EXPANDING THE FOCUS: ADDING CREATIVE ACTIVITIES TO THE SECONDARY INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC ENSEMBLE

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Abstract

An emphasis on performance and musical re-creation has been seen in secondary instrumental classrooms for the last century. Due to community performance demands and lack of pre-service training with regards to creative processes, high school instrumental programs often lack experiences in which students can develop a more contextual understanding of music. The purpose of this project was to review the literature related to creative learning, explore models and frameworks pertaining to creative learning, and examine how creative processes like composition and improvisation contribute to secondary instrumental curricula. After reviewing the literature, a series of recommendations for practical activities are provided to begin introducing creative learning into modern high school band programs. Activity recommendations include informal exploration, scribbling, exploration etudes, creative repertoire preparation, SCAMPER, soundpainting, Developing Musicianship through Improvisation, and informance preparation.

Keywords: creativity, secondary instrumental ensemble, band, improvisation, composition, creative learning models
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Expanding the Focus: Adding Creative Activities to the Secondary Instrumental Music Ensemble

After completing my undergraduate degree in 2017, I began teaching as the band and choir director at Braxton County High School in Sutton, West Virginia. As of 2019, Braxton County High School served 549 students (ninth through twelfth grade) with a student to teacher ratio of 15:1 (NCES, 2018); the school has a minority enrollment of less than 3%. I am the sole music educator at the high school and, aside from directing band and choir ensembles, I also teach music appreciation, acoustic guitar, music theory, and theatre courses. Notably, the poverty rate in Braxton County is over 20% which is nearly double the national average (USCB, 2018). A significant number of Braxton County High School students receive nutritional assistance due to their family’s socioeconomic level. Characteristically, Braxton County High School is quite similar to a number of other rural high schools throughout West Virginia: funding for basic school necessities is scarce and supplemental funding for the arts is practically non-existent. The Braxton County High School music program only functions through the support of parent booster organizations and widespread local fundraising.

The broader community of Braxton County, West Virginia encompasses six small towns: Flatwoods, Sutton, Burnsville, Little Birch, Frametown, and Gassaway. Each town contains its own elementary school which feeds into a consolidated middle school. Undeniably, there is a strong sense of individualistic town pride. For example, four of the towns hold their own Christmas parades, two of the towns hold their own Independence Day parade, and three of the towns hold an annual community celebration parade. It has been a long-standing tradition to have the band perform at all of these functions. While this already presents a rather full schedule, the band also performs at all home and away football games, as well as judged festivals and non-
competitive spectacles around the state, which is the expectation of board administration and community members. As with other rural music programs throughout America, the band is a vital part of both the broader community and the individual small towns that encompass said community.

Community relevance is certainly appreciated by music programs. However, a significant concern arises when the central function of a secondary instrumental ensemble is to produce community performances rather than to provide a comprehensive music education. With relevance to the four artistic processes addressed in the National Core Arts Standards (NCAS, 2014), directors may place an overwhelming emphasis on performance standards with a profound neglect towards topics like “Responding to,” “Connecting with”, and “Creating music” (NCAS, 2014). In an effort to provide my students with a well-rounded music education, I have contemplated how creativity standards can be addressed through the traditional secondary performing ensemble.

**Purpose Statement**

Many high school music programs, but particularly those in rural areas, depend on community interaction for both ensemble recruitment and funding. This leads music educators to question how creative and student-centered instruction may be introduced while also fulfilling performance obligations. Therefore, the purpose of this project was to review the existing scholarly literature related to creative instruction for high school performing ensembles focusing on curricular frameworks and educational philosophies that address creativity standards. The following questions guided this project:

1. How do creative activities affect student engagement in the large ensemble classroom?
(2) How can music educators implement activities involving creative performance, creative listening, composing/arranging, and improvising into the instrumental large ensemble?

Review of Related Literature

Teacher and student perceptions regarding instruction in the secondary instrumental ensemble have revealed an adherence or expectation of performance culture (Menard, 2015; Snell, 2012; Vitale, 2017). This suggests that students and teachers alike viewed performance as the central function of secondary ensembles. Historically, school bands were popularized in the late-19th century as decommissioned Union and Confederate musicians went home to form community bands (Starr & Waterman, 2018). Additionally, the Sousa Band’s extensive nationwide touring from 1895 to 1918 further supported the desire for community band performance (Starr & Waterman, 2018). Understandably, the general public’s historic perception on the success of music programs related to the product that the program puts forth, and traditionally this product took the form of concerts, adjudicated festivals, and marching field competitions/shows. This has led to an established performance culture amongst many secondary instrumental ensembles (Snell, 2012; Vitale, 2017). Researchers maintained that community expectations, time constraints, and performance-oriented pre-service training further accentuate the performance focus in the classroom (Fleischmann, 2020; Snell, 2012; Stewart, 2013; Vitale, 2017). More recently, music educators and scholars have recommended a curricular expansion towards creative learning in an effort to provide a more comprehensive music education (Mark & Gary, 2007; CNAEA, 1994; NCCAS, 2014; Thomas, 1970; WMEA, 1977).

Creative learning in music provides opportunities for students to introspectively explore music and participate in meaningful experiences through participatory music making (Fleischmann, 2020; Gilbert, 2016; Robinson et al., 2011; Williams, 2011). Further, researchers
have revealed that learning through creative processes like composition and improvisation resulted in heightened musical fluency, enhanced self-efficacy, and greater levels of musical achievement (Davison, 2010; Hartz & Bauer, 2016; Hickey et al., 2015; Higgins & Campbell, 2010; Wall, 2018). Some scholars argue that the point of emphasis in a performance focused setting becomes the product which is put forth rather than the process encountered by young minds (Gilbert, 2016; Williams, 2011). Still, scholars must not discount the current perceptions of secondary educators; specifically, that program viability is reliant upon frequent performance (Snell, 2012; Vitale, 2017). Understanding the existing rationales and educational approaches pertaining to general creativity may help to clarify how a philosophical expansion of both performing and creative learning can be introduced into the secondary instrumental classroom. Additionally, exploring the roles of improvisation and composition in the traditional instrumental ensemble may help to reveal practical ways in which educators can implement creative activities.

**Models of Creativity in Music Education**

Creative learning in music education has been a sought after curricular goal for the last 75 years (CNAEA, 1994; Mark & Gary, 2007; NCCAS, 2014; Thomas, 1970; WMEA, 1977). However, teacher and student perceptions reveal a significant emphasis on musical re-creation through performance preparation rather than musical generation through creative processes like composition and improvisation (Bernhard, 2019; Snell, 2012; Vitale, 2017). Nonetheless, educators and researchers alike still note the importance of creative learning towards a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of music (Snell, 2012). Unfortunately, a lack of pedagogical experience, as well as community performance pressure, has led to a performance cycle that is largely void of creative learning (Bernhard, 2019; Vitale, 2017) With this in mind, leading researchers and scholars in the field of music education have provided models and
frameworks to break this aforementioned cycle (Hall, 2020; Hickey & Webster, 2001; Holsberg, 2009; Sindberg, 2009; Stewart, 2013).

Prior to discussing the future of creative music learning in the field of music education, it is necessary to understand the current presence of creativity in the music classroom. Snell (2012) conducted a survey-based research study with 314 New York instrumental music educators. Using a Likert-type response format, Snell (2012) determined teacher perception, curricular inclusion, preparation, and comfortability with regards to teaching each of the nine 1994 National Music Standards. Snell (2012) revealed that study participants generally felt as if all standards were important, but a noticeably higher curricular importance rating was given to standards involving performing, reading, and notating music. Similarly, educators suggested that students were more engaged when participating in activities that involved recreation rather than improvising or composing. Interestingly, this identification of curricular importance and student engagement is directly correlated to participants’ perception of teacher/graduate preparation and professional development. This suggests that participants who felt teacher/graduate pre-service programs and professional development opportunities left them unprepared to teach improvisation and composition also felt standards involving performing, reading, and notating music were more important.

Vitale’s (2017) mixed-methods study on the role of creativity in Ontario secondary music classrooms largely concurs with the findings of Snell (2012). Like Snell (2012), Vitale (2017) used self-report data to determine teacher perceptions with regards to creativity in the secondary ensemble curriculum. Vitale (2017) revealed that music educators overwhelmingly felt teaching creativity was important at the secondary level, but that the province curriculum and formal teaching approaches led to a significant absence of creative learning in the classroom. This
notion supports the findings of Snell (2012) in that a higher degree of curricular importance is given to formal skills like performing, reading, and notating music. Bernhard (2019) suggested that secondary ensemble directors can easily fall into a sequence of prepare, practice, prepare, and perform. Vitale (2017) refers to this sequence as a “music education vortex” (p. 39) that strips students of autonomy, independence, and the ability to act on personal interests in music. Participants in Vitale’s (2017) study agreed that informal music practices like self-directed learning, playing by ear, and improvising encouraged creative thinking. Vitale (2017) further suggested that educators felt as if an informal setting encouraged freedom, risk taking, and general creativity. Unfortunately, participants stated that public performance demands present a nearly insurmountable challenge to the incorporation of creative endeavors like improvisation and composition (Vitale, 2017). This finding concurs with a plethora of research regarding teacher and student perceptions of creative music learning (Holsberg, 2009; Snell, 2012; Stewart, 2013).

Instrumental music educators largely focus curricula on the re-creation of music, as opposed to the generation of new music (Snell, 2012). Researchers have suggested this is often due to established performance cultures (Hall, 2020; Holsberg, 2009; Snell, 2012; Stewart, 2013; Vitale, 2017). Nonetheless, research has shown that curricula focused on re-creation can simultaneously emphasize performance for performance’s sake rather than performance for musical understanding (Stewart, 2013). Hall (2020) argued that ensemble directors unevenly delegate instructional time to convergent skills over divergent skills. Using Webster’s (1990) model of creative thinking as a point of reference, Hall (2020) suggested that creative thinking requires a combination of convergent and divergent skills. To facilitate creative thinking in the secondary performance ensemble, Hall (2020) offered a number of suggestions including
cooperatively solving musical problems through reflection, intentionally listening to music, and moving from conductor/director to facilitator of music learning. Through the development of creative thinking skills, music educators will be inviting deeper levels of understanding beyond technical accuracy.

Hickey and Webster (2001) wrote an article referencing the function of creative thinking in music education. Namely, the authors discussed the “Four P’s” of creativity: person, process, product, and place. Using Webster’s four-step model for the creative thinking process, Hickey and Webster (2001) described the importance of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification as it pertains to creative thinking in music. Preparation refers to the initial formation of ideas regarding a creative product. Incubation refers to a period of time in which a person is not directly contemplating a creative problem, but ideas are active in the subconscious mind. Illumination is “described as the ‘aha!’ effect” (Hickey & Webster, 2001, p. 20). In essence, illumination occurs when a quality creative idea comes to mind. Finally, verification refers to the culmination of creative ideas into a creative product.

In addition to describing the “Four P’s” of creativity, Hickey and Webster (2001) also described the essential creative principle of thinking in sound. In essence, creative thinking in sound is a process that encourages students to imaginatively consider sound as it is applied to listening, performing, composing, and improvising music. Imaginatively considering sound is somewhat different than audiation as the former refers to a more divergent realization of sound whereas the latter refers to mentally hearing and understanding music. Hickey and Webster (2001) also discussed the notion of combining the tedious process of skill building in music with creative activities. This is a particularly relevant topic for instrumental music educators. Ample research has shown lack of instructional time as a reason for hesitancy when planning or
incorporating creative music learning into the curriculum (Holsberg, 2009; Snell, 2012; Vitale, 2017). Merging skill-building with creative activities allows educators to simultaneously address fundamental skills like tone-building and technique with personal music making through composition and improvisation in a time-efficient manner (Hickey & Webster, 2001). An example of this approach might be an activity developed by Hickey (2012) called exploration etudes. In short, exploration etudes are a compositional opportunity for students to exhibit notational and technical understanding on specific topics. Students could be asked to compose short etudes that examine articulations, dynamics, scalar patterns, odd meters, or any number of musical concepts.

Similar to Hickey and Webster (2001), Norris (2010) also recommended that instrumental music educators consider merging fundamental and creative skill development. With respect to the 1994 National Music Standards and comprehensive musicianship, Norris (2010) argued that a significant shift of focus from knowledge to behaviors was evident in 21st century music education. In this sense, knowledge refers to a holistic understanding of the basic musical elements (pitch, duration, intensity, and timbre) and behaviors refer to how students may be able to use this knowledge (singing, performing, improvising, etc.) (Norris, 2010). While this particular article was written prior to the release of the 2014 National Core Arts Standards, it could certainly be argued that the focus on behaviors has been further amplified by the categorization of standards within four artistic processes: performing, creating, responding, and connecting. With this in mind, Norris (2010) recommended a four-part curricular model for ensemble directors to facilitate musical creativity. Through the model, Norris (2010) suggested “(1) a focus on the musical elements; (2) a cognitive approach with which understanding of musical elements may be developed and demonstrated; (3) musical behaviors that specifically
include improvising, composing, and arranging; and (4) repertoire that sequentially introduces the musical elements” (p. 59). Both Norris (2010), as well as Hickey and Webster (2001), seem to recommend the intertwining of skill development with creative experiences as a way to give context and personal meaning to music learning.

Developing a holistic understanding of musical elements is also a key principle to comprehensive musicianship. The Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance project (CMP), is defined as “a program of instruction which emphasizes the interdependence of musical knowledge and musical performance” (WMEA, 1977, p. 1). Differences in a CMP program compared to a traditional program include a focus on creative music making and musical discovery rather than re-creation or teacher-centered learning. Additionally, CMP emphasizes multiple musical competencies (i.e. creating, performing, and responding) whereas traditional programs largely emphasize performing. Existing as a teaching/planning tool, the CMP model focuses around five points: music selection, analysis, outcomes, strategies, and assessment. Using the CMP model, Stewart (2013) conducted a study to explore how CMP informs the planning process in four Minnesota high school music programs. Principally, CMP involves an expansion from instrumental education as a means of concert preparation towards performance as a catalyst to deeper musical understanding (Sindberg, 2009). Stewart (2013) revealed that all four teacher participants believed that instrumental music students should be developing skills beyond those necessary for performance. These skills included developing a cognitive and affective understanding of the music. Notably, Stewart (2013) recognized through his collective case study that cognitive and affective understandings were most commonly developed during class discussions and student conducting experiences. Data collection for this study included teacher and student interviews, observations/field notes, and classroom artifacts. While not
directly observed, composition was recommended as an area of interest by interviewed students (Stewart, 2013). Two of the four teacher participants recommended or included chamber ensemble experiences during the spring semester for student-centered communication and creativity (i.e., improvisation and composition). Further, all four of the teacher-participants recognized that high performance expectations and lack of planning/instructional time inhibited an ideal incorporation of the CMP model and principles.

**Student-centered Practices**

Williams (2011) presented a notable, yet polarizing, argument against the traditional school performance ensemble (band, choir, and orchestra) model. Williams (2011) discussed the notion of rapidly dropping participation percentages for high school music classes and the cause for such a drastic decline being correlated to the large ensemble model not widely representing the interests of students. Citing a study conducted by researchers Byrne and Sheridan (2000), Williams (2011) concluded that widening the variety of instruments (including non-traditional instruments) and musical styles along with the utilization of student-centered teaching methods led to a significant increase of music participants in Scottish schools. Williams (2011) suggested exploring new models for music education that emphasize smaller class sizes and prioritize student-centered learning. Additionally, Williams (2011) recommended that educators begin to relinquish creative decision-making to students and transition towards concerts that focus on an informal sharing of student learning practices.

Keeping with the theme of student-centered creative learning, Holsberg’s (2009) dissertation focused on broadening the traditional frameworks and pedagogical practices for the standard high school band setting. Participants in the study included 40 students from St. Benedict’s Preparatory School in Newark, New Jersey. The students ranged from grades 7 to 12.
Holsberg (2009) compared a traditional or teacher-centered model of learning which he termed the “Revelli paradigm” with a constructivist or student-centered model of learning which he termed the “Dewey paradigm.” In an effort to explore the Dewey paradigm/constructivist learning model, Holsberg (2009) designed several dyad, small group, and large group activities for the participants. Each of the activities took students through a pedagogical framework in which they were presented with a problem, asked to investigate the problem, and construct ways to deal with the problem. Additionally, most of the activity sets led students from exploratory problems to more higher-order or demanding problems. For example, the dyad activity set began by asking pairs of students to work on any piece of their own choosing. In the second dyad activity, students were asked to compose a new solo while simultaneously offering peer critiques to their partner who was completing the same task. Notably, Holsberg (2009) discussed the difficulties in shifting the focus of the large ensemble. Holsberg (2009) mentioned that students’ perceptions of how a large ensemble typically operates prohibited them from immediately investing in the creative process. In concluding his study, Holsberg (2009) had the students plan and perform a concert for the school’s student body. Unlike the traditional instrumental concert, students largely performed in small group settings and took time to discuss the learning processes experienced throughout the unit. Holsberg (2009) found that many of his students felt an enlightened sense of creative freedom while other students felt unproductive in the chaos of constructivism. Ultimately, Holsberg (2009) concluded that this new creative environment led his students to take ownership of their creative endeavors and participate in leadership roles that are normally dedicated to the conductor.

Similar to the constructivist approach studied by Holsberg (2009), Gilbert (2016) recommended a student-centered framework based on the CCC (curious, collaborative,
creativity) model developed by Collins (2014). Ultimately, Gilbert recommended “placing the responsibility to be imaginative in the hands of our students and rethinking the design of performance” (2016, p. 28). Gilbert (2016) noted that many directors experience hesitation towards true student-centered instruction due to time constraints and community performance expectations. Nonetheless, Gilbert (2016) maintained that a flipped classroom is necessary to engage and fulfill the educational needs of today’s students. Using the CCC conceptual framework, Gilbert (2016) recommended secondary instrumental educators begin by collecting pertinent student information and establishing a democratic process for selecting repertoire - curiosity. Next, Gilbert (2016) suggested developing teams of student musicians that are focused on areas like creating, performing, and responding - collaboration. Within these respective teams, students organize and create relevant tasks. For example, Gilbert (2016) suggested that the performance team may be responsible for developing rehearsal goals and planning “informances” (p. 29) whereas the creating team may be responsible for “arranging, composing, or improvising new music to be studied and performed” (p. 30). Lastly, Gilbert (2016) recommended displaying student creativity via informances which serve as an informal alternative to performances. The notion of informances was also recommended by Williams (2011) as a means to share student learning practices with the community. Notably, informances as discussed by both Williams (2011) and Gilbert (2016) are conceptualized as a presentation of process over product.

While Holsberg (2009) and Gilbert (2016) offered a constructivist perspective to creative musicking, Robinson et al. (2011) proposed a seven-step instructional model aptly titled “The Creative Music Strategy” (p. 50). The model itself was designed to assist/guide lesson planning with a central focus on improvisation and composition. Robinson et al. (2011) initially utilized
the model in the general music setting. However, the creative music strategy can easily be adapted for the secondary instrumental setting (Fleischmann, 2020). The sequential steps proposed by Robinson et al. (2011) include “springboard for the strategy, develop an open-ended musical question, large-group brainstorm, personal exploration, large-group conducted improvisation, record for reflection, and reflective aural/oral analysis” (p. 53). Principally, the model involves engaging students in discussion on relevant and perhaps even cross-curricular topics. For example, Robinson et al. (2011) proposed using the Underground Railroad springboard topic during Black History Month. The relevant topic then leads to open-ended questions with verbal responses. Next, Robinson et al. (2011) suggested that, with a small amount of creative questioning, the students can transform their verbal responses into musical responses. Using the same example of the Underground Railroad, the authors suggested asking questions like: “What does fear sound like?” and “What sound comes to your mind when you think about bravery?” (Robinson et al., 2011, p. 53). The remaining steps transition towards participating in the creative musical processes and reflection.

Continuing with a focus on the seven-step creative music strategy, as discussed by Robinson et al. (2011), Fleischmann (2020) conducted a participatory action research study focusing on improvisation, composition, and arranging (ICA) in four Southern California large ensemble settings. Each of the four participant groups revealed through an initial survey that creativity was not a central focus of their programs. The reasons for this absence of creativity varied, but most typically included time constraints, teacher insecurity, teacher attitude, and student apprehension. In addition to participating in the survey, participants also formed an online professional learning community (PLC) that served to brainstorm ways to meaningfully integrate ICA activities into the curriculum. Fleischmann (2020) revealed that the PLC utilized
the creative music strategy (Robinson et al., 2011) for planning and implementation of their lessons. In teaching two separate lessons, each participant used at least four steps from the seven-step instructional model. Most of the teachers did not allow time for personal exploration, and none of the teachers recorded the ICA activities for student reflection. Nonetheless, the directors did reveal that the creative music strategy (Robinson et al., 2011) helped to serve as a catalyst for productive discussion and planning in the PLC. Further, Fleischmann (2020) revealed that the instructional model helped participants overcome the anticipated obstacles of time, student apprehension, performance quality, and teacher insecurity.

While introducing creative learning can certainly be difficult in the traditional band setting, ample evidence exists to support that a curricular expansion is necessary (Gilbert, 2016; Snell, 2012; Vitale, 2017). Existing frameworks and theories for incorporating creative learning into music curricula include the creative music strategy, CCC, constructivist learning models or the Dewey paradigm, comprehensive musicianship, and Webster’s (1990) model of creative thinking (Gilbert, 2016; Holsberg, 2009; Norris, 2010; Robinson et al., 2011; Stewart, 2013). Utilizing these frameworks to conceptualize how creative learning may effectively take place in the traditional band setting will serve as a catalyst towards a broad curricular expansion.

**Improvisation in the Instrumental Music Classroom**

The philosophical presence of performance remains a central part of most traditional high school instrumental programs (Brophy, 2002; Norgaard, 2017; Snell, 2019). This leaves instrumental music educators with the challenging task of expanding the focus to creative learning rather than merely shifting the focus to creative learning. Improvisation provides a meaningful process by which students can build skills that lead to a more comprehensive music understanding as well as better performance qualities (Agrell, 2019; Azzara, 1993; Davison,
With this in mind, researchers and scholars alike have explored the benefits of instruction in free and structured improvisation including an enhanced ability to audiate, heightened musical fluency, and enhanced self-efficacy towards improvisation and music learning (Davison, 2010; Hartz & Bauer, 2016; Hickey et al., 2015; Higgins & Campbell, 2010; Wall, 2018). Further, educators and researchers have provided frameworks from which improvisation can be effectively introduced (Agrell, 2019; Minors, 2012; Snell, 2019).

Burnard (2000) provided insight into the student’s perspective on improvising and composing. Specifically, Burnard (2000) investigated the interconnectivity between improvisation and composition as detailed by the student and how children’s previous experiences relate to the mental processes used when music-making. Interestingly, Burnard (2000) provided a profile of three 12-year old student participants with varying musical backgrounds. These profiles were developed through an initial interview process that detailed previous meaningful musical experiences and a late-phase interview process that offered a reflection opportunity for students to detail the meaning of improvisation and composition. Notably, the late-phase interview process followed a six-month course of study in which participants experienced 21 weekly music-making sessions. Burnard (2000) concluded that “children’s willingness to improvise and compose is a function of creating an environment where children can express their creativity” (p. 21). Pedagogically, Burnard (2000) suggested incorporating creative activities that easily integrate with a student’s existing musical experiences and skills. Additionally, student participants noted through pictorial sketches that improvisation is an impulsive activity that requires thinking-in-action whereas composition is a structured process that incorporates revision. Yet, a significant degree of interrelatedness was
also exhibited as participants suggested improvisation acts as a “creative catalyst to externalize musical thoughts” (Burnard, 2000, p. 16) ultimately leading to composition.

While Burnard (2000) explored the interconnectivity between student experiences and musical creativity, Wall (2018) studied what and how a group of middle school instrumental music students learned while participating in eight sessions of group improvisation activities. Using a participant observer research model, Wall (2018) studied how six fifth-grade band members learned and interacted in group lessons themed around free improvisation. Wall (2018) noted that musical fluency was a skill broadly developed as students were able to perform sounds from their imaginative minds on their instrument through musical motives and phrases. Further, Wall (2018) suggested that personal interest played a large role in how improvisations developed as the teacher moved from the role of decision maker to facilitator. Students who were more interested in improvising and composing developed their musical fluency through performing original music. Other students focused less on creating original music and more on varying ideas and themes from other music by rote playing. Implications of this study for the field of music education include designing curricula that afford students the opportunity to explore individual and personal decisions in music through free improvisation. Wall (2018) also recommended that music educators begin to recognize that even young students are able to make pedagogical decisions based on their respective interests without overt teacher direction. Finally, Wall (2018) maintained that while learning through exploration and collaboration may seem too informal or time consuming, a musical understanding rooted in context and meaningful experience is well-worth the curricular expansion.

Hickey et al. (2015) studied the role of free improvisation instruction on improvisation confidence and achievement amongst 19 college non-music majors. In defining free
improvisation, Hickey et al. (2015) stated that free improvisation was “improvised music without any rules beyond the logic or inclination of the musician(s) involved” (p. 128). Hickey et al. (2015) and Higgins (2008) argued that free improvisation provided a more democratic and creative environment for students compared to structured improvisation which largely maintains the traditional teacher/leader roles. Hickey et al. (2015) took participants through a ten-week free improvisation curriculum in which a plethora of exploratory and aural based activities were sequentially introduced. Periodically throughout the 10-week study, participants would perform a recorded solo improvisation which was later scored by judges for fluency, syntax, creativity, and quality. Surprisingly, Hickey et al. (2015) found that group free improvisation instruction did not improve the improvisation achievement amongst participants; however group instruction did significantly improve improvisation confidence. With this in mind, Hickey et al. (2015) proposed that free improvisation instruction could help to alleviate creative anxiety amongst K-12 students as well as classically trained music education majors.

With regards to free improvisation as discussed by Hickey et al. (2015), Higgins (2008), and Wall (2018), a few common themes become increasingly evident. Free improvisation is centered around the idea that improvisatory learning should be about exploration and invention. Free improvisation, unlike structured improvisation, requires little to no prerequisite (traditional) musical knowledge, and is instead aurally focused and student-centered (Hickey, 2015; Higgins, 2008). Higgins and Campbell (2010) offered several suggestions for incorporating group free or semi-structured improvisation instruction into the instrumental setting. Notable suggestions include creating a classroom environment conducive to risk taking and exploration and building from points of comfort. For example, one specific suggested activity involved a focus on breathing before singing any chosen pitch in a group setting. While simple, this activity
encourages listening and reacting to spontaneously created tone clusters and requires no prior musical training.

Agrell (2019) supported the use of free improvisation in the large ensemble curriculum, but also maintained that the term free improvisation may be less than ideal. Improvisation is often mistakenly considered a jazz specific activity, and free improvisation falsely implies “spontaneous playing without rules” (Agrell, 2019, p. 87). Rather, Agrell recommended terms like non-jazz improvisation or simply creative music. Importantly, listening and responding are foundational principles to free improvisation. Using a conversation model, Agrell argued that conversing involves one person speaking about a topic and the other person listening and responding to continue the overall progression of the interaction. Similarly, improvisation involves the presentation of an initial idea followed by an informed response to that idea. In addition to philosophical support, Agrell (2019) also provided examples of how to initiate free improvisation in the large ensemble setting. One example was using a common scale and having students play it in a normal fashion. Next, students may explore a range of aural based alterations to the scale. For example, students could add accents, change the tempo, change the note length, change the meter, change the articulation, or apply extended techniques.

Subsequently, Agrell (2019) provided a framework for approaching concert band improvisation which included areas relating to individual development, duets, small groups, and large groups. Agrell (2019) framed the duet as the “ideal unit for improvisation” (p. 94) and suggested that students be afforded the opportunity to create new music through improvisation in the duet setting. With respect to large ensemble improvisation, Agrell warned that pre-conceived notions of improvisation may impede immediate success. Additionally, even willing improvisers may create a disorienting environment in the large ensemble setting. To remedy this situation,
Agrell recommended first having students experience improvisation in the duet and small ensemble setting. Next, Agrell recommended utilizing a technique invented by New York musician Walter Thompson (2004) known as soundpainting. Soundpainting involves the conductor choosing a general creative constraint while the student chooses something more specific like which note(s) to play.

Minors (2012) provided an in-depth exploration of soundpainting in her case study on how function and sculpting gestures contribute to the dialogue between musicians. In this manner, function refers to a gesture with a precise interpretation. For example, a function gesture may tell the group who specifically is to perform and when. On the other hand, a sculpting gesture answers the question of how and what the ensemble will perform. For example, the soundpainter could inform the ensemble to perform a long tone with a decrescendo. Minors (2012) noted that the soundpainting model has a specific order of who, what, how, and when. In practice, this may mean that the soundpainter will inform the ensemble of which players will perform (whole group), what they are to perform (long tones), how they will perform it (with a decrescendo), and when they will start and stop playing. Minors (2012) also revealed how soundpainting functions as a creative endeavor in improvisation or composition. Soundpainting is, in essence, composing in real time. The idea of composing in the moment without a direct intent to revise is a fundamental principle of improvisation (Azzara, 2002). First, the soundpainter presents gestures that typically lead to divergent musical responses from the ensemble. The soundpainter then has the opportunity to request alterations to the musical soundscape via subsequent gestures. Minors (2012) noted that educators could function as a soundpainter and incorporate memory gestures in which specific pre-composed or improvised motifs are revisited later in the soundpainting. Ultimately, soundpainting is a language of
gestures that sparks internal dialogue amongst ensemble participants (Minors, 2012). While similarities could certainly be drawn to traditional conducting, the gesturing transforms from a command to a catalyst for conversation.

Ample research has shown teachers’ lack of comfort with creative processes as an impediment to the regular inclusion of improvisation in the secondary ensemble curriculum (Bell, 2003; Brophy, 2002; Snell, 2012; Stewart, 2013). Nonetheless, researchers and scholars like Azzara (2002), McPherson (1993), and Bernhard (2019) maintain that experiences in improvisation allow students to develop unique and personal representation of aural and notational stimuli. Azzara (1993) conducted a study in which he explored the connection between a curriculum rooted in improvisation and the music achievement of 66 fifth grade band students. Using a control group of students who did not experience the improvisation curriculum, Azzara (1993) discovered that those students who received instruction with improvisation were able to perform three notated etudes with a higher degree of rhythmic accuracy, pitch accuracy, and expression. Similarly, McPherson (1993) conducted a study on the influences of improvisation achievement with 101 seventh through twelfth grade clarinetists and trumpeters. McPherson (1993) discovered that students who revealed experiences with singing, mental rehearsal, and/or playing a secondary instrument demonstrated a higher degree of improvisation achievement.

In agreement with the findings of researchers like Azzara (1993), Bernhard (2019), McPherson (1993), Norgaard (2017) presented multiple frameworks from the perspective of professional improvisers. Specifically, Norgaard recognized the important presence of stored patterns and structural understanding within the improvisational process of gifted improvisers. With regards to pedagogical applications, Norgaard recommended incorporating routine practice
of simple rhythms and familiar structures to build an improvisational database from which students can build off of. Further, Norgaard (2017) suggested adding structure to improvisation in an effort to broaden the focus of students from note choice to a more substantial musical phrase/idea. Finally, Norgaard (2017) maintained that the driving force behind ensemble learning is the public performance. While this may not always be beneficial, in the current model of large ensemble learning for skills to be considered important they must have relevancy to a public performance. Therefore, Norgaard (2017) recommended incorporating improvisation skills into the ensemble repertoire through pieces like “Metroplex: Three Postcards from Manhattan,” “Danzas Cubanas,” and “Hues of Blue. Each of the aforementioned pieces were composed by Robert Sheldon and contain either a designated (repeated) section for individual improvisation or recommended measures/sections that are conducive to student improvisation.

Hartz and Bauer (2016) conducted a study in which they explored the role of improvisation in increasing self-efficacy amongst amateur community concert band members. Participants in the study noted that after eight weeks of instruction on structured improvisation their ability to play by ear had significantly increased. Snell and Azzara (2015) came to similar conclusions after studying the role of a seven-week improvisation course on the confidence and inhibition of undergraduate music majors. In both studies, participants’ self-efficacy with regards to improvisation significantly increased. Similarly, participants noted increased success with improvisation-guided skills like audiation and playing by ear.

With similarities to Hartz and Bauer (2016), as well as Snell and Azzara (2015), Davison (2010) studied the role of aural and aural/notated transcription modeling conditions on self-efficacy and improvisation achievement. The study included 76 middle school student participants and required each student participate in 10 treatment sessions based on their
assigned modeling group of aural and aural/notated. Data were collected through self-efficacy scales and pretest/posttest performance reviews. Davison (2010) concluded that both models mentioned above were equally as effective in terms of improvisation achievement. Additionally, Davison’s (2010) participants identified a much higher self-efficacy rating towards improvisation and general instrumental performance after modeling instruction. This led the researcher to suggest that music educators consider using modeling-based improvisation instruction to increase student confidence towards instrumental music in general.

Numerous researchers have noted increased success with audiation through improvisation guided instruction (Azzara, 2015; Davison, 2010; Hartz & Bauer, 2016). Researcher and music scholar Edwin E. Gordon is largely attributed with coining the term audiation and he identifies it as thought in music. With a comparison to language, Gordon (1999) maintained that music is the language itself, performance is how the language is conveyed, and “audiation is what is communicated” (p. 42). In simpler terms, audiation occurs when we “think in sound” (Hickey & Webster, 2001). Audiation is the process by which we mentally understand music through listening, reading, composing, or improvising. Needless to say, audiation as a skill is directly related to overall musical aptitude. Processes like improvisation provide critical means in which educators can improve audiation through informal and personal experiences (Snell & Azzara, 2015; Davison, 2010; Hartz & Bauer, 2016).

Snell (2019) framed the need for improvisation in the musical curriculum through a comparison to language understanding. Musicians build a vocabulary of songs, melodic ideas, styles, and skills from which their musical vocabulary is built. Snell suggested that “asking someone to say, sing, or play something in the moment provides an ideal way to assess that person’s learning and understanding of a given vocabulary” (2019, p. 117). Notably, scholars
like Hickey (2009) and Williams (2011) found that structured improvisation was less conducive to creative musical development than free or informal improvisation. However, scholars like Snell (2019) maintain that effective resources are readily available for teaching improvisation in the secondary ensemble setting. Furthermore, Snell (2019) recommended that instrumental music educators combine frameworks of recreation and generation to achieve a comprehensive music education. With regards to a comprehensive music education, Snell (2019) suggested that students are led to more complete understandings which are rooted in experience, demonstration, and application when incorporating creative skills like improvisation. Based on research by Azzara (2002) and Kratus (1996), Snell (2019) recommended a sequenced approach to teaching improvisation with young instrumentalists that includes: “prioritization of learning multiple musical vocabularies” as well as “making comparisons and whole-part-whole instruction” (p. 118).

Beyond advantages relating to a comprehensive understanding of music, some scholars propose that activities like improvisation provide a more utilitarian benefit. For example, Sawyer (2006) argued that group creativity in music simultaneously benefits non-musical group collaboration. With specific relevance to improvisation and collaboration, Sawyer (2006) maintained that music educators inadvertently teach music as a solitary activity through repetitive technical drills, memorization exercises, and sight-reading activities. Sawyer (2006) proposed that group creativity and musical collaboration centered around group interaction leads to higher success in non-musical group collaboration and/or problem solving. Importantly, Sawyer (2006) noted that for collaboration through improvisation to be truly successful, music educators should design curricula to emphasize group interaction rather than (solely) reinforce individual accuracy.
Composition in the Instrumental Music Classroom

Composition as a curricular skill and goal has been proposed or suggested as a common experience in all United States’ music classrooms since the 1960s (CNAEA, 1994; Mark and Gary, 2007; NCCAS, 2014; Thomas, 1970; WMEA, 1977). Nonetheless, researchers and scholars have noted that a curricular expansion towards composition and other creative processes has yet to take place. Instead, a rather intense focus on performance and musical re-creation remains (Menard, 2015; Norris, 2010; Snell, 2012; Stewart, 2013; Vitale, 2017). While the issues of time constraint, community pressure for performance, and lack of pedagogical creative training certainly exist, the benefits of a comprehensive music education through composition are evident. Specifically, Menard (2015) referenced the work of Barrett (2003) in saying that music composition is a form of meaning-making through a creative dialogue between culture, student-as-musician, and student-as-composer. In this manner, students are able to construct new and meaningful understandings of music beyond recreation and technical accuracy (Menard, 2015).

In an effort to explore the effects of introducing composition into a high school music curriculum, Menard (2015) conducted a case study with a secondary general music class and traditional band program. Menard (2015) discussed the hesitations of educators and students alike as they pertain to composition instruction. Specifically, Menard (2015) noted that the band director feared composition instruction would negatively alter the performance culture of the band and limit instructional time needed for performance preparation. Additionally, the band director was concerned about previous teacher training in creativity and the ability for effective composition instruction to take place in a large ensemble setting. Similarly, interviews with students revealed that their hesitations included adhering to the performance culture tradition,
rehearsal time limitations, aural and theoretical understanding, and self-efficacy in composition (Menard, 2015). After discussing pre-conceived notions of composition and creative learning in a pre-interview, participant educators and students completed a seven-week program in composition instruction. Students began with three-note compositions and progressed through antecedent and consequent phrase composition. Further, students used the SCAMPER (substitute, combine, add, maximize/minimize, eliminate, rearrange) model as discussed by Eberle (1996), and concluded with a multi-phrase, one to two voice composition. Students and teachers alike concluded that composition instruction led to heightened musical understanding.

With strong similarities to Menard (2015), Doiron (2019) conducted a case study on two secondary instrumental music teachers and their perceptions on including composition activities into the secondary instrumental curriculum. Unlike Menard (2015), Doiron (2019) did not ask for educator participants to introduce composition but sought out two music educators who already prioritized composition and received high praise for outstanding performances. Several researchers have found that secondary instrumental music educators often ignore creative music education in favor of preparation for public performance. Doiron (2019) suggested that the findings from his case study further supported a plethora of researchers who maintained that “improvising and composing help to develop musicianship, aid music literacy, provide a means for creative expression, enhance music reading, and improve performance skills” (p. 119). Specifically, participants in Doiron’s (2019) study suggested through interviews that composition opportunities resulted in improved aural skills, musical understanding, and even performance ability.

To further connect the above study to practical teaching applications, Doiron (2019) discussed ways in which the two educator participants incorporated composition into the
instrumental classroom. One participant revealed several activities that he used to prepare students for composition and engage students in the creative process. The participant recommended singing as a context building aural approach to creative musicianship. With this in mind, he incorporated chorale singing as a relatively frequent warm-up activity. Next, the participant recommended using aural transpositions of common melodies as a tool to engage creative listening and audiation. Students would perform a given scale followed by a common melody in that same key. Further, the participant recommended call-and-response patterns to develop listening skills as well as an understanding of melody construction. The director would begin by providing call patterns for the students to exemplify tonal patterns and would later incorporate student leaders. In a more direct compositional activity, the participant encouraged his students to create invented endings to method book exercises (Doiron, 2019). In sequencing, the director would use the full ensemble to perform an introductory phrase followed by a solo invented ending. Additionally, the participant discussed ways in which he had students make more holistic compositions. Specifically, he asked his students to invent a short melody using solfege, and to teach their melody to a fellow student (Doiron, 2019). The director would then ask students to create a duet by composing a harmonic accompaniment for their melody. Students would then pair up and learn/perform each others’ compositions. The participant noted that the success of this activity was largely supported by the aural skill development and contextual understanding built through the subsequent activities (Doiron, 2019).

Interestingly, the findings of Doiron (2019), particularly through his aforementioned participant interviews, draw some notable comparisons to the improvisation focused articles by Snell (2019) and Norgaard (2017). Specifically, creative processes like improvisation and composition are best applied through activities rooted in prior understanding. Snell (2019)
specifically mentioned an experience, demonstration, and application framework for introducing improvisation. Doiron (2019) noted that his participants developed activities in which students would contextually experience compositions in an aurally focused manner. Students would demonstrate an aural understanding through transposition and call-and-response patterns. Finally, students would apply this new understanding to compositional applications. Clearly, the interconnectivity of improvisation and composition, as described by Burnard (2000), is evident in the existing research.

Hickey (2012) presented a collection of ideas for composing in the K-12 music classroom. Importantly, Hickey (2012) noted that creative activities such as composition “open the door to a much deeper understanding of all of the concepts, the “rules” that should be taught in music education” (p. 15). Researchers like Azzara have ascertained through their body of work that restrictions or parameters when introducing creative activities are freeing to the student. However, Hickey (2012) recommended open composition with few parameters to promote exploration within personal and student-developed boundaries. Further, Hickey (2012) provided a practical discussion on a number of lesson activities pertaining to beginning, intermediate, and advanced students as well as music technology classes and large ensembles. The activities pertained to musical exploration, compositional prompts, form, fundamental musical elements, and advanced musical elements (Hickey, 2012).

As mentioned previously, Burnard (2000) noted a high degree of interconnectivity between composition and improvisation in her ethnographic multi-method study. Principally, student participants suggested that improvisation was a more impulsive activity while composition is a process based in revision. Nonetheless, as scholars like Burnard (2000) and Azzara (1993) have maintained, composition begins as improvisation with the added intent to
revise. Stringham (2010) conducted a mixed-methods study on the effects of an eight-week sequential music curriculum on the performance, composition, and improvisation achievement levels of 66 high school instrumentalists. Students were introduced to a sequential curriculum through a creative method book authored by Azzara and Grunow (2006): *Developing Musicianship through Improvisation*. Azzara and Grunow (2006) recommended an aural approach that corresponds with prominent models of creative learning (Hickey, 2015; Hickey et al., 2016; Higgins, 2008). However, unlike previous researchers (Agrell, 2019; Hickey, 2015; Higgins & Campbell, 2010; Wall, 2018), Azzara and Grunow (2006) proposed an antithesis to free improvisation through ultra-structured improvisation activities. Additionally, Azzara and Grunow (2006) presented a six-step unit design within their method book based on familiar and folk melodies. The six parts include repertoire, patterns and progressions, improvising melodic phrases, learning to improvise – seven skills, reading and writing, and learning characteristic solos. With regards to composition, a structural progression of aural development through neutral syllable and solfege singing is developed prior to introducing short improvisatory and composition tasks. Importantly, Azzara and Grunow (2006) aim to develop a harmonic and rhythmic context before introducing notated objectives. After a context has been established, improvisation is used as a catalyst towards composition (Burnard, 2000).

Stringham (2010) discussed how secondary instrumental students simultaneously learned to improvise and compose while preparing “Amazing Grace” (Ticheli, 1998) for performance. During an eight-week treatment period, students were instructed to sing, play, and notate the melody and bass line for “Amazing Grace.” Further, students were taught to improvise and compose tonal and rhythm patterns both using voice/solfege and their respective instruments. As portrayed in *Developing Musicianship through Improvisation (DMTI)*, the improvisation and
composition activities were both short and relatively non-exploratory. Rather, a very careful sequence of aural development with rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic context was utilized prior to introducing improvisation and composition activities within given harmonic progressions. Following the eight-week treatment period, Stringham (2010) concluded that students exhibited higher achievement levels in both improvising and composing. This suggests that it is possible to prepare ensembles for performance while simultaneously providing a comprehensive music education through creative instruction. Additionally, Stringham (2010) suggested that developing aural skills like a sense of tonality, meter, and style, was imperative to higher music achievement skills in all areas. Method books like *DMTI* (Azzara & Grunow, 2006) provide a means to pedagogically align aural skill development with creative learning and performance preparation.

With specific relevance to ensemble composition activities, Hickey (2012) recommended ensemble scribbling. Scribbling is when students freely improvise on their instruments. Hickey (2012) suggested using this exploratory activity to have students compose a phrase without notation. In essence, students freely improvise as a warm-up until they have developed a musical phrase (from memory) to share with the class. Additionally, Hickey (2012) recommended an ensemble composition activity in which the SCAMPER technique, as discussed in the Menard (2015) study, could be employed. Using *Rejouissance* by James Curnow (1988) as a point of reference, Hickey (2012) recommended exploring thematic variations. In the aforementioned piece, Curnow varies the theme from “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” in numerous ways. Students are tasked with writing a new variation on this theme and discussing the specific variation technique used. Hickey (2012) noted that while this activity was designed specifically for the work by James Curnow, it could be applied to any piece or song that employs thematic variation.
The benefits of creative learning have been widely researched over the last several decades. These benefits include improved overall musical achievement, deeper levels of musical understanding including a more holistic understanding of musical elements, and enhanced leadership abilities (Davison, 2010; Hartz & Bauer, 2016; Hickey et al., 2016; Higgins & Campbell, 2010; Sawyer, 2006; Wall, 2018). However, a lack of pedagogical training and time constraints/performance expectations have caused apprehension amongst secondary instrumental educators when considering how to implement creative learning strategies (Fleischmann, 2020; Snell, 2012; Stewart, 2013; Vitale, 2017). Researchers and scholars have provided a multitude of frameworks and models from which creative learning experiences and performance preparation can occur simultaneously (Fleischmann, 2020; Stewart, 2013; Stringham, 2010). Meanwhile, other leaders in the field of education have recommended a more significant shift towards a student-centered and student-led model of music learning in which traditional performances are replaced with informances (Gilbert, 2016; Holsberg, 2009; Williams, 2011). In both instances, a constructivist approach involving creative processes (improvisation and composition) that are conducive to instrumental teaching strategies were recommended.

Instruction in improvisation has led to an enhanced ability to audiate, heightened musical fluency, and higher levels of self-efficacy towards improvisation and music learning. Researchers have considered two different models of improvisation instruction: structured improvisation and free improvisation. Free improvisation instruction allows for more personal exploration and student-led decision making (Hickey et al., 2015; Higgins, 2008; Higgins & Campbell, 2010; Wall, 2018). Further, some scholars have maintained that free improvisation provides a more democratic environment for students to freely create while structured improvisation upholds outdated teacher/leader roles (Hickey et al., 2015). In contrast to free
improvisation, researchers like Azzara (1993), Bernhard (2019), Hartz and Bauer (2016), McPherson (1993), and Norgaard (2017), have suggested that a structural understanding is fundamental to the improvisational process. In essence, the researchers recommended incorporating aural-based skill development through modeling, call and response patterns, whole-part-whole instruction, and solfege singing, to develop a musical vocabulary. Scholars suggest that skillful improvisers utilize this developed vocabulary to build successful improvisations.

Finally, several researchers have suggested a significant connection between improvisation and composition (Azzara & Grunow, 2006; Burnard, 2000; Doiron, 2019). Scholars like Azzara (1993) have maintained that composition begins as improvisation with the intent to revise. Importantly, composition in the traditional sense also typically involves some form of either invented or standard notation. With this in mind, researchers have suggested that composition instruction leads to heightened degrees of musical understanding; particularly notation-based understanding (Menard, 2015). In a manner similar to improvisation instruction, composition instruction largely begins as an activity rooted in aural understanding (Doiron, 2019). In recognizing improvisation as a predecessor to composition, educators have recommended activities like scribbling in which students move from free improvisation to phrase composition (Hickey, 2012). Further, some researchers and scholars have recommended adding a notational element to structured improvisation learning strategies in which students improvise then compose within given harmonic progressions (Azzara & Grunow, 2006). Lastly, student composition, in a broader sense, can be implemented into traditional performances or informances through solos, duets, and chamber groups. For teachers who are concerned with community performance expectations, student compositions can provide an opportunity to
simultaneously fulfill expectations while also expanding from re-creation towards generation (Bernhard, 2019; Snell, 2012; Vitale, 2017).

**Discussion**

Through reviewing the literature, I have found that student engagement with creative activities appears to result in deeper musical understandings, higher self-efficacy in music, and ultimately higher musical achievement in both performance and creative skills. The second research question pertains to how music educators can implement activities that involve creative processes. With regards to the traditional instrumental ensemble, researchers and scholars have largely focused their work on the processes of improvisation and composition as they are most conducive to active instrumental music making. With this in mind, I have compiled a collection of sequential creative activities (see Table 1) that are either directly found within the body of reviewed literature or are supported by prominent creative learning frameworks and research.

**Table 1**

**Summary of Creative Activity Recommendations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Name</th>
<th>Creative Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal Exploration</td>
<td>Improvisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soundpainting</td>
<td>Improvisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Musicianship through Improvisation</td>
<td>Improvisation and Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribbling</td>
<td>Improvisation and Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Repertoire Preparation</td>
<td>Improvisation and Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAMPER</td>
<td>Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration Etude</td>
<td>Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informance Preparation</td>
<td>Improvisation and Composition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Researchers like Vitale (2017) and Snell (2012) have found that formal teaching approaches are both abundantly present and creatively diminishing in the music classroom. Unfortunately, this adherence to formal or traditional teaching practices is often due to teachers’ previous experiences in school and in educator training (Fleischmann, 2020; Stewart, 2013; Vitale, 2017). If we hope to expand the focus of instrumental music learning, we must consider practical ways in which we can introduce informal or student-centered teaching practices. I recommend beginning with informal exploration as an introduction to free improvisation and exploratory learning. Hickey (2015) and Higgins (2008) both maintained that free improvisation helps to establish a more democratic and creative environment. Further, free improvisation requires no prerequisite training as the goals are rooted in invention and exploration rather than technical accuracy.

In application, I would recommend incorporating informal exploration via five- to ten-minute exercises, weekly. However, due to the chaotic nature of informal exploration, I recommend framing the activities using the creative music strategy (Robinson et al., 2011). At first glance, fellow educators may assume that informal exploration refers to simply releasing students to their own creative devices. While this may be beneficial to some degree, managing a traditional large ensemble classroom without some semblance of direction could be cumbersome at first. Therefore, I suggest spring-boarding topics and creating open-ended musical questions for students to informally explore within the creative music strategy (Robinson et al., 2011). For instance, perhaps an ensemble is preparing a piece by Karl L. King who is renowned for his circus marches. Using the circus as a springboard to an open-ended question; for example, a director may ask the ensemble to suggest images or emotions associated with a ringmaster. Next, students would develop brief exploratory improvisations to musically represent those images.
and/or emotions. It is important to note that this activity can take place within a very short time span, incorporates exploratory creative learning, and could add contextual meaning to pieces being prepared for traditional performance.

Soundpainting, a creative conducting/instruction technique developed by Walter Thompson (2004), provides the framework for another recommended activity. In essence, soundpainting incorporates the same free improvisatory themes as informal exploration, but it maintains more traditional teacher roles. While I would argue that it is paramount for ensemble directors to move towards more student-centered strategies, I find that soundpainting as an activity offers benefits with regards to creative learning while not overtly disrupting the traditional ensemble environment. This notion implies that it would be easy to incorporate the activity as a function within the traditional ensemble curriculum.

As discussed in the review of literature, soundpainting is a gesturing technique in which the conductor chooses a creative constraint while the performers improvise more specific musical elements like pitch. I envision using this technique as a warm-up or closure activity sporadically with an ensemble. Specific gestures have been developed with regards to soundpainting as a conducting technique. However, I find that the concept of soundpainting as a catalyst for creative conversation is more meaningful than learning the specific gestures. For example, the educator and students could come up with a unique collection of gestures to represent musical concepts rather than using prescribed gestures. Principally, soundpainting involves the conductor informing which, what, how, and when students play. As mentioned previously, students are then left to listen, communicate, and interact with each other as they create a unique and improvised musical soundscape. While soundpainting does not produce a
product that is considered “normal” by traditional ensemble standards, it does produce an
aleatoric composition in which the full ensemble may freely improvise simultaneously.

*Developing Musicianship through Improvisation (DMTI)* (Azzara & Grunow, 2006) is a
creative method that introduces students to improvisation and composition through structured
and sequenced exercises. Namely, this method includes a six-step approach to improving
creative musicianship that involves developing a sound aural foundation in repertoire-based
patterns and progressions before moving on to more improvisation specific activities and
ultimately composing. Improvisation, while a separate creative process, almost always serves a
fundamental role in developing compositional understanding. Azzara and Grunow defined
notation as the “documentation of a creative process” (2006, p. 3). In this sense, we may even
consider the true creative act of composing to simply be improvisation with the intent to revise
and refine. The act of adding traditional or invented notation is simply a documentation of the
creative process itself. Further, Azzara and Grunow’s method plays a pivotal role in the sound
before sight pedagogical debate. In language learning, listening, thinking, and speaking must
precede reading and writing. If music is akin to language, listening, interacting, and improvising
must precede notational understanding.

Admittedly, *Developing Musicianship through Improvisation (DMTI)* (Azzara &
Grunow, 2006) is less of an activity and more of a method curriculum. Nonetheless, secondary
instrumental directors, including myself, incorporate brief periods of method exercises on a near-
daily basis to reinforce fundamental skills. Perhaps, expanding this time of fundamental
development to include creative learning through a method that accounts for key creative
processes is well warranted. Further, an approach similar to that of Stringham (2010) could
provide a sensible solution to effectively including creative learning while also maintaining
performance expectations. Stringham conducted a study in which students used *DMTI* activities based on the traditional song “Amazing Grace” while simultaneously preparing a concert band arrangement of the song by Ticheli (1998). As mentioned previously, Stringham (2010) found that students exhibited significantly higher achievement levels in performance, improvising, and composing after completing an eight-week treatment period with *DMTI*. When choosing repertoire for concert performance, it would be both beneficial and incredibly simple to align a selection with the folk repertoire present in the *DMTI* method. In addition to “Amazing Grace” by Ticheli (1998), I would also recommend programming “Simple Gifts: Four Shaker Songs” by Ticheli (2002), or the marching band arrangement of “Simple Gifts” by Barrett (1994), both of which align with the “Simple Gifts” unit in *DMTI*. If acquiring *DMTI* is not possible, I would recommend modeling warm-up based fundamental development on the six-step framework described by Azzara and Grunow (2006): (a) repertoire, (b) patterns and progressions, (c) improvising melodic phrases, (d) learning to improvise-seven skills, (e) reading and writing, (f) and learning characteristic solos. The notion of developing performance exercises to aid in musical understanding is quite familiar to most instrumental music educators. *DMTI* takes this same notion and expands it to include not only the process of performance/re-creation, but also improvisation and composition.

Scribbling is another activity that allows students to experience creativity through free improvisation. The activity itself was recommended by Hickey (2012) in a collection of compositional activities for the K-12 music classroom. However, the concept was first described by Stevens (2007). In essence, students play their instruments with no restrictions (freely improvise) in an attempt to generate musical phrases that can be replicated and shared (composition). Hickey mentioned that composition, in the context of scribbling, should not
immediately involve the use of notation. Rather, the focus of the activity is on creative
generation, memory, and replication.

With regards to application, scribbling could easily be implemented into the portion of
time in which students are assembling their instruments and preparing for traditional instruction.
In my classroom, students spend the first three to five minutes of class daily going to their
instrument locker, assembling their instrument, and playing self-selected repertoire. Normally, I
ask that students look at personally troublesome sections in the music we are preparing for
performance. However, I must admit that when discipline issues occur in my classroom they
almost always occur during this unstructured time. I believe this to be because students do not
have a stated goal and find this time to be non-educational. Therefore, I recommend
incorporating scribbling into the daily pre-instruction procedure. Upon entering the class, the
educator could write on the board that students must create a melodic phrase to share with other
students. Students, with a direct task in mind, could begin to freely improvise or scribble. At the
end of the five-minute period normally dedicated to instrument assembly, the teacher could ask
for student volunteers or choose students to perform their short-original melody. While not
incorporating the freedom initially intended by Hickey (2012), teachers could also ask that
students create variations on repertoire-based melodies or provide topic springboards. For
example, in preparing the monothematic “Drums of the Saamis” by Hazo (2014), a teacher may

![Drums of the Saamis Theme](image)

**Figure 1**

*Drums of the Saamis Theme*
give students the structural theme transposed to their instrument (see Figure 1). Prior to sight-reading the piece for the first time, a teacher may have students scribble to complete a consequent phrase for the above theme.

Creative repertoire preparation refers to the selection of repertoire that incorporates creative processes, namely improvisation, for ensemble performance. The preceding activities and suggestions refer to ways in which teachers can incorporate small exercises or techniques relating to free improvisation and structured improvisation. This suggestion relates more heavily to selecting repertoire that involves not only re-creation but also generation. Researchers have consistently found that performance culture and performance pressure has been a primary deterrent for directors when considering if they should expand their curriculum to include creative processes (Holsberg, 2009; Snell, 2012; Stewart, 2013; Vitale, 2017). In my experience, while I design my ensemble curriculum to provide a comprehensive music education, I quickly fall into the sequence of prepare, practice, prepare, perform (Bernhard, 2019). By programming repertoire that includes creative processes, ensemble directors who are primarily concerned about performance quality must simultaneously be concerned about teaching students to improvise and compose.

With regards to literature selection, Norgaard (2017) recommended “Metroplex: Three Postcards from Manhattan” (Sheldon, 2006), “Danzas Cubanas” (Sheldon, 2010), and “Hues of Blue” (Sheldon, 2015). These pieces do not include a dedicated section to improvisation or composition, but adaptations are recommended by Sheldon for each piece to be inclusive of creative processes. For example, in “Danzas Cubanas,” Sheldon (2010) recommends having flute, trombone, and trumpet players improvise during their respective solo sections and looping those sections to offer more improvisatory opportunities. In addition to the pieces recommended
by Norgaard (2017), I would also recommend exploring “Crossroad Journey” by McBride (2016) and “Riders on the Southern Front” by Barrett (1998). In “Crossroad Journey,” McBride does offer a specific repeated section for individual improvisation over a given chord structure. Pairing “Crossroad Journey” with exercises from DMTI (Azzara & Grunow, 2006) would be fitting as students will need to be able to identify the harmonic rhythm and improvise tonally within the repeated progression. With regards to “Riders on the Southern Front,” Barrett does not provide a dedicated section for improvisation but does construct the piece in Aeolian mode with a very simple harmonic rhythm. Barrett recommended directors consider incorporating Aeolian based solo-improvisation within certain sections of the piece.

SCAMPER is a composition-based model designed by Eberle (1996) that accounts for techniques or strategies to use when varying musical themes. As an acronym, SCAMPER represents the techniques of substitution, combination, adaptation, maximization/minimization, put to another use, elimination, and rearranging. Hickey (2012) recommended using the SCAMPER technique as an ensemble composition activity while preparing “Rejouissance” by James Curnow (1988). After spending some time rehearsing “Rejouissance,” Hickey recommended providing students with copies of the “Mighty Fortress” theme. Using the SCAMPER technique, students would be given time to create and notate variations of the theme. By doing so, students would develop creative skills through divergent thinking while also gaining a contextual understanding of a piece presumably being prepared for performance. Importantly, this activity also accounts for the dreaded creative block that often accompanies spontaneous composing. In SCAMPER, students are already provided with the framework of a composition and are simply asked to vary that framework, making the activity particularly useful for secondary novice composers. Further, theme and variation is an incredibly common
occurrence in all musical literature. With this in mind, the SCAMPER activity as proposed by Hickey (2012) could easily be adjusted for a plethora of concert band repertoire.

In using SCAMPER with students, I recommend connecting the technique to an introduction of traditional concert repertoire. Using “Drums of the Saamis” by Hazo (2014) as an example again, a teacher could have students use SCAMPER to create variations of the main

Table 2

Example of SCAMPER Method for High School Band

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Application Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>Change instrumentation; Change key; Change tempo; Change meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>Merge with other musical ideas or themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Modify articulations or dynamics, but maintain melodic and rhythmic structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximization/Minimization</td>
<td>Add embellishments; Add or remove non-chord tones; Simplify or develop rhythms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put to another use</td>
<td>Use musical ideas elsewhere; Keep one structural idea (i.e., rhythm) while replacing another (i.e., pitch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination</td>
<td>Remove existing ideas permanently or temporarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rearrange</td>
<td>Invert rhythmic or melodic ideas; Reshape existing material</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
theme (see Figure 1). For this activity, I recommend giving students a written copy of the theme transposed to their instrument. Next, I would suggest connecting the principles of SCAMPER to literary learning. While this may initially seem too childish for high school students, I find folk tales or children’s stories to be fitting when trying to build contextual understanding in SCAMPER. For example, a director could use the familiar tale of “The Tortoise and the Hare.” Using this story, I suggest questioning students about how the story may change if we substituted the tortoise with a different animal, or perhaps if we added more animals to the race? Following this literary connection, I recommend providing students with examples of how SCAMPER techniques can be applied musically (see Table 2).

Exploration etude is both an activity recommended by Hickey (2012) as well as an activity I experienced as a private percussion student. In summary, students are asked to compose an etude or a short exercise that is centrally focused on one to two techniques/concepts. Doiron (2019), Norgaard (2017), and Snell (2019), ascertained that creative processes are most successfully applied when rooted in prior understanding. An exploration etude, as described by Hickey, could simply be an extension of scribbling in which students compose a designated number of measures before notating their composition. In this manner, the activity would be rooted in personal understanding and creative choices through free improvisation. In a more structured context, an activity like exploration etude could be used to develop a number of technical or expressive skills. For example, when rehearsing a piece that has greatly varying styles of articulation it would be beneficial to assign an exploration etude that must incorporate the legato, marcato, and staccato styles. Further, creative restrictions could be added like length, key, and meter.
Importantly, the word etude denotes some form of notation or creative documentation. Doiron (2019) noted that improvising and composing helped to not only provide a means for creative expression, but also supports performance skills through enhanced music literacy. Pedagogically, Doiron’s conclusions make a great deal of sense. Students learn best through active participation. Directors who are concerned about sight-reading abilities, or perhaps feel that students do not grasp repertoire quick enough, may consider implementing compositional activities like exploration etude. Through acting in the role of composer, students are likely to gain an appreciation and more contextual understanding of the notes and rhythms they are performing. With regards to application and curriculum, an exploration etude is quite unique compared to other recommendations as it is probably best suited as an out-of-class activity. Directors who are pressured to perform may balk at the idea of dedicating multiple class periods or rehearsals to an activity that does not directly relate to concert literature. I recommend assigning an exploration etude as a homework assignment or project to be completed over the length of one to two weeks. I would remind the students that participating in this activity should not be exhaustive and is a chance for them to show-off their creative ability. Finally, I would allot a small portion of several class periods or rehearsals for students to perform their etude. It may even be more meaningful if the teacher or a classmate performed the etude for everyone to listen and enjoy.

Informances are a reimagined design of the traditional concert performance in that the purpose of an informance is to share student learning practices while the purpose of a traditional performance is to exhibit a high-quality product. As the name implies, informances are also more informal than the traditional performance. Williams (2011) and Gilbert (2016) both discussed the notion of informances as a presentation of process rather than a presentation of product. A
central ideal of constructivist and student-centered learning theories is that educators should allow students to take charge in creative and imaginative roles. Informance preparation allows for secondary instrumental teachers to step away from the role of conductor and decision maker to the role of creative facilitator. Gilbert (2016) recommended approaching informance preparation through Collins’ (2014) CCC (curious, collaborative, creativity) model. Additionally, Holsberg (2009) noted that informance preparation afforded students a sense of ownership in musical development and allowed for students to participate in leadership roles that are typically unavailable.

Similar to the creative repertoire preparation activity, informance preparation is a rather broad recommendation that could take shape in a variety of different ways. Unlike creative repertoire preparation, informance preparation shifts the focus to process over product. In truth, informance preparation could simply be the act of preparing for a live display of creative activities like scribbling, soundpainting, exploration etudes, and/or SCAMPER compositions. In reviewing the scholarly literature, I found the recommendation of informances to appear quite often (Gilbert, 2016; Holsberg, 2009; Williams, 2011). However, the notion of informances has consistently been portrayed as an alternative to traditional performance rather than an expansion of traditional performance. I recommend finding ways to maintain the performance culture expected by students, community members, and administrators while also expanding the focus to a display of learning processes. For example, prior to a concert, students could sign-up to perform exploration etudes in the lobby or welcoming area. Rather than warming-up and fine tuning in the band room before heading to the concert hall or gymnasium, students could begin with a five-minute scribbling session or informal exploration based on a spontaneous teacher selected springboard prompt. Better yet, the parent/community audience could offer a
springboard topic for the students to improvise within. As in class, after a short period of time, student volunteers could share their improvisations/compositions with the audience.

In conclusion, the review of scholarly literature revealed several positive outcomes for student engagement with creative activities in the large ensemble, including deeper musical understandings, higher self-efficacy in music, enhanced music literacy, and higher musical achievement. Based on this review of literature, I have offered a collection of activities that I feel best expand the focus of traditional ensembles to include creative processes and musical generation. Principally, I wish to reinforce the notion that traditional performance culture and creative music learning do not have to exist separately. Secondary instrumental directors can and should find ways to put forth high quality performances while also providing a comprehensive music education.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

While reviewing the literature, the benefits of creative learning and the creative processes most relatable to instrumental music education were made apparent. However, many of the researchers and scholars approached creative learning as an alternative to traditional instruction rather than a curricular expansion. Studies focused on how directors may maintain performance expectations while also integrating meaningful opportunities for creative learning are recommended. Specifically, future research should help to determine if the hybrid model of traditional and non-traditional music learning, as recommended through the suggested activities in this project, yield similar results as creative-focused models in terms of student self-efficacy, musical achievement, and music literacy. Finally, longitudinal studies on the correlation between creative learning and ensemble recruitment/retention at the high school level are recommended.
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