is] coaching” (p. 13), and (c) providing opportunities to improve not only student learning, but “incentives to change teaching” (p. 16). The creative music strategy as a model framework for ICA was desired by participants due to its authenticity. Each lesson presented in this study was grounded in a musical concept or concert repertoire that had relevance to the students and
served the performance goals of the ensemble. Participants also found ways of providing quality feedback throughout the process of the creative music strategy by way of formative assessment. In the lessons presented, participants found multiple opportunities to provide quality feedback as described by Wiggins. The creative music strategy also has potential for educators to change their teaching, as described by Richard in his second lesson.

Creating Feedback: Formative Assessment

Authentic performance tasks also feature, “intelligent trial and error,” where students address, “the gap between actual work and standards through feedback” (Wiggins, 1998, p. 34). The creative music strategy encourages students to engage in, “intelligent trial and error” as teachers monitor and coach. Quality feedback is described by Wiggins as not only, “feedback after [sic] the performance,” but also, “during (concurrent with) the assessment activities” (p. 43). The creative music strategy allows for multiple stages of feedback before, during, and after the prescribed sequence. Participants utilized opportunities to provide ongoing feedback at various stages of the process.

While students were working, participants moved around, and offered coaching and assistance to students, and group discussions concluded each lesson. While moving from group to group, participants were able to guide their students toward solutions for problems that arose. Specifically, Hickey (2012) prescribes that assessment for composition assignments should focus on process: “[s]imple observation of, questioning about, and subsequent reflection on various components of both the compositional process as well as the final product” (p. 29). Participants were able to incorporate all
three of these into their formative assessment practice. The consistent monitoring of student progress not only helped to put struggling students at ease, but in Richard’s case allowed him to learn from his students as they solved problems in innovative and unexpected ways. This is one example of how the creative music strategy was educative for Richard, where his student’s actions encouraged him to reconsider his teaching approach (Wiggins, 1998). At the conclusion of each lesson, a group discussion was used with emphasis on process, asking questions, and peer feedback. Discussion allows for opportunities to ask critically reflective questions that may lead to students’ deeper learning and understanding of the process (Pogonowski, 1989; Robinson, et al., 2011).

Participants did not provide a great amount of detail as to the exact questions that were asked, or specific conversations that took place. Their descriptions of the questions they asked their students were limited to questions such as: What did you like? What didn’t you like? What did you learn? Robinson et al. (2011) describe a progression of questions, beginning with the open-ended, moving toward guided, then finally toward specific questions. Open-ended questions on their own may be too vague for a rich, guided conversation (Allsup & Baxter, 2004). These questions may or may not lead to formative feedback unless more specific, directed questioning takes place. Hickey (2012) describes a need for feedback to be specific to the composition: such as contrasts or use of vocabulary. Specificity, she argues, will be more tangible and authentic for students’ application of critique. The data gathered for this study did not include recorded discussion periods for each lesson, so it is difficult to discern the degree to which participants provided specific feedback as Hickey suggests.
Henry and Andrew provided a written feedback opportunity for their students. They believed that they were able to get honest responses from students, and also that each student’s individual voice was able to be heard. In a discussion setting, it is likely that not all students will have an opportunity to speak, or that they may not feel comfortable sharing out in front of a group. Some students may require more think-time to formulate a response to inquiry (Tobin, 1987). For this reason, written opportunities may allow students to formulate more thoughtful answers. A written option is a method by which educators can engage all learners, regardless of their comfort level in social settings (Brookfield, 2015).

Creating Feedback Through Rubrics

Rubrics have been shown to be extremely valuable for teachers and students for a variety of applications in music education (Burrack & Parkes, 2019; Cooper, 2005; Hickey, 2012; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015; Wesolowski, 2012; Wiggins, 1998). None of the participants in this study developed rubrics as assessment tools for their students’ work. At the end of the study, Andrew and Henry expressed interest in developing a rubric as a tool to guide their students’ future work. Andrew was specifically interested in developing a rubric based on the language found in the National Core Music Standards, as well as the Model Cornerstone Assessments. Rubrics were never discussed as a method of evaluation, but rather as to be a clear guide to help students focus their work. Hickey (2012) suggests that composition work should be accompanied by a rubric limited to three to five components. She also suggests that rubrics for composition work should include domains such as, “Effectiveness of musical elements […] Completeness/Appropriateness, […] [and] Aesthetics” (p. 20). Hickey recognizes the
subjectivity of a domain such as, “aesthetics” and suggests that it should emphasize, “creativeness, craftsmanship, aesthetic appeal […] to encourage more holistic and creative thinking” (p. 20). Henry, Andrew, and Richard described the use of a rubric as helpful to help guide student work, but not for the purposes of evaluation and grading.

**Summative Assessment for Creativity**

In this study, students were not graded for the quality of their creative products. Students were given grades only for their participation in the lesson. Henry discussed the issue with his students, asking whether or not their motivation for completing the assignment at a high level would be compromised if they were not receiving a grade. Most of his students responded that the absence of a grade made no difference to them, and that the absence of a grade did not have an effect on their effort. A small number of students said that they, “might have tried harder” if the assignment were graded. Despite an absence of grades, all participants found examples of students that exceeded their expectations with content, and that some of their students completed their assignments with an unexpected enthusiasm. Hickey (2012) says of assigning grades for composition assignments:

> Intrinsic motivation and creativity can be squelched when the prospect of evaluation is imminent. Therefore, music composition should not always be approached as an assignment to be completed and graded, but more as an ongoing activity. (p. 32)

Participants also described their ICA lessons as, “activities” in the OnPLC and with their students. Gary indicated that his students also viewed them as such. They believed that the nature, and feel of ICA as an, “activity” lowered student affective insecurity and discomfort with their lessons.
Summary: Assessment Strategies for Creating

The *creative music strategy* is an ideal model for educative assessment as described by Wiggins. For lessons that include creative products such as ICA, participants found that formative assessment is extremely important for students, reinforcing their deeper understandings of the process. Specific feedback that hones in on the unique details of students’ work can be more effective than general open-ended questions in dialogic group settings. Additionally, music educators may consider a written feedback component in addition to a group discussion to democratize the feedback process. Andrew and Henry found this to be a helpful tool in their ICA lessons. As a guide, rubrics can be a valuable tool for student success, but caution should be taken if rubrics are to be used for evaluative purposes. The pressure that students feel when letter grades are assigned to their creative work may inhibit their creative potential. Therefore, a variety of specific methods of feedback is ideal for ICA, without the attachment of evaluative grades.

Creating Spaces for Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging

The Creative Music Strategy: A Rationale

To solve the problem at hand, participants wanted to design lessons that would be effective for achieving the student learning goals found in the NCMS, specifically engaging them in the process of making creative music products through the processes of improvisation, composition, and arranging. Furthermore, participants desired an instructional framework that fit into their teaching style, and teaching setting. For students, creative products are best engineered under conditions which allow for student choice and a combination of divergent and convergent thought (Custodero, 2015;
Sawyer, 2015). Participants believed the versatility of Pogonowski’s creative music strategy met their individual needs.

The creative music strategy holds potential to expose students to music in a variety of ways: they are improvising, composing, arranging, decision-making, problem-solving, problem-finding, reflecting, and engaging in meaningful social discourse. Musical concepts can be practically and authentically explored in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, the creative music strategy can be designed relatively quickly, and can be implemented in one to two hours of class time. Perhaps most important to the participants, the creative music strategy was not just a, “fun outlet when time permits” (Strand, 2006; p. 159), but rather, a meaningful strategy that could be used multiple times throughout the academic year (Cooper 2005; Strand, 2006). Even though the creative music strategy was not just, “for fun,” it was still viewed with the levity of an activity as opposed to a formal assignment. This distinction was welcomed by the participants and students as Gary described as a, “break from the structure.”

Creating Time

After interacting with the creative music strategy, participants discovered that their ICA lessons could be implemented in under one to two hours of class time. They also believed that repeated exposure to this activity was good for the process. They believed the creative music strategy had a learning curve for the students that could be overcome with repeated engagement in the process (Cooper, 2005).

All four participants teach in music programs with at least 30 performance commitments per school year, and are constantly in a state of performance preparation. All participants had marching band programs that were active in the fall months, and a
concert season that spanned from December through May. Gary clearly described what he called, “pockets of time.” Gary and the other participants believe that they all had naturally occurring pockets of time either in the days preceding or following their winter concert, or in the month of January. Other pockets of time naturally existed for participants close to their respective spring break schedules, and following their final concerts. Richard found that he was easily able to find pockets of time during his school’s testing schedule which already disrupted his usual rehearsal schedule. Participants universally believed that anyone could find the necessary pockets of time for the delivery of a creative music strategy lesson.

Creating a Unit

All participants found success implementing their own variations of the creative music strategy in their teaching settings. They also had appreciation for the creative music strategy as a lesson design that could be implemented in under two hours of class time. When discussing how they think they will apply ICA in their future teaching, Henry and Andrew both expressed an interest in taking time to plan a week-long composition unit for their students. Their vision for a longer unit on composition more closely resembled the Ensembles Model Cornerstone Assessment (MCA) for the artistic process of Creating (NAfME 2018b). They described an ideal unit that would feature individual student projects instead of groups, an extended opportunity to teach more compositional tools more deeply, and the use of developed rubrics to guide student work. They felt it would be important to use a longer period of time to give students repeated feedback, and to allow them to continue to refine their work.
The intentions of the Ensembles MCA for the artistic process of Creating is to give students more time to work individually, and to work collaboratively with a peer-composer as a sounding board for ideas and critique (Burrack & Parkes, 2018; Hickey, 2012; NAfME, 2018b). Kokotsaki (2011) recognizes the value of a longer period of time to compose so that students have opportunities to sharpen the, “intentionality” of their work (p. 111). Henry was concerned that the group compositions weren’t complete enough, and specifically, “fell apart” toward the end. He thought that more time to rehearse and refine work would make the process more authentic to what he believed composition entails. Some music educators like Andrew and Henry may find that one of the disadvantages to the creative music strategy is its short creation period. Andrew and Henry’s concerns were twofold: (1) the creative music strategy was not, “authentic” to the composition process of Western art music and (2) that by design, the creative music strategy did not allow enough time to sharpen the intentionality of student work. Their solution was to design a longer compositional unit, guided by the Ensemble MCA for the artistic process of Creating.

Chapter Summary

The available literature at the time of this study was consistent with the experiences described by the participants during this study in regards to their perceptions and the challenges they faced when approaching improvisation, composition, and arranging in their curriculum. Many of the obstacles described by the participants were overcome simply by their willingness to participate. Their perceptions of why ICA might not be successful in large ensembles were fears rooted in the unknown, and turned out to be non-issues with a few isolated exceptions. Therefore, the most dominant obstacle to
implementing ICA in a high school music large ensemble setting may simply be the mindset of the teacher. Participants believed that by taking the first steps, and having the courage to try ICA lessons with their students was enough to ensure success. Participants also described their perceptions of their colleagues in the field as being resistant, and possibly sharing the same fears and assumptions that they had at the beginning of the study. Participants believe that by sharing their experiences with their counterparts, and showing them the possibilities of including ICA in their curriculums, that some of their colleagues might be receptive, but some might not.

Over time, participants began to incorporate more learner-centered techniques in their lessons, slowly relinquishing control and choice to the students. Parameters were very important in establishing fertile creative ground on which students could create, but approaching parameters from a stance of minimums instead of limits was a noticeable feature of the lessons presented in the latter part of the study. Participants naturally designed lessons that included formative assessment, but purposefully avoided evaluative grading for their students’ creative work. They believed that this was an important factor in establishing a safe environment within which their students could work.

Two participants expressed a desire to take more time for a week-long composition unit. They believed their students benefitted from the shorter activities, and believe it would be a worthwhile endeavor to spend more time on composition. Their ideas and vision for a longer unit closely resembled the Ensemble Model Cornerstone Assessment for the artistic process of Creating (NAfME 2018b).
Chapter VII

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to work with a cohort of high school large ensemble directors to explore the extent to which they were able to design and deliver a holistic music curriculum to their students in a large ensemble setting. Six significant findings emerged from the collected data to address three research questions: (a) participants were able to identify and overcome four significant obstacles: time, student apprehension, teacher insecurity, and teacher attitude; (b) the creative music strategy met participants’ criteria for practical lessons; (c) small groups were ideal for improvisation, composing, and arranging (ICA); (d) carefully designed parameters are key for students success; (e) educative assessment strategies encourage student engagement and critical thinking, and (f) participants enjoyed personal success and satisfaction with their ICA lessons. In this chapter, I will present (a) final conclusions to the research questions, (b) a conceptual model of the final conclusions, (c) limitations of this study, (d) recommendations for future research, and (e) implications.

Final Conclusions

Research Question 1: Prior to Their Participation in an Online PLC, How do High School Large Ensemble Directors Describe the Role of Creativity as Contributing to a Holistic Music Education?

Participants agreed that students’ exposure to creative activities such as improvisation, composition, and arranging (ICA) are parts of a larger musical puzzle that,
when assembled together alongside the pieces of skills-based fundamentals, will reveal a holistic representation of musicianship. By cultivating well-rounded students through exposure to ICA, students develop problem-solving skills that enable them to think differently about the music they encounter. According to participants, these processes may have great potential to deepen students’ overall musical understandings. Furthermore, participants recognize the importance of appealing to the talents of the students in their programs that may have a hidden spark or interest in composition buried within them.

**Research Question 1a: To What Extent do Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging Appear in Their Previous Teaching Practices?**

Of the four participants in this study, only one had purposefully implemented improvisation, composition, and arranging (ICA) into their curriculum over their teaching career. They had accumulated their own teaching resources over the years, and had implemented small-group improvisation games as well as group composition and arranging projects for their students on a semi-regular basis. The other three participants declared that they had no formal experience with systematically implementing ICA in their curriculum for their large ensemble settings.

Despite the limited presence of ICA in their curriculums, all participants were able to cite some sort of relevant lessons or activities they had used in the past. All participants immediately cited jazz band settings as their previous experience for teaching improvisation to their students. As their first impression, participants tended to define improvisation as soloing in a jazz context. Participants were able to cite examples of how they utilized this strategy in their large ensemble settings such as concert band or wind
ensemble as call-and-response activities. The contexts which participants were able to cite were largely in warm up settings at the beginning of a class. For most participants, composition or arranging only existed in advanced courses for music theory such as Advanced Placement (AP) Music Theory or International Baccalaureate (IB) Music. Participants had indicated that in the past some of their advanced students took on an interest in composition and pursued those interests voluntarily.

**Research Question 1b: What Obstacles and Challenges do They Anticipate While Discussing Implementing Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging Into Their Past Curriculum?**

Four significant obstacles surfaced during group discussions that participants attributed to being obstacles for the integration of improvisation, composition, and arranging into their curriculums: (a) teacher attitude, (b) time, (c) student apprehension, and (d) teacher insecurity.

**Teacher attitude as an obstacle.** While describing the discipline of music education at the high school level, and why ICA hasn’t necessarily, “taken off” as a common part of teaching practice, participants identified teacher attitude as an obstacle with regard to an overall attitude of resistance to change, or a fear of venturing outside of their comfort zone. One participant’s impressions were that it would be difficult to change certain teachers’ ideology, trying to convince them that it is not only possible to use ICA in large ensemble settings, but was also important to a holistic music education. Consequently, he described these types of conversations with his colleagues as, “a bit of sales job.”
According to participants, another commonly held perception in the field contributing to the music educators’ stance against including ICA in their teaching practices perhaps may be that there may not be a place for ICA in the large ensemble setting. One participant questioned whether or not there may even be a need for ICA in large ensemble settings, and maybe that improvisation only belongs in jazz band settings, or composition/arranging curriculum only belongs in courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) Music Theory or International Baccalaureate (IB) Music. Participants also described a lack of performance literature available that engages students in ICA, which perhaps delegitimizes its inclusion in large ensemble settings.

Time as an obstacle. Participants described a typical high school music director’s experience as being inundated with all sorts of activities, performances, and other various responsibilities outside of their regular teaching contract. The issue of time was twofold for participants: (a) there is little available time outside of the school day with the extra rehearsal and performance obligations that are scheduled, and (b) there is little available instructional time available to dedicate toward activities other than performance preparation. While there are times where time commitments are reduced, the perception amongst participants was that they are always busy to some degree. One participant humorously stated, “There is less stuff. Less more, do you know what I mean?”

Student apprehension as an obstacle. Participants were overly concerned that their students may not be receptive to ICA lessons for two prominent reasons: (a) students may be overwhelmed by the challenges of ICA lessons and therefore have a negative experience and (b) students may show immaturity as a result of their insecurities when presented with the freedom and openness of ICA. Participants viewed
improvisation, composition, and arranging as challenging musical endeavors, and feared that their students would not be able to handle the musical demands to participate in these tasks in a meaningful way. Specifically, there was a fear that students would freeze under pressure and become overwhelmed by their lack of prerequisite skills such as knowledge of traditional notation, harmony, music theory, orchestration, and voice leading, that participants felt their students must possess to compose music. It is possible that many of these perceptions may be passed on to students from teachers as they deal with their own insecurities with teaching ICA.

**Teacher insecurity as an obstacle.** Participants overwhelmingly felt that they did not have enough training in how to teach ICA to students in large ensemble settings. They received little or no training in their undergraduate teacher preparation programs, and furthermore had no functioning model to emulate. Participants felt ill-equipped to teach composition in particular, as they were not highly trained composers themselves.

**Research Question 2: What Instructional Strategies Can High School Large Ensemble Directors Design Together in an Online PLC to Include Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging in Their Teaching Practices?**

Participants desired to design CIA lessons that were relevant to the repertoire they were studying in their large ensemble settings, and that could be implemented quickly (within one or two days). In this study, participants managed to design lessons that met their criteria by using a flexible seven-step framework: the *creative music strategy*. Participants were able to implement their lessons in one to three days’ time and utilized small student group configurations as well as individual work. The lessons that were designed for this study culminated with students performing short compositions or
rehearsed improvisations (:25 – 2:30 each), and group discussions where students reflected on their process. Participants also found that the plasticity of the *creative music strategy* lends itself to students of all levels of musical proficiency. Participants successfully incorporated this strategy in the beginning and advanced level ensemble classes they teach.

**Research Question 2a: Which Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging Activities do They Choose to Implement Into Their Teaching Settings? What Reasons do They Give for Their Choices?**

Participants indicated a desire to design lessons that had more substance than just exercises or warm ups. Additionally, they discussed aspirations for lessons that had relationships to the repertoire being studied, and that could be delivered in a short amount of class time. The versatility of the *creative music strategy* was desirable for participants. They saw applications for this framework to be used multiple times throughout the school year, and in a variety of contexts regardless of what repertoire they were preparing. The *creative music strategy* begins with a springboard, where participants were able to find relevance to their repertoire by asking their students to *compose/improvise/arrange in the style of _____*. Springboards varied from case to case. Participants drew from multiple musical concepts in their repertoire, such as: writing variations, re-arranging source material, use of a pentatonic scale, motivic variation, texture, ostinato, and composing a variation in AABA. All of these springboards were directly related to the repertoire their students were studying. Participants believed that their students had an enhanced understanding of their repertoire after participating in these lessons. Participants were
able to engage their students in the activities of improvisation, composition, and arranging by way of the *creative music strategy*.

**Research Question 2b: What Problem-Solving Strategies do Participants Utilize to Overcome Obstacles and Challenges They Face?**

With consideration to the obstacles that participants identified and encountered throughout the study, participants found that they could rely on their own classroom experience and rapport with their students to overcome their challenges. With few exceptions, participants discovered that most of their perceived challenges for implementing ICA were unfounded fears and assumptions that did not have a debilitating effect on their success.

Teacher attitude was not an issue for participants in this study, as they were all volunteers. By participating in this study participants were actively seeking assistance to improve their teaching practices. Participants believe that a perception exists among their colleagues that implementing ICA may be difficult or impossible in performance-driven large ensemble settings. They joined this study with a commitment to, “making it happen,” therefore they were committed to arriving at a successful outcome. They believed this mindset was key for them in overcoming other challenges throughout the study.

Participants discovered that time was not a significant factor preventing them from implementing ICA. They found that lessons could be designed in under and hour, which was a reasonable amount of preparation time according to participants. Participants managed to design lessons that could be implemented in one to three class periods, and consequently did not impact the quality of their performances by taking away from time
dedicated to performance preparation. After their experience in this study, participants agreed that there are always, “pockets of time” that exist in their class time which would allow them to implement ICA lessons multiple times throughout an academic year.

Participants found that in isolated incidents, students struggled with their ICA lessons for precisely the reasons they thought they would. In some cases, students were self-conscious about their work, and apprehensive about presenting something that was not as polished or refined as a traditional performance. Participants found that by cultivating a safe environment for creativity, struggling students were able to flourish. This was achieved by an overall rapport (notably trust) that participants had with their students, as well as frequent monitoring of student work during creation periods. Teachers were present and always available to answer questions. Participants also believed that the right balance of structure, parameters, and freedom helped students to find success on their own terms. It was also observed that small groups were useful in helping students to work with one another to problem-solve. Establishing a safe environment for their students did not take any overwhelming amount of training or strategy on the part of the participants, they were able to rely on their own instincts and teaching experience.

After viewing examples of student products from creativity lessons such as the creative music strategy, participants changed their expectations of what improvisation, composition, and arranging could look like in a large ensemble setting. Viewing other models of lessons in action, as well as fruitful critical discussion played significant roles in participants’ overall success. Collaboration supported participants by providing them the confidence and the necessary tools for success.
Participants entered the study with assumptions that the act of composition meant a fully notated musical product for wind ensemble or orchestra, or that improvisation meant a complicated solo in a jazz style. After collaborating, and sharing ideas, participants not only found that they possessed the skills necessary to teach ICA to their students, but that their students also possessed all of the prerequisite musical know-how to succeed at ICA at least a novice level.

Participants entered this study uneasy about their talents, training, and abilities to teach ICA, and exited the study confident that they were equipped with everything they needed. This change occurred in part by re-defining what exactly improvisation, composition, or arranging entails. By re-defining ICA in their minds, they were able to confidently deliver successful lessons to their students.

**Research Question 3: Following Their Experience in an Online PLC, What Measures of Success (if Any) do Participants Describe from Their Participation in a 16-Week Collaborative Process?**

Participants described their experience in the 16-week collaborative process as successful overall. They enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to discuss teaching strategies with other fellow music educators. Specifically, participants cited the benefits of observing recorded teaching settings as helpful to their own development. Observing their peers teach, and their students work was beneficial to them, and inspired critical inquiry among participants that in turn contributed to their own teaching development. Participants also appreciated the opportunity to receive professional development from a facilitator for the purpose of exposure to new resources and research. The combination of collaborative discourse and professional development led to each participant to feel that
they had improved their teaching practice. All participants expressed an interest in going deeper into ICA in their future teaching practices.

**Research Question 3a: What Measures of Success and/or Failure do Participants Describe Regarding Their Implementation of Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging into Their Teaching Practices?**

Participants described a range of success and failure throughout the study. The purpose of a collaborative PLC is to improve teaching practice. After presenting their first ICA lessons, participants felt the lessons were successful overall, but saw potential for their own development in the ways in which they establish parameters, and their approach to facilitating discussion.

At the end of the study participants still looked inwardly at their own teaching, discussing the strategies that their colleagues used, and wanting to use them for themselves. Participants always found room for improvement in a positive way, but never described their lessons as a negative experience for their students or themselves.

Participants described that their students exhibited a range of success that resembled a bell curve: some were struggling, some were exceptional, and most were in the middle. Participants anecdotally described that students were surprised with the quality of the products that they were able to design in short amount of time. In these anecdotal descriptions, participants described that students wanted to continue to participate in ICA lessons again, and that they were already thinking of ways to improve their work for the future. Despite a few struggling students, participants indicated that most of their students had a positive experience with ICA.
Participants also described their own surprise at how well their students handled their ICA lessons. Certain students were more invested in the process than anticipated. At the end of the study, participants all affirmed that their lessons and their students met or exceeded their expectations. After reviewing the National Core Music Standards, all participants believed that their lessons helped their students to meet the standards for the artistic process of Creating (improvisation, composition, and/or arranging).

**Research Question 3b: What Enduring Changes, if any, Do High School Large Ensemble Directors Plan to Implement Pertaining to the Inclusion of Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging in Their Teaching Practices?**

At the end of this study, all four participants expressed an interest in carrying on their work with implementing improvisation, composition, and arranging in their teaching practices. Two participants believe that they can find small, “pockets of time” throughout the school year to implement these lessons. Notably between concert cycles, or just prior to planned vacation times. One participant believes they can find 20 minutes of class time with regularity to spread out ICA lessons over a few days’ time as a break from performance preparation. Two participants indicated that they would like to develop longer, more in depth units inspired by the Model Cornerstone Assessments, and now have the resources and confidence to do so. At the conclusion of this study, all participants plan to make room for improvisation, composition, and arranging in their large ensemble settings.

Two participants in particular showed a great deal of growth with a newfound appreciation for learner-centered teaching strategies. Specifically, the changes in these
participants’ lesson designs over time exhibited a willingness to trust and empower students more, while relinquishing some of their own control in the process.

**A Conceptual Model of the Final Conclusions**

The original conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) for this study illustrates the presence of four significant obstacles that act as a filter in the teaching process, distilling music educators’ ends-in-view for ICA into a limited presence in their teaching practice. In this study, an online PLC (OnPLC) was used as an intervention in an effort to remove the perceived obstacles of time, student apprehension, teacher insecurity, and teacher attitude.

![Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework Model. Improvisation, Composition, and Arranging in the High School Large Ensemble Setting](image)

Participants engaged in a 16-week collaborative process which included dialogue, viewing models of successful teaching practices, recording and reviewing their own teaching, and professional development training. As a result, participants were able to negotiate their perceived obstacles, allowing them to implement ICA lessons in their
teaching settings. Participants believed that three of the obstacles: time, student apprehension, and teacher insecurity were present, but could easily be overcome by other music educators in the profession. Participants perceived their own positive attitude toward ICA, a commitment to, “making it happen,” was enough to combat the obstacles of time, student apprehension, and teacher insecurity. Consequently, teacher attitude was perceived as the most significant obstacle, and is representatively the largest in size in the model of the final conclusions (Figure 7.1). Symbolically, all four obstacles contact the teaching process in some capacity, as they are inevitably present in the minds of the participants to some degree throughout the process. The increased presence of ICA in practice can appear as a variety of unique outcomes.

![Figure 7.1. A Conceptual Framework Model of the Final Conclusions](image)

Participants believed the creative music strategy was effective, and can appear multiple times throughout the academic year. Participants found variations on the creative music strategy to be effective, which included group compositions, individual compositions, and improvisation games. Within the creative music strategy framework,
participants were slightly deficient in the areas of student-centered instruction, questioning techniques, and discussion techniques. Figure 7.1 is a model representing the final conclusions of this study.

Limitations

Are These Participants Outliers?

While reviewing the discussion that follows, it is important to keep in mind who the participants were, and who they represent (or, more importantly, do not represent). The group of four participants from this study may represent an extremely small subsection of the high school music education community in Southern California. These are educators who knowingly volunteered to participate in this study, with the intention of developing their teaching practices in a professional learning community to support the inclusion of improvisation, composition, and arranging in their large ensemble curriculum. This was not a case study of individuals who work together in the same district (or county), and furthermore, they were not required to participate in this OnPLC as a part of a policy-driven initiative for professional development. Therefore, the scenario in which these participants were working was not representative of a common professional development experience.

The participants in this study are individuals who were open to learning, and were willing to collaborate. It should also be noted that of the 555 invitations sent out to high school music educators in Southern California, only 13 (2.3%) responded to the survey with interest. Of the 13 respondents, only 6 were eligible for the study based on the parameters for participation. This data may be an indication that most high school music educators in Southern California may be uninterested in (or, resistant to) this topic for a
variety of reasons which may include perceptions that it is too difficult, or that it is irrelevant in large ensemble settings (Coleman, 2015; Kokotsaki 2012; Kokotsaki & Newton, 2015; LaCognata, 2009; Strand, 2006). I propose that the participants in this study are outliers in their community at large in that they not only showed openness in participating, but recognized an opportunity to develop something that they thought was missing from their teaching practices. Therefore, the findings and conclusions of this study are extremely localized. A replication of this study with different participants may yield drastically different outcomes.

**Problems and Advantages of the Online PLC Format**

In this study, participants agreed to participate in six synchronous Online PLC meetings. Many high school music educators (such as band and orchestra directors) schedule a great deal of extracurricular activities. Participants in this study found it difficult to find common time to meet, citing a variety of conflicts such as performances, rehearsals, or family obligations. Battersby and Verdi (2016) suggest that OnPLCs may be a desirable collaborative option for high school music educators who find it difficult to align their schedules to meet in a central location.

The participants in this study lived and worked approximately 150 miles apart, and were able to meet synchronously online. Despite the geographical convenience of an OnPLC, attendance and communication were still formidable issues in this study. The participants and I kept an active text message, “chat,” and used an online scheduling tool to communicate and schedule future meetings. Only two participants actively participated in the online scheduling tool in a timely manner. Consequently, meetings had to be scheduled without everyone’s input for availability, which led to some participants being
excluded. Only two of the six meetings had full attendance from all members. Additionally, only two participants responded to the online journal prompts. When absent, participants were asked to provide some feedback to their peers in sessions they missed. In these cases no communications were made on behalf of the absentees.

Despite issues of attendance and participation, all participants were able to complete the study and deliver two designed lessons using ICA. As a hybrid design, the OnPLC also utilized an asynchronous platform where resources and recordings of online meetings were posted. Bell and Robinson (2014) suggest that an asynchronous model of an OnPLC may be just as effective as a face-to-face PLC. If a participant missed a meeting, they were still able to recover lost time by accessing the information in a shared online space. Participants acknowledged the advantage of the collaborative online format, and being able to communicate in real time. The asynchronous platform may not be a replacement for the richness of face-to-face dialogue, but it in this case it provided a safety net for participants who were unable to attend scheduled synchronous meetings.

There is no, “magic bullet” for finding common collaborative time for high school music educators. The hybrid model of the OnPLC did not work to my expectations as the facilitator, but it did allow for meaningful collaboration for all of the participants.

One of the critical pieces that was missing from the online sessions was recorded teaching practice. Some participants recorded themselves teaching, but some did not. It would be more helpful in future studies to insist that teachers record themselves teaching, and not just the resulting student products. Finally, it would be helpful to have been able to view recorded discussion periods between students and teachers. As such, trusting the participants to bring recorded data to the OnPLC resulted in inconsistencies.
Longitudinal Change in Practice

In this study, four participants worked together in an OnPLC for 16 weeks. Permanent, catalytic changes in teaching practices may not be observable over 16 weeks. Therefore, it would be logical to follow up with the participants in this study after one academic school year to discover what enduring changes in teaching practice had taken place as a result of their participation in this study. It is impossible at the end of this study to determine if participants will permanently change their approach to teaching improvisation, composition, and/or arranging in their large ensemble settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was specifically implemented in high school settings in Southern California. A replication of this study in more diverse teaching settings may provide further insight on how educators may incorporate improvisation, composition, and arranging in large ensemble teaching settings. More diverse teaching settings may include multiple levels of educational settings, representing a variety of geographical locations and socio-economically diverse populations. Southern California is not the only region in the United States where music programs engage in highly competitive performance-driven activities. Replication of this study in other similar regions may yield differing results.

The participants in this study were all volunteers with at least five years of teaching experience. Because the participants in this study were relatively homogenized in experience and mindset, a more diverse group of participants might bring new challenges to the effectiveness of an Online PLC for the purposes of implementing improvisation, composition, and arranging in large ensemble settings. Furthermore, a
replication of this study with younger, less experienced music educators may yield different results.

As a practical model for implementing ICA in large-ensemble settings, I believe the creative music strategy in its seven steps requires more widespread exposure in professional development settings. Specifically, music educators should consider their decisions for how student groups are formed, and how they facilitate meaningful discussions.

Participants in this study struggled with student-centered teaching strategies, and facilitating meaningful discussion. Specifically, an emphasis in facilitating discussions using combinations of open-ended and closed-ended questioning is needed for music educators. Participants missed opportunities for student growth by lecturing and giving instructions instead of engaging students in a discussion designed with constructivism in mind. Participants also missed the original intention of the creative music strategy by skipping Step 6: “Record for Reflection,” which impacted the following step, “Reflective Aural/Oral Analysis.” It may be beneficial to conduct future research investigating large ensemble directors’ ability to facilitate student-centered instructional activities and rich discussion while implementing the creative music strategy as it was originally intended.

Finally, a follow-up study with the same participants would be beneficial to determine if any enduring changes in teaching practice had occurred as a result of this study.

**Implications**

This study featured four participants who teach in diverse teaching settings throughout Southern California. With minimal professional development and training,
participants were able to successfully implement improvisation, composition, and arranging into their large ensemble teaching settings at the high school level. It is strongly recommended that pre-service music educators have access to practical models, resources, and advocacy for the application of improvisation, composition, and arranging in large ensemble settings. The inclusion of these resources in teacher training programs may better equip music educators with strategies and positive attitudes needed to successfully implement improvisation, composition, and arranging. Specifically, courses where pre-service music educators engage in the *creative music strategy* themselves may be a worthwhile consideration for collegiate music education programs.

Furthermore, most teachers may be avoiding including improvisation, composition, or arranging in their teaching settings because they have manufactured their own unfounded fears and constructed barriers in their minds. Participants in this study were able to overcome their fears through minimal collaborative professional development. Providing high school music educators with a collaborative outlet where they could meet periodically to discuss and improve teaching practices can be an effective avenue for school districts to consider. A hybrid synchronous and asynchronous Online PLC can be an effective method for high school music educators to participate in meaningful professional development. Due to each music program’s unique performance schedules and extracurricular activities, finding mutually convenient times will always be a challenge. Even when participants in this study were not able to attend synchronous sessions, they were still able to succeed through their access to materials asynchronously which included recorded sessions, videos, transcripts, and research-based resources.
Additionally, an outside (or internal) facilitator may be helpful in providing music educators with encouragement and expertise that will help them to succeed in their own teaching settings. It was suggested by participants that just, “seeing it in action” would be enough to break down the fears and barriers that music educators keep in their minds. Convincing others not only that it can be done, but that it is worthwhile may be a significant first step to more successfully incorporating improvisation, composition, and arranging into high school large ensemble settings.

**Coda**

As I reflect on my own journey as a facilitator of this study, I feel that I have become more enlightened as an educator. Working with my peers in the field over time, and diving deeply into their struggles, their victories, and their overall experiences as music educators has inspired me to become a better educator myself. The power of collaboration was not just beneficial to the participants, but to me as well. I found myself relating to their stories, and being awestruck by the creativity they brought to their lesson design. I was moved by their passion for their craft and their genuine dedication to their students. It was striking to witness the determination shown by each participant to become a better teacher tomorrow than they were the previous day. By observing their growth in how they trust their students and exposed themselves to uncertainty, I have become more aware of my existing deficit-based views of my students’ abilities. This journey has inspired me to let go of many of my assumptions, and to trust more in possibilities. Most importantly, I have learned to trust more in my students as I now seek
to revel in the beauty of the unknown. Now more than ever, I believe that my students will always surprise me when given the chance.
REFERENCES


Appendix A – Invitation Email

Invitation Email to Potential Participants

Esteemed Colleague,

I am a doctoral student in Music and Music Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. I am seeking participants for my dissertation study entitled “Making Room for the Creating Process in Southern California High School Large Ensemble Band Settings.” This study is intended to assist high school band directors in the incorporation of creative processes such as composing and improvisation into the large ensemble classroom in a practical way that will not detract from the performance quality of their ensembles. I am putting together a team of five high school band directors to work in collaboration over this coming spring semester (February-June).

If you decide to participate in this study, you will commit to participate in eight online meetings to take place between February 2019 and June 2019. Meeting times will be determined by mutual availability of all participants. You will be asked to keep a weekly journal (as brief as you would like) chronicling your experiences throughout the study. Journals can be emailed, typed, or audio recorded on a smart phone.

You will be asked to video record two lessons to share with the group. Finally, you will be asked to participate in two additional interviews in June and September that will last between 45 and 60 minutes each. You will be given a pseudonym in order to keep your identity confidential. There is no penalty for not taking part in this research study and there are no foreseeable risks in participating.

All collected data including recorded meetings, questionnaire responses, recorded interviews, and reporting will remain confidential, and participants’ identities will be kept anonymous. It is expected that each participant preserves the anonymity of other participants involved in the study. Please contact Michael Fleischmann (mpf2129@tc.columbia.edu) if you have any questions related to this study.

Eligible participants must meet the following criteria:

- Currently teaching in Southern California as a high school band director
- Have a minimum of five (5) years teaching experience in Southern California as a high school band director
- Indicate an estimated 30 or more performance commitments per school year (This includes football games, contests, any festivals, local showcases, winter guard shows, spring musical theater performances, pep band performances on campus, community functions, winter percussion shows, etc.)
• Is able to provide consent from your current school district for study participation (a letter will be provided for you to send to your school district explaining the study with Teachers College, Columbia University approved Institutional Review Board reference number).

If interested, please complete this brief questionnaire by the end of this month.

https://tccolumbia.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9RmHZZ41pJLletf

Completion of the questionnaire does not guarantee participation in the study. Participants will be contacted on or before February 10, 2019 to confirm their eligibility and further participation. Your participation is greatly appreciated! Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns related to this research. Thank you for your time and musical support!

Michael Fleischmann

Doctoral Student, Music & Music Education
Teachers College, Columbia University
mpf2129@tc.columbia.edu
(213) 841 1261
Appendix B – Questionnaire

Demographic and Background Inventory Questionnaire

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

Protocol Title:
Making room for the creating process in the Southern California high school large ensemble band settings

Principal Investigator:
Michael Fleischmann, Teachers College
(213) 841 - 1261, mpf2129@tc.columbia.edu

Thank you for interest in this project, and thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify qualified and interested participants for this research. You will be asked to answer questions about your beliefs as a high school band director, your background in music education, and some information about your current teaching position. All responses will be kept confidential.

The questionnaire should take approximately ten (10) to fifteen (15) minutes to complete. Some questions ask for you to provide details that you may not have on hand. Please give your best estimate. Your participation is completely voluntary, you have the right to withdraw from the questionnaire, for any reason, without penalty. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator of this study, please contact Michael Fleischmann at mpf2129@tc.columbia.edu.

Eligible participants must meet the following criteria:
• Currently teaching in Southern California as a high school band director
• Have a minimum of five (5) years teaching experience in Southern California as a high school band director
• Indicate an estimated 30 or more performance commitments per school year
• Interested in developing and implementing strategies for including composition and improvisation in their large ensemble classes Concert Band/Wind Ensemble, etc.)
• Is able to provide consent from your current school district for study participation (a letter will be provided to your school district explaining the study with Teachers
College, Columbia University approved Institutional Review Board reference number).

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary, you are at least 21 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the questionnaire at any time for any reason without penalty. Please note, Completion of the questionnaire does not guarantee participation in the study. Participants will be contacted on or before February 10, 2019 to confirm their eligibility and further participation.

Also, please note that this questionnaire will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Q1 Are you currently a high school band director in one of the following counties in Southern California: Orange, Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside, Ventura, or San Bernardino?

   - Yes
   - No

Q2 How many years have you taught at the high school level in the Southern California counties of Orange, Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside, Ventura, and/or San Bernardino?

   - 0-4
   - 5-10
   - 11-15
   - 15-20
   - 25-30
   - 31 or more

Q3 Given your BEST estimate, approximately how many performance commitments will your students participate in this year? This includes football games, contests, any festivals, local showcases, winter guard shows, spring musical theater performances, pep band performances on campus, community functions, winter percussion shows, etc.

   - Under 30
   - 30 to 50
   - More than 50

Q4 Would you be interested in working with 4-5 other high school band directors to develop teaching strategies to help implement composition and improvisation in YOUR concert band ensemble classes?

   - Yes
   - No
Q5  How often are your concert ensemble classes (concert band, beginning band, wind ensemble, etc) exposed to composition?
   o  Never
   o  Sometimes
   o  Frequently

Q6  How often are your concert ensemble classes (concert band, beginning band, wind ensemble, etc) exposed to improvisation?
   o  Never
   o  Sometimes
   o  Frequently

Q7  Which of the following obstacles do you face in trying to include composition and improvisation? Choose all that apply. [command-click to select multiple responses]
   o  There are too many other things to teach in my concert ensemble classes (not enough time)
   o  There is not enough access to technology
   o  I think these activities belong in other classes such as AP Music Theory or Jazz Band
   o  I do not feel comfortable teaching composition or improvisation to my concert band ensemble classes
   o  I do not feel that I have the appropriate skills to teach composition and/or improvisation in my concert band ensemble classes
   o  I do not think my students could handle this material
   o  Not Applicable: I feel confident teaching composition and improvisation in my concert ensemble classes

Q8  Are there other obstacles that you face, that are not listed above? Please list.

Q9  How would you describe your comfort level with teaching composition?
   o  Very Uncomfortable
   o  Moderately Uncomfortable
   o  Comfortable
   o  Very Comfortable
Q10 How would you describe your comfort level with teaching improvisation?

- Very Uncomfortable
- Moderately Uncomfortable
- Comfortable
- Very Comfortable

Q11 Approximately how many students do you have in your PERFORMING ensembles this year? This includes Marching Band, Concert Ensembles, Percussion Ensembles, Winter Guard, etc.

Please do NOT count the same students twice who participate in multiple ensembles.

- Less than 50 students
- 50-75
- 76-100
- 101-125
- 126-150
- 151 or more

Q12 Please indicate the types of performing ensembles offered to your students this year, indicate all that apply:

- Concert Ensembles (Concert/Symphonic/Wind Ensemble)
- Pep Band
- Marching Band (Field)
- Marching Band (Parade)
- Percussion Ensemble (Concert)
- Percussion Ensemble (Indoor Drum Line)
- Color Guard (Indoor Winter Guard)
- Chamber Ensembles
- Spring Musical "Pit Orchestra"
- Jazz Band (Big Band)
- Jazz Ensemble (Combo)
- Beginning Band
- Modern Band
- Guitar
- Mariachi

Q13 If you offer a performing ensemble does not appear on the list above, please include it here:

Q14 Please list the officially scheduled courses that are part of your teaching contract in the fall and spring semesters this school year:
Q15 Please provide your name:
________________________________________________________________

Q16 Please provide your preferred contact email:
________________________________________________________________

Q17 Please provide your preferred contact phone number:
________________________________________________________________

Q18 Please indicate your age group:
   o 21-25
   o 26-30
   o 31-35
   o 36-40
   o 41-45
   o 46-50
   o 51-55
   o 56 or older

Q19 What is your highest level of education?
   o Bachelor's Degree
   o Master's - Incomplete
   o Master's - Completed
   o Doctorate - Incomplete
   o Doctorate - Completed

Q20 In which subject areas are your awarded degrees? (example: BM Music Education, MM Conducting, MA Music Performance, etc.)
________________________________________________________________

Q21 Where is your current teaching position? (School Name, City)
________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time!

You will be contacted by the conclusion of this month with details concerning your future participation in this research study.
Appendix C – Informed Consent

Informed Consent and Participant’s Rights

Protocol Title: Making room for the creating process in the Southern California high school large ensemble band setting

Principal Investigator:
Michael Fleischmann
Doctoral Student, Teachers College
(213) 841 - 1261
mpf2129@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION
You are eligible to participate in a research study entitled “Making room for the creating process in the Southern California high school large ensemble band setting.” Approximately four other high school band directors will participate in this study. Should you choose to participate in this study, the time commitment would span from February 2019 through June of 2019. A follow-up interview would take place in September 2019.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?
The purpose of this study is to develop with a group of high school band directors practical strategies for the inclusion of composition and improvisation in their own large ensemble band settings (concert band, wind ensemble, etc.).

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in eight online video conference meetings between February 2019 and June 2019. Other participants in the online meetings will be high school band directors like yourself. Meeting times will be determined by the mutual availability of all participants. Online meetings will be forums for collaborative discussions intended to draw from the expertise of all participants to improve teaching practice. Due to the nature of these meetings occurring online, participants are expected to have access to a computer with a webcam and a strong WiFi connection. All video conference online meetings will be recorded.

All participants will be asked to video record two lessons to share with the other band directors in the study. The recording device you use must be positioned strategically to not capture any identifiable features of your students. If identifiable features of your students are captured by accident, the researcher will edit the videos to “blur” the faces of students. Recorded lessons will be viewed by all participants, and constructive criticism
will be given. If you require assistance in recording your lessons, you will receive appropriate assistance. If you require access to a recording device, one will be provided to you.

You will be asked to keep a journal (as thorough or as brief as you would like) chronicling your experiences throughout the study. The method of journaling to be used is up to you, the participant. Journals can be emailed, typed, handwritten, video recorded, or audio recorded on a device such as a smartphone. If you require materials for journaling (such as a notebook), they will be provided to you at no cost.

Throughout the study, an encrypted Google Drive will be a repository of all digital materials which you will have access to. Participants will be asked to provide a recent copy of their operating budget, as well as a band handbook (and/or syllabi) that describes the breadth of your program, including performance commitments.

Finally, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. The first interview will take place in June of 2019, and will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The final follow-up interview will take place in September 2019, and will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

**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 while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss problems that you experienced in the past. Additionally, you may feel embarrassment or discomfort sharing your recorded lessons with the other four participants. **You do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don’t want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.**

**WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**
There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

**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 you have completed the final interview in September 2019. If necessary, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven’t finished.

**PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY**
All recorded online meetings, lessons, and interviews will be transcribed and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Pseudonyms will be used for all transcribed materials to
protect the identity of the participants. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years.

The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name. All information will be stored on a password-protected computer, and in an encrypted GoogleDrive.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

**HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?**
The results from this study will be used for a doctoral dissertation. Results from this study may be used in the future for publication in academic or practitioner journals. Results from this study may be used in the future for academically oriented presentations such as conferences.

**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
- I consent to allow AUDIO ONLY materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College
- I DO NOT consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College

**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
- I DO NOT give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study

**WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**
If you have questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Michael Fleischmann, Doctoral Student, Teachers College at (213) 841 – 1261 or mpf2129@tc.columbia.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) 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 for Teachers College Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. 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.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his professional discretion.
- If during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my 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 electronic signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

___________________________________________________
Appendix D – References Provided

Reference Material Provided to Participants


Lesson Discussion Questions - Session V

1. Please describe how you set up the lesson, what instructions & parameters were given?
2. What was the goal of this lesson?
3. What did you consider when planning this lesson?
4. Why did you consider these factors for this lesson?
5. If you had the chance, how would you have done this lesson differently?
6. What do you think your music students gained from this lesson?
7. Was there an opportunity for students to reflect/debrief after the lesson?
8. If so, what sorts of comments/questions came up?
9. Was this a helpful process for your students, or do you feel like you were “checking a box” to meet a music standard?

Lesson Discussion Questions – Session VI

1. What were the goals of your assignment?
2. What feedback was given from you?
   a. Peer to peer feedback?
3. Were your expectations of your students met?
   a. Do you think your students’ expectations were met?
4. What would you do differently if you did this lesson again?
5. Take a moment and look at each anchor standard in the NCMS, what range do you think your students fall on the rubric?
Appendix F – Exit Interview Protocol

Exit Interview Protocol

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE
- Tell me, in your own words about your journey since February - where did you start, what did you gain (if anything) from the experience, and what is next for you?
- Thinking back to your lessons (and others) - who can do this? What sorts of prerequisite skills are necessary?
- Are there doubts you had at the beginning of this journey as to your ability to design and implement lessons in composition, improvisation, and/or arranging?
- Do you still have doubts?
- Did you see growth in yourself from lesson # 1 to lesson #2?

TIME
- Is there an ideal time during the school year to implement these lessons?
- What does the timeline of an ideal composition, improvisation, and/or arranging lesson look like - how long does it take to introduce the lesson, have the kids work, have the kids present, and debrief?

OUTCOMES - TEACHER & STUDENT
- Thinking back to your lesson implementation - what surprised you?
- Was there anything about your students that surprised you during the process?
- What victories (if any) do you think your students had during the process?
- Do you think taking time for these lessons got in the way of performance quality?

LESSON DESIGN
- When you were designing your lessons - what barriers (if any) did you find? (Was there a moment where you thought “that won’t work” and revised?)
- We talked about the new standards - were they of any practical use for you? Why/Why not?
- Talk to me about the role of evaluation/assessment - what do you think worked/didn’t work for you and your students?
- For the classes you recorded lessons for - why did you chose those ensembles over your other ensembles?
- Could you teach these lessons in your other classes, why or why not?

THE FUTURE
- What tools do you think you might need to be successful in implementing composition, improvisation and/or arranging in the future?
- Will you start to use these lessons more often (same/less)? If so - how?
- Think back to other lessons from the group, did you get ideas from others that you think you can use?
- What would you do differently in the future?

CODA
One of our big themes from Session 1 was “How do we make it happen.” If you were giving a Professional Development workshop for other teachers in your district, to get them on board with this idea.

- What would you tell them?
- How would you explain what you did?
- What advice/support could you give them to be successful?
- How could you encourage them to “make it happen?”
Appendix G – Pilot Study Interview Protocol

Pilot Study Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

1. What are the current assessment strategies being implemented by high school band directors in Southern California to measure individual student musical growth?

2. How do band directors’ assessment and grading practices cultivate creativity and musicality in students?

3. To what degree are high school band directors familiar with the National Core Music Standards?

4. What are high school band directors’ experiences with PLCs?
   a. Would band directors be open to joining a PLC for the purpose of improving their own assessment and practices?

Estimated interview time: 30 - 45 minutes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hello, my name is Michael Fleischmann, and I am a graduate student at Teachers College. I am investigating assessment and grading practices of high school band directors in Southern California. Do you have any questions before we begin?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Introduction, Cont’d</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please state your name, and tell me a little bit about your teaching career so far.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Places you’ve taught</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• How long you’ve been teaching</td>
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<tr>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Introduction, Cont’d</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Tell me about your current program, how many students do you have?</td>
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<th>Q4</th>
<th>Introduction, Cont’d</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take me through your typical calendar for the year, what sorts of performance opportunities do your kids take part in?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• On campus performances?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Competitive events vs. non-competitive</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Concerts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Other opportunities kids play in public or for each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of performances</td>
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</table>
| Q5 | RQ1 - Assessment & Grading Strategies | As you develop your syllabus for a class like Marching Band or Concert Band, what does the break down of a students’ grade look like at the end of the semester?  
- Attendance/Participation  
- Playing Tests  
- Theory  
- Portfolio(?) |
| Q6 | RQ1 - Assessment & Grading Strategies, RQ2 - How are HSBD Cultivating of Creativity? | How did this grading model come to be? Has it always been the same, or has it changed over time?  
- Based on previous models from when you were a student  
- Participation/Attendance  
- Attitude  
- Playing tests/Written tests |
| Q7 | RQ1 - Assessment & Grading Strategies, RQ2 - How are HSBD Cultivating of Creativity? | When a student comes into your program - what kinds of assessments do they have throughout the year?  
- Playing tests, memorization  
- Journal  
- Jury/Solo Piece  
- Theory? |
| Q8 | RQ3 - Familiarity with CMS | Where did the ideas for these assessments come from?  
- Standards  
- Models of other teachers |
| Q9 | RQ2 - How are HSBD Cultivating Creativity? | What do you think creativity looks like in a band-type class?  
- Visualization?  
- Composition?  
- Improvisation? |
| Q10 | RQ2 - How are HSBD Cultivating Creativity? | What sorts of experiences do your students have where they get to flex their creative muscles in your band classes? |
| Q11 | RQ2 - How are HSBD Cultivating of Creativity? RQ3 (?) Familiarity with CMS | If there were no rules, no limitations of time, money, etc, and grades were not required by your site, what sorts of activities would you do with your students?  
- If there were no standards? |
<p>| Q12 | RQ3 (?) Familiarity with CMS RQ2 - How are HSBD Cultivating of Creativity? | Other than the fact that this is not a perfect world, what do you think gets in your way from doing these things? |
| Q12 | RQ4a - PLC | If you had an opportunity to collaborate with other supportive |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q13</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>band directors like yourself to make some of those ideas happen, would you be willing to try it out?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>RQ3 - Familiarity with CMS</td>
<td>When we moved to common core a few years back, what did that mean for you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>RQ3 - Familiarity with CMS</td>
<td>To what degree would you say the core arts standards inform your design for grading and assessments?</td>
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</table>
| Q16 | RQ4 - PLC Experience | Have you had any experiences being part of a Professional Learning Community, or PLC?  
  • Other teachers?  
  • What do those meetings look like?  
  • Other Band Directors?  
  • What do you think the advantage would be with all band directors?  
  • Was it beneficial or not/why? |
| Q17 | RQ4a - PLC Participation | Would you be willing to participate in a PLC with 10-12 other band directors over a semester to implement some of your ideas like [idea from IQ 11] out? |
| Q18 | Closing | I think that’s about it, do you have any questions for me? |