Teacher Observations From Using an Informal Learning Framework in an Elementary Popular Music Ensemble

Cody Kelly

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TEACHER OBSERVATIONS FROM USING AN INFORMAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK
IN AN ELEMENTARY POPULAR MUSIC ENSEMBLE

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2019
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This action research study examined teacher observations from using an informal learning framework, similar to Green’s (2002) research of popular music. Participants (n = 15) in this study included fifth and sixth grade instrumental music students in their second or third year of instruction. Participants engaged in improvising, composing, and copying music by ear in peer chosen groups. Data from the study included personal reflections of the teacher, student exit-tickets, student interviews, and administrator observations. Emergent themes of peer learning, autonomy, and heightened self-esteem arose from the data. These themes led to a larger theme of higher student engagement from using an informal learning framework in an elementary popular music ensemble.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION .......................................................... 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present Music Instruction ........................................ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rationale for Study ................................................ 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose of Study .................................................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methodology ........................................................... 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Questions ................................................... 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delimitations ........................................................ 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ..................................... 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signature Band Pedagogies .......................................... 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factors and Theories of Motivation ................................ 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectancy x Value Theory .......................................... 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Efficacy Theory ................................................. 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attribution Theory .................................................. 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement Goal Theory ............................................ 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Determination Theory .......................................... 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informal Learning .................................................... 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improvisation, Composing, and Playing by Ear ................... 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constructivism ........................................................ 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popular Music as Curricular Material ................................ 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>METHODOLOGY ............................................................ 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Information .................................................... 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My Context ............................................................. 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensemble Description ................................................ 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Collection ........................................................ 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Analysis and Interpretation .................................... 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparations and Qualifications of the Researcher .............. 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>RESULTS .................................................................. 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants ............................................................ 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Results ................................................................. 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Learning ........................................................... 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy ............................................................... 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher Self-Esteem .................................................... 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Levels of Engagement .......................................... 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National &amp; Statewide Policy Change</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Recommendations</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Thoughts</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES .................................................................................. 83

APPENDICES .................................................................................. 90

- Appendix A – Site Permission Letter ................................................. 90
- Appendix B – IRB Approval ................................................................. 91
- Appendix C – Permission to Participate ............................................. 93
- Appendix D – Pentatonic Scale Sheet Score ........................................ 95
- Appendix E – Exit Ticket Sample ..................................................... 96
- Appendix F – Administrator Observation Questions .......................... 97
- Appendix G – Student Interview Questions ........................................ 99
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Maslow’s hierarchy of needs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student demographic breakdown</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Relationship amongst emergent ideas</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Unexpected events can either set you back

Or set you up.

It’s all a matter of—

Perspective.

The unexpected can set us back or set us up. It all depends on how individuals perceive it. Mary Ann Radmacher’s (2014) quote above describes an unexpected set of events that set up the framework for this project. Gracie, a beginner clarinet player, learned the Theme from Jaws by ear on her clarinet. Her learning impressed me as she was a beginner. When asked how she accomplished this, I determined that her learning occurred by ear. Upon further questioning, I determined, from the conversation, her learning was haphazard and holistic, and included music of her choosing. How she accomplished this puzzled me as a teacher. I wanted to examine how she accomplished this and if her process of learning could influence my practice as a music educator.

**Present Music Instruction**

Most music instruction today includes whole group instruction and learning where a teacher leads the class in activities. Folkestad (2006) refers to this as formal learning. Formal learning occurs in an educational setting when an individual, not necessarily a teacher, leads an activity intended for learning using a pre-planned sequence of activities.

In contrast, informal learning uses little to no sequencing because the sequence of activities is driven by the interaction of the participants. Informal learning in the music
classroom may encompass the following activities: composing, playing by ear, and improvising. The teacher or leader can create environments where these processes can occur; however, an instructor may not officially lead the group in the activities; participants lead the activities. At the most basic level, informal music practices are natural and spontaneous. Evaluations, teacher direction, or guidance occur minimally. The musical enculturation, influences of parents, and first instruments are all a part of the beginning experiences already in place at the start of the learning process and may have an influence on the student in their choice of music or instrument (Green, 2002). This transforms the activities from teacher-led to student-led as the student chooses their own pathway.

Sequencing in informal learning relies on the participants and the motivation of the individual to engage in the activity. Self-determination theory (SDT), an empirically based theory of human motivation, development, and wellness, focuses on types of motivation such as autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. In their original idea, Deci & Ryan (2008) proposed that the type or quality of a person’s motivation would be more important than the total amount of motivation for predicting important outcomes. In autonomous motivation, people may have a feeling of free-will and self-control of their actions. In contrast, controlled motivation influences individuals to experience pressure to think, feel, or behave in particular ways (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In addition, it addresses the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Guay, Ratelle, and Chanel (2008) identified the motivation types proposed by SDT, intrinsic and extrinsic, important for understanding how students thrive and succeed in school. They also highlight the role of the instructor in the development of student’s motivation. Motivation contains the idea of using the energy of people’s psychological processes and behaviors. When an individual has intrinsic motivation for a task and an intrinsic
regulation, as mentioned by Deci & Ryan (2000), a high interest, enjoyment, and inherent satisfaction occur.

Popular music education has gained the attention of music educators as a way to connect the student’s experience outside the school music classroom to those in the school music classroom. Campbell (1995) studied garage bands and their learning processes. Campbell (1995) noted that the song acquisition process and skill building processes of young rock musicians occur both independently and within group practice sessions. Concentrated listening to play “like the recording” gave the rehearsals guidance. Campbell (1995) concludes by saying that “the lesson gained from looking at how garage bands function may be more related to the understanding of the nature of music learning than to the matter of curriculum development” (Campbell, 1995). Since then, Campbell (1995) and others, such as Davis (2005) and Jaffurs (2004), have investigated the engagement of young people with popular music outside of schools. Green (2002), in her study of how popular musicians learned, noticed five key tenets in which informal learning occurs:

- learning occurs by ear
- learning takes place individually or within friendship groups of similar musical tastes
- the learning is holistic and haphazard,
- the learning of a particular piece is chosen by the student.
- all skills of listening, composing, improvisation, and playing are applied in the learning of the music.

These tenets informed the development of a pedagogy with the idea of idiosyncratic and informal learning processes in mind (Green, 2002). In Green’s 2002 study during student
interviews, students noted their feelings of accomplishment when able to cover a piece of music by ear and their motivation to learn more by ear. The students demonstrated a high level of competence. Autonomous motivation acts upon, initiates, and/or affects the behavior of individuals, thus their choices of music and their choice to create, play, or copy a piece of music.

With the above information in mind, other researchers looked at young people’s engagement with music outside of school in an effort to connect to their musical worlds both in and out of the school music classroom. Davis (2005) and Jaffurs (2004) studied similar informal learning practices using rock bands. In her study, Davis (2005) examined musical processes of a three-member rock band, their roles within the group, and considered how they construct musical meaning. She discovered collaborative composition was facilitated by shared musical tastes and grounded in friendship and commitment to music making. Jaffurs’ (2004) study initially examined the factors which contributed to the creation of a rock group. From the study, Jaffurs (2004) also revealed the lessons of informal learning practices and the implications for her own classroom environment.

Tobias (2015) investigated the intersectionality of musical engagements of secondary student’s experiences in songwriting and technology class (STC) to new experiences outside of the school music classroom. For example, students’ experiences in STC (in school) influenced or contributed to students’ out of school experiences of: (1) listening focus, (2) listening approach, (3) future goals as musicians and studies in higher education, and (4) dispositions toward music and music industry. Students’ prior experience with instruments, software, and their own choice of popular music, all out of school experiences, influenced or contributed to (1) ability to create music, (2) sound source used in music, (3) musical and stylistic characteristics incorporated in music, (4) type of groups formed, (5) inspired music, (6) mediated discussions, and (7)
reinterpreted music. Tobias (2015) identified students’ informal learning strategies which connected the above musical experiences in and out of the school music classroom.

Using the above information, one can start to identify the application of these informal learning strategies and self-determination theory. Tobias (2015) brings the connection of the informal and the formal worlds of learning. Folkestad (2006) noted that these two ideas, formal and informal learning, are not a dichotomy but a continuum. Teacher instruction can be influenced by understanding the continuum of informal and formal learning. Using an informal learning framework in the classroom may allow more opportunities for musical engagement and understanding that benefits all individuals.

**Rationale for Study**

This study will provide educators with ideas within a framework to address music engagement in their schools outside of the traditional band, chorus, orchestra model. By using an informal learning framework, educators will be able to consider the effects and observable outcomes from using popular music in their classrooms.

One can argue the value of music’s presence in the school systems. Multiple sources present themselves as music advocacy resources. In the public school, music remains important, not because it improves test scores or provides relief to other teachers, but because it teaches students the following: (1) hard work, (2) discipline, (3) self-confidence, and (4) transferable life skills (Cerabasi, 2012). By using popular music and emerging non-traditional ensembles, such as a Pop Music Ensemble or Modern Band, teachers can foster creativity and engagement amongst students. Using the above mentioned music, teachers may provide opportunities for the remainder of the school population, who are not in the traditional music ensembles of band, choir, or orchestra.
How can students construct and connect musical knowledge based on what they have learned in school and with what they have learned on their own when the music being used in school is not music they identify with? How do educators connect to students, musical worlds, nurture and encourage musical identities, cultivate students’ aural strategies, and balance between aural and notation-based music learning experience? The answer to the above questions derives from using popular music in the classroom setting in the various forms such as emerging ensembles outside the traditional ones and the integration of popular music in general music classes to teach musical concepts. In a study of how popular musicians learn, Green (2002) noticed a heightened level of engagement in students when using popular music in music classes. One of the tenets Green notes is “all of the skills of composing, improvising, and playing by ear come into use” (pp.7-9). Green also noted students listened differently to music in their outside of school experiences after participating in the study. Students used hard work and discipline to cover their chosen piece, developed self-confidence in their own abilities, and transferred these skills to experiences outside the classroom.

Using popular music in the classroom allows for the educator to remain relevant with the changing times, recruit individuals who do not fit the traditional music ensembles, and to engage in meaningful musical experiences in addition to building upon the above skills. Popular music’s presence in the school music program is limited; however, popular music can foster creativity of all students.

In the article “Music Education for Creativity, not a Tool for Test Scores, McCammon (2014) notes the decline in time for music instruction because of other things, such as tested subjects, higher on school priority lists. The author also mentions “the rhetoric is missing the point and the virtues of music that can’t be tested.” (McCammon, 2014). Simply, those intrinsic
values of hard work, discipline, self-confidence, and transferrable life-skills cannot be tested, therefore, music may not have as high priority on district lists of importance. McCammon (2014) quotes Chris Woodside of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) stating “It is incredibly valuable that kids improve their reading skills or grade-point averages, or spatial reasoning through access to music education. But those are just the icing on the cake.” (McCammon, 2014). He then goes on to mention Woodside wants teachers to talk less about tests and more about the intrinsic benefits that music provides to make the argument to foster creativity and collaboration amongst students (McCammon, 2014).

Reflecting upon my own district, the outdated curriculum, and the changing student population, the need for popular music in the classroom is evident. In my reflection, I am attempting to connect the past and present musical trends to meet the needs of the current student population during their educational process. From birth through adulthood, music plays an important role in the lives of individuals. Active engagement with this music allows for the shaping of identities, navigating societal roles, connecting with loved ones, and constructing meanings of existence. Using popular music in the classroom, that students know and enjoy, allows for the district music teachers to engage all students. When students identify and enjoy content, they tend to engage more and have a meaningful musical experience. The addition of popular music and an emerging ensemble can change how the music program in my district recruits, retains, and engages many more students than solely relying on the traditional ensemble model.

How does one use popular music in the classroom to teach music? Tobias (2015) in a case study investigated the intersections of secondary students’ musical engagement in a Songwriting and Technology Class (STC) and outside of school music experiences. Tobias
investigated students’ creation and production of original music in a secondary music classroom, while asking a similar question to one mentioned earlier: “In what ways do students’ musical engagement in STC intersect with their musical engagement outside of school.” Findings from the case study suggested that the open-ended structure allowed students to experience a smooth transition between in-school musical engagement and out-of-school musical engagement.

Providing access to high quality music education, such as that mentioned above, returns music to a “back to basics” approach and a renaissance of traditional enrichment. Increasing student engagement experiences provides the well rounded education and controls the effects from a “Fast-food” approach in an environment of standardized tests and high stakes accountability (Earnhart, 2015).

Using an emerging ensemble outside of the traditional model allows for engagement with those students who do not fit the traditional ensemble model. One example of this comes from the Little Kids Rock organization in the form of Modern Band. Modern Band uses the idea of Music as a Second Language (MSL). MSL follows the similar process of language acquisition skills, utilizing the principles of Stephen Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition (1982) to develop music knowledge like that of speech development.

Weiss, Abeles, and Powell (2017) examined the influence of participation in a popular music initiative on the development of students’ musical skills, social and emotional skills, and college and career-ready skill development. Results from the study indicated effects on the students’ levels of confidence, collaboration skills, self-expression, and identity formation. A strong majority of students agreed Modern Band made them feel happier to be at school, and Modern Band made them feel more confident. Parents, when surveyed, agreed their children were more confident participating in their school’s Modern Band program and their students
looked forward to going to school on days they had Modern Band. The data suggested that participation in the Modern Band program provided students with an outlet for emotional and self-expression. Additional data indicated an increased awareness and development of peer relationships. These relationships are central to social and emotional development for adulthood (Weiss, Abeles, & Powell, 2017).

In an article by Fox News (2012), the author indicates music is more than an enjoyable hobby. They mention a 2005 article from *The Midland Chemist* that found almost all of the past winners of the Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science, and Technology for high school students played one or more instruments (Cerbasi, 2012). An interview with a Florida mother, from the same article, Cerbasi (2012) indicates music instilled positive traits such as, patience, teamwork, discipline, and respect. Others interviewed in the article noticed the same traits, in addition to perseverance and worth ethic. The traits noticed from music participation from parents are similar to those mentioned above. Winners of the Siemens Westinghouse Competition played one or more instruments, but lacks indication of what instruments students play. Using popular music and emerging ensembles, such as Modern Band, can engage those who do not fit the traditional ensemble model.

Why include popular music in school? Why include a popular music ensemble, such as modern band, into the curriculum? Including popular music teaches students: (1) hard work, (2) discipline, (3) self-confidence, and (4) transferable life skills (McCammon, 2014). The inclusion of popular music and popular music ensembles allow for the engagement of those not normally met by the traditional ensemble model. By providing these options, teachers have the ability to include and engage more students and foster creativity amongst students who might not normally engage using the traditional ensembles and curriculum.
**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this action research project is to examine the teacher as a participant observer reflecting upon observed outcomes using an informal learning framework with elementary instrumental students in a newly formed Popular Music Ensemble. In this study, I examined my own personal observations from using and informal learning framework in an elementary popular music ensemble. I examine meanings from teaching students to negotiate and process playing their instruments while composing, improvising, and copying music by ear, and how the composing, improvising, and copying music by ear affects my perception of competence of elementary band students while engaged in such activities. Examining my own pedagogy as a means to improve my practice is the main goal of the study. The second goal of this study is to advocate the use of popular music and an informal learning framework to teachers, administrators, and district stakeholders.

**Methodology**

This qualitative action research project took place during a regularly scheduled rehearsal of Pop Music Ensemble (PME). Students in PME were in their second or third year of instruction on their instrument. Activities during the ensemble time included improvising, composing, and copying music by ear. Students engaged in composing an original piece of music or arranging a known piece of music by using only their listening skills. The teacher served as a participant-observer by taking notes during sessions, circulating the room to help groups needing assistance, and to lead beginning activities. Students completed an anonymous reflective exit ticket prior to leaving the music room. The teacher used a reflective journal to document the experiences of the session. The school principal observed rehearsals using a structured observation form. At the end of the project, the teacher interviewed students using a series of open-ended questions to gain
understanding into the student’s thinking during the activities. Student exit tickets, student interviews, teacher reflective journal, and administrator observations provided data to triangulate the study and provide validity to the findings.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What can I observe by teaching an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble within an informal music learning framework?

2. What meanings can I derive from teaching students to negotiate and process playing their instruments while composing, improvising, and copying music by ear?

3. How does composing, improvising, and copying music by ear affect my perception of competence of elementary band students while engaging in such activities?

**Delimitations**

This investigation was limited to a single school year of instruction. A study conducted over a longer duration may yield different results. Further, in this study, I focus on the observations and meanings from my perspective in a rural school district in Northeastern Pennsylvania, thus the results of this study cannot be generalized.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In order to examine the participant’s observations and reflections of using the informal learning framework, it is important to understand how this study fits into the music education literature. The author examined these sources in order to understand popular music education’s role in the curriculum, self-determination theory, and other learning theories. Using these ideas as the basis an informal learning framework allowed for the development of context and support for identifying possible implications of using an informal learning framework, intrinsic to popular music, in an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble. The studies conducted in the United States and abroad provide clarity for the use of informal learning strategies in the formal band ensemble. For the purpose of this literature review, studies are grouped into the following categories: Signature Band Pedagogies, Theories of Motivation, Informal Learning, Improvisation, Composition, and Playing by Ear, and Constructivism.

**Signature Band Pedagogies**

Professional training for future teaching practitioners includes an organization of fundamental ideas. Shulman (2005) identifies signature pedagogies or the organization of the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions. These signature pedagogies are pervasive, routine, and habitual. For beginning teachers, education in three domains of professional work occur. These domains, according to Shulman (2005), include: thinking, performing, and acting with integrity in the given profession. Signature pedagogies include three dimensions: surface structure, deep structure, and implicit structure (Shulman, 2005). Surface structures consist of concrete, operational acts of teaching and learning, of showing and demonstrating, of questioning and answering, and of interacting and
Deep structures are a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how. Implicit structures are moral dimensions that comprise a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions (Shulman, 2005).

Music educators obtain specific training in order to practice as a music teacher. This training in the signature pedagogies, according to Don, Garvey, & Sadeghpour (2008), is rooted in the apprenticeship model of learning a trade and in the conservatory method of study. This method, based on the conservatory model, follows the lines of “teaching how one was taught.” For example, if an individual experienced in their band ensemble each day a warm up with the Bb concert scale using some rhythmic idea then they would begin working on the repertoire, the individual would teach band in the similar way in which they experienced it. In a similar manner, most signature pedagogies are based on the past experiences of how a content area was taught.

Band rehearsals contain signature pedagogies which are common amongst all band rehearsals. The most successful rehearsals, according to Cooper (2004) have a rehearsal plan and include the following components of rehearsal: warm-up and tuning time, technique-building time, major problem fixing time, review of other literature, sight reading session, and complete play-through of a major section of a piece (Cooper, 2004). Young ensembles need more directions and guidance through this rehearsal structure in order to develop successful habits. Many middle and elementary school directors do not allow for their students to warm up individually but prefer for them to warm up as a group using scales, technique/etude exercises, and chorales. By warming up as a group, Cooper (2004) suggests appropriate warm-ups are used and it decreases chaos in the rehearsal setting.
Factors and Theories of Motivation

Motivation, a key factor in teaching and learning, continues to be a topic of interest to researchers and educators. To study and understand motivation, one must concern their focus with observable behaviors that reflect the engagement in a given activity. Smith (2011) and Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich (2011) describe four actions that motivational research focuses on: (1) choice and preference, (2) intensity, (3) persistence, and (4) quality. These actions vary in the degree present in an individual but are key in giving music educators the idea of an individual’s aspiration to learn. Smith (2011) describes his conceptual model that considers two levels of time (long-term and situational) and two levels of context in terms of motivation.

The two contexts mentioned by Smith (2011) and the model provided give an overview of the literature in relation to motivation and music learning. Long-term influences are those formed early in one’s life seen as having a lasting and enduring effect on situational motivation later in life. Role models, learning opportunities, sequenced instruction, personality, conceptions of ability, attributions, prior achievements, and reinforcement valence are examples of long-term influences that affect situational influences later in life. Situational influences are those of a particular environment that act for a short period of time. Teacher attributes, instructional methods, task attributes, evaluation and feedback, and social motivation are elements that have an effect on the situational influences. In addition, individual factors such as perceived task value, goal orientation, self-efficacy beliefs, and affective state can affect the situational influences of motivation (Smith 2011). These two levels of influence of motivation focus into the four central “action patterns” as mentioned by Smith (2011) and Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich (2001): (1) choice, (2) intensity, (3) persistence, and (4) quality of engagement.
By studying above action patterns of motivation, one may begin to understand motivation for the teaching and learning of music. Choice and preference refers to the individual deciding to perform or engage in a particular activity. Choice can be reflected when an individual is given a variety of options. For example, if an ensemble director gives individuals time to practice a section on their own, some will practice, while others will not practice. Those seen practicing will be seen as “motivated.” The focus of one’s attention to a given activity refers to the intensity of a given activity. This can be illustrated in an individual practicing scales versus practicing a piece of music they enjoy. The individual would practice the enjoyed piece of music more intensely than the scales. The notion of continuing to engage or perform a given activity, even when it becomes difficult, refers to the persistence. Finally, the monitoring of one’s own understanding and the ability to fix deficits in one’s own understanding refers to the quality of engagement (Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, & Pintrich, 2011).

In the examination of motivation in relation to teaching and learning several social cognitive theories are prominent today, including: expectancy x value theory (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, 1983), self efficacy theory (Bandura 1982), attribution theory (Weiner, 1986), achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggert, 1985; Nicholls, 1984), and self determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). These above mentioned five theories aid in the further discussion of motivation in relation to teaching and learning.

**Expectancy x Value Theory**

In 1957, Atkinson, proposed a model of motivation that contains the following components: (1) expectancy, (2) value, (3) fear of failure, and (4) hope for success. Atkinson (1957) elaborated people choose to do or to keep on doing an activity they think they can do (expectancy) and what they enjoy doing (value). The belief or expectation of an individual that
they will do well in future tasks and the self perceptions of one’s peer judgment of their competence in a given activity (Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, & Pintrich, 2011).

Value, as defined in Atkinson’s (1957) original model, is the inverse of the probability of success. A modern approach by Eccles, as mentioned in Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, & Pintrich (2011) defines values as four components: (1) importance, (2) utility, (3) interest value, and (4) cost. The first three are the most researched and important in terms of this study. The student’s own personal beliefs about how important doing well on a task is to them is referred to as importance. Utility value refers to the perceived usefulness of a task. The personal intrinsic interest of the individual for a task refers to the interest value. From studying these components, Eccles (1995) noted a positive correlation between expectancy and value components and the relationship between these two grows stronger as children grow older.

Patterns in decision making, however, are not consistent. Individuals approach tasks with hope for success in the task and fear of failure in achieving the task. According to Atkinson (1957), individuals with a higher hope than fear, due to a high achievement motivation, are more likely to persist in performing tasks with unknown outcomes and still be successful.

**Self-Efficacy Theory**

Self-judgments of one’s performance capabilities in a given situation is referred to as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982). Bandura (1977) asserts cognitive processes influence the acquisition and retention of new behavior patterns. Much of human behavior is learned through modeling. From observations, Bandura (1977) was able to form conceptions of how these new behavior patterns are performed. By observing the effects of one’s own actions, individuals are able to discern which responses are appropriate in which settings, thus causing them to act
The actions of individuals and the persistence of these actions are rooted in cognitive activities, as mentioned by Bandura (1977).

By using a choice of activities, effort expended, persistence, and task accomplishment, self-efficacy is hypothesized to influence motivation. Schunk (1984) notes attributional values have an important influence on the idea of self-efficacy. Choice behavior can influence the idea of the quantity of effort and willingness to perform or engage in a given task. Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich (2011) suggest some evidence exists with the idea of self-doubt fostering learning even when students have not acquired the skill yet. Bandura (1986) mentions “Self doubt creates an impetus for learning but hinders adept use of previously established skills.” (234) One could think from the writings of Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich (2011) and Bandura (1986) that self doubt could affect the individual’s self-efficacy both positively and negatively.

Self-efficacy theory, as proposed by Bandura (1977), possess some key differences from the above mentioned expectancy value theory proposed by Eccles (1983). First, self-efficacy is defined as the organization and execution of courses of action. Musically, this would include one’s ability to make explicit judgments about technical or musical skills in order to learn or perform a piece of music. Second, a goal is referenced. The goal can be determined by an individual or the task at hand. Bandura (1977) also notes that choice behavior affects the self-efficacy of an individual. Using Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, & Pintrich ‘s (2011) example of driving and self-efficacy can begin to understand how this theory applies to the achievement of an individual in a task. For example, a driver who lacks confidence in their driving ability to navigate a winding mountain road (low-efficacy) may picture images of accidents and injuries.
On the opposite end, one who is in the same situation and confident in their abilities (high self-efficacy) may anticipate the beautiful views from the mountains.

The ability for an individual learner to set personal goals and then monitor the progress toward these goals is referred to as self-regulation. By adjusting one’s own learning strategies, environmental circumstances, and monitoring one’s own cognitive and affective states one can begin to progress in a given activity (Hodges & Sebald, 2011). The self regulation behavior, as mentioned by Hodges & Sebald (2011), was examined in young beginning music students in 2001 by McPherson and Renwick. They found most students played through their assigned pieces once or twice and exhibited low levels of self-regulatory behavior. Because of these low levels of self regulatory behaviors students did not progress in their music studies. Those students that did progress had a high level of self regulatory behavior and motivation.

**Attribution Theory**

The understanding of why events occur is important to individuals. Attribution theory proposes the importance of understanding the why events occur in the world. Weiner (1986) suggests that individuals analyze their current situation for causes. Individuals consider environmental factors, such as social norms and personal factors (prior knowledge and beliefs) about one’s competence. The causes perceived by the individual can then further be classified into three domains: stability, locus, and control. Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich (2011) mention that Weiner (1986) suggests that locus determines whether the cause is internal or external to the individual; stability suggests how stable the perceived caused is; and controllability determine if the cause can be controlled by the individual. Of the three domains mentioned, stability seems to have the highest importance in predicting future outcomes (Weiner
For example, Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich (2011) suggest that an individual who attributes success to a stable outcome will expect a similar result in future events.

Skills individuals possess and see as successful may influence their future outcomes, motivation, and competence when performing or engaging with a given activity. The beliefs of the individual can have positive or negative affects on the outcome of an activity. Feedback given from the individual’s environment can influence the attributional beliefs of the individual. These environmental factors, in an educational setting, could resemble a teacher’s reaction to a student’s success or failure. A teacher who expresses pity when a student fails will most likely make attributions to low ability. In contrast, a teacher who expresses great joy when a student succeeds will most likely make attributions to higher ability on their instrument.

Attributional theory of performance, as noted by Kukla (1972) conceptually combines two traditional theories, the theory of expectancy and attribution theory. Attribution theory contains four variables which aid in the discussion of motivation. The four variables of attribution theory include: (1) ability of individual, (2) amount of effort expended, (3), the degree of difficulty involved in a task, and (4) uncontrollable chance factors in the environment (Kukla, 1972). Attributions can be any combination of the above mentioned factors with any weight in one particular category.

Achievement Goal Theory

Specific objects individuals set for themselves, or goals, can have influence on the behaviors and outcomes of individuals performing or engaging with a specific task. Achievement goal theory concerns itself with the why, similar to attribution theory’s concern of the why, an individual wants to reach their goal and how they approached achieving that goal (Pintrich, 2000). Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich (2011) mention two types of goals in reference
to goal orientation: task goals and ego goals. These goals are similar to the idea of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in individuals. In achievement goal theory, the focus is cognitive based in contrast to the personality-like intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. For an individual to adopt a task goal orientation, they focus on learning, mastering the task at hand, and growth in their skill and competence. In contrast, ego goal orientation focuses on the ability and how the ability will be judged by others. Both of these goals, as mentioned by Dweck (1999) are opposite sides of a dichotomy and individuals should have one or the other. This would then suggest that individuals may have or show mixed theories of beliefs and intelligences over time. Once an individual reaches a certain age these beliefs should become stable (Linnenbrink-Garcia, Maehr, and Pintrich, 2011).

An individual who functions under task goal orientation is concerned with increasing their ability and becoming a master of a given task. Using this mindset leads to different interpretations of feedback from outcomes given. In contrast, an individual functioning under ego goal orientation uses ability attributes for success and failures. These individuals see effort and ability as an inverse and think that the harder they try a task; the less ability they will have. This leads to the avoidance of effort and a learned helplessness (Dweck & Leggett, 1988)

**Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory, first introduced in the mid-1980’s by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 1985), identifies a multidimensional approach to motivation. It is grounded in the idea of fulfilling three basic innate psychological needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Motivation relies on these needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985,2008). Relatedness refers to a wish for being connected with, loved by, and cared for by others. In a music context, this refers to being part of a group, being valued for contributions to the group,
and as an individual. Competence refers to the inherent desire to be effective in one’s interaction with the environment. Musically, this refers to the individual’s feelings towards being able to play a particular passage or piece of music, or one’s confidence in their own musical skill.

Finally, autonomy refers to the need for one’s own preference, to be able to shape their own experiences and behavior according to their self, goals, and values. (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008).

In a musical context, this refers to the belief in one’s own musical work and to have the choice to play and choose what they feel is best to come next in their music.

Motivation drives individuals to achieve goals and influences actions. Initial research on self-determination theory (SDT) began in the 1970’s; however, the first statement of of this theory appeared in the mid 1980’s. Self-determination theory, according to Deci & Ryan (2008), addresses basic issues within a wide span of life domains. More importantly, it is a macro theory of human motivation. Many theories have treated motivation as a unitary concept which focuses on the degrees of motivation that an individual has overall for behaviors or activities. SDT provides a way to differentiate the types of motivation. SDT distinguishes between two types of motivation: autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic (internal) motivation and extrinsic motivation (external) which people use identify the value of an activity and integrate into their sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Controlled motivation includes the ideas of reward or punishment, avoidance of shame, self esteem, and ego. According to SDT, both of these motivations influence the behavior of an individual.

Motivation is a key subject amongst teachers, administrators, and parents in the determination of the success of students in academic settings. Many teachers can be quoted as saying, “You better study because this is gonna be a hard exam”. This would work if motivation was a simple concept and was synonymous with effort. SDT explains that motivation is
multidimensional concept that varies in the terms of quality (Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008). For example, high quality motivation occurs when motivation is intrinsic, integrated, and regulated. In contrast, poor quality motivation occurs when it is externally based with regulations that are interjected, such as the quote above being an interjected regulation (Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008).

Maslow, in his 1954 *Motivation and Personality*, introduced his theory about how people satisfy the many needs of their life and work. Based on this and his observations, Maslow (1954) noted needs and satisfaction follow a similar pattern in most people. These eight needs, known as *Maslow’s hierarchy of needs*, are listed in figure 1.

![Figure 1. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs.](image-url)
Biological and physiological needs are, according to Maslow (1954), the first step in motivation. Individuals need to fulfill these needs in order to have internal satisfaction. These needs include: homeostasis (internal balance), food, water, sleep, shelter, and sex. Safety needs are the ability to feel safe in the given environment. If an individual does not feel safe, they will seek safety before a higher need is met. Safety needs include: personal security, emotional security, financial security, health and well-being, and needs against accidents or other adverse impacts. Belonging and love needs are to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance among social groups regardless of group size. Belonging needs include: friendships, intimacy, and family. Esteem needs are those that refer to status or ego. Esteem needs include: receiving recognition, status, importance, and respect from others. The top of Maslow’s hierarchy is self-actualization. This is the desire to accomplish everything that one can be. Self-actualization needs include: mate acquisition, parenting, utilizing abilities and talents, pursuing a goal, and seeing happiness.

**Informal Learning**

John Dewey, in his 1916 *Democracy and Education*, mentions one of the heaviest of philosophical problems of education is developing a balance between the informal and formal, the incidental and the intentional modes of education (Dewey, 1916). By developing formal pedagogy and teacher training, a split between the experiences of those gained in the classroom and those from direct experiences begins to grow (Dewey, 1916). Separating these processes and the content of students out-of-school learning experiences sets up what Dewey (1910) described as detached and independent systems of school knowledge that inertly overlay the ordinary systems of experience instead of reacting to enlarge and refine them. Pupils are taught to
live in two different worlds, one the world of out-of-school experience, the other the world of books and lessons (pp. 199-200).

Teaching in such a way when both worlds are separate prevents students from having authentic experiences that mimic those in the real world. In considering how to approach teaching in a manner to provide authentic experiences, one must consider how students learn outside of school and be able to engage students in real-life problem solving experiences.

Central to education is curriculum. It provides activities and direction to develop the cognitive function of the individual (Eisner, 2002). Eisner (2002) mentions the practical implications of an integrated arts curriculum for teachers. By using the popular music in the curriculum, one can begin to bridge this tension that Eisner (2002) mentions between the desire to provide programs which initiate the young into the concepts, discipline procedures in a school curriculum, and programs which relate fields relevant to the student (Eisner, 2002). Popular music changes with society. The classroom conditions change with the prevailing norms, comments, attitudes of peers, and organizational framework of the school (Eisner, 2002). By using popular music in the classroom, educators may adapt their curriculum to meet the standards and to engage students with concepts using materials relevant to the individual student.

Popular music education has gained the attention of music educators as a way to connect student’s experience outside the school music classroom to those in the school music classroom. Campbell (1995) studied garage bands and their learning processes in order to connect student’s experience outside the school music classroom to those in the school music classroom. Since then, Campbell (1995) and others, such as Davis (2005) and Jaffurs (2004), have investigated the engagement of young people with popular music outside of schools. Green (2002), in her study of how popular musicians learned noticed five key tenets in which informal learning occurs: (1)
it is learned by ear, (2) learning takes place individually or within friendship groups of similar musical tastes (3), the learning is holistic and haphazard, (4) the music learned is of the individuals choosing. (5), all skills of listening, composing, improvisation, and playing are applied in the learning of the music. These tenets informed the development of a pedagogy with the idea of idiosyncratic and informal learning processes in mind (Green 2002). In Green’s 2002 study during student interviews, student’s noted their feelings of accomplishment when able to cover a piece of music by ear and their motivation to learn more by ear. The students, without knowing, used autonomous motivation.

With the above information in mind, others looked at young people’s engagement with music outside of school in an effort to connect to their musical worlds both in and out of the school music classroom. Davis (2005) and Jaffurs (2004) studied similar informal learning practices using rock bands. In her study, Davis (2005) examined musical processes of a three-member rock band, their roles within the group, and considered how they construct musical meaning. She discovered collaborative composition was facilitated by shared musical tastes and grounded in friendship and commitment to music making. Jaffurs’ (2004) study initially examined the factors that contributed to the creation of a rock group. From the study, Jaffurs (2004) also revealed the lessons of informal learning practices and the implications for her own classroom environment. Tobias (2015) investigated the intersectionality of musical engagements of secondary student’s experiences in songwriting and technology class(STC) to experiences outside of the school music classroom. STC influenced or contributed to the out of school music experiences of the students in terms of their listening focus, approach, future goals as musicians, and dispositions towards music and the music industry. Their prior experiences with instruments, software, and choice of popular music influenced or contributed to their ability
to create music, sound source used, stylistic implications, groups formed, inspiration, discussions, and reinterpreted music. Tobias (2015) identified students’ informal learning strategies which connected the above musical experiences in and out of the school music classroom.

Using the above information, one can begin to identify the application of these informal learning strategies. Tobias (2015) connects of the informal and the formal worlds of learning. Folkestad (2006) noted that these two ideas, formal and informal learning, are not a dichotomy but a continuum. Teacher instruction may be influenced by this pedagogy. Using this pedagogy in the classroom may allow more opportunities for musical engagement and understanding that benefits all individuals.

**Improvisation, Composing, and Playing by Ear**

Musical composition may allow for students to contribute to their own creative expression and empowerment, engage in higher order thinking and musical problem solving, and their individual creativity. Composition may occur in multiple ways. It can use standard notation and voice leading principles or it could be creative and use the imagination, flexible approaches, and graphic notation. Hogg (1994) indicates students were highly engaged when organizing, refining, and performing their own compositions, thus making the song their own. Four stages of development of musical representations, as identified by Welch (1998), may occur in the composition process while using graphic notation; scribbling, action equivalents, figural, and imitation.

By using graphic notation, students can work at their own level, which differentiates instruction for all students. It saves time in correcting errors that can occur in the traditional notation, which may frustrate individuals. Using graphic notation in the compositional process
may provide students with a sense of ownership. Finally, the graphic representation can help to “bridge” the gap between the listening and analysis of music (Tan & Kelly, 2004)

Many popular musicians did not learn their skill from playing scales and technique exercises. These popular musicians learned their skills from practicing and performing songs which were a part of the individual’s culture, whether they received it from family members or peers. Abramo (2010) in a case study, noticed that participation in school music programs was limited to those in band, chorus, and orchestra. In order to change this statistic, he was tasked with the creation of a new course which would increase the participation in the music program. The course needed to appeal to students who did not fit into the traditional model of ensembles and the various ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Abramo, 2010).

Green (2001, 2004, 2008) mentions that to include popular music in the curriculum means a change in pedagogy is needed. Popular musicians learn aurally, while in contrast to classical musicians who learn from notation (Green, 2001,2004,2008). Popular musicians communicate differently with each other, in comparison to classical musicians (Jaffurs, 2004). Jaffurs (2004) noted that popular musicians pick up ideas and skills from interactions with one another. In a similar study, Davis (2005), studied how rock musicians learn and found that the practices found in rock band have much insight to offer for music educators. By using these practices – playing by ear, using popular music of students choosing, and collaborative composition, can have a positive impact on music teaching and learning.

Constructivism

Vygotsky is assumed by many to be the origin of social constructivism. Central to Vygotsky’s concept is the idea of social collectivity and the relationship between the social and the individual. This relationship is vital in the learning process. Jaramillo (1996) mentions that,
according to Vygotsky, students learn through their interactions with peers, teacher, manipulatives and their environment. In this framework of teaching and learning, teachers use a bottom-up teaching approach. The teacher functions as a facilitator, as opposed to the leader, facilitating what and how students learn concepts in and out of the classroom. Teachers would use participant observations of student actions to see how they find meaning from their social settings (Jaramillo, 1996). To understanding how a student learns, one must look beyond the individual and to the setting in which the individual resides. Vygotsky’s theory of proximal development describes the social relationship occurring in the learning process. Chaiklin (2003) mentions the ZPD is an interaction during a task between a less competent person and a more competent person. The less competent person, in this case, may have a low competence on the activity, may become independent and proficient at the activity. By taking this a step further, one could begin to understand the more competent person in the theory would be the instructor and the less competent person being the student. As the student becomes proficient at the task, they become independent and enter their zone of proximal development.

Theorists such as Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky help to shift educators focus to constructivism. Constructivism is a theory focusing on how children learn or gain knowledge, with teaching implications (Shively, 2015). Simply, Shively (2015) states constructivism provides music educators with ideas for consideration in terms of learning and teaching in the music classroom. It describes how we make meaning of our experiences and understand the world around us. Shively (2015) mentions Webster’s (2011) principles which are present in constructivist writing: (1) knowledge is formed as part of the learner’s active interaction with the world; (2) knowledge exists less as abstract entities outside the learner that are absorbed by the
learner; rather, it is constructed anew through action; (3) meaning is constructed with this knowledge; (4) learning is in large part a social activity (Shively, 2015; Webster, 2011)

These common principles are present in the work of Green (2001) in her study of how popular musicians learned. In comparing Webster’s (2011) principles and Green’s (2001) tenets of informal learning, one can begin to see the parallels between informal learning and constructivism. Green (2001) mentions that learning takes place in peer friend groups. This relates to learning being a social activity. Learning is haphazard and holistic, according to Green (2001), ties into Webster’s idea of knowledge existing in abstract entities outside the learner that are absorbed.

**Popular Music as Curricular Material**

Lebler (2007) examined the pedagogical approach using students-as-masters in one conservatorium. This approach uses a scaffold self-directed learning community and a master-less studio in addition to a reflective component embedded into the program. It is embedded in a popular music program in order to provide graduates with skills needed for an unpredictable future as musicians. Lebler (2007) noticed that for the modern conservatorium to survive, they need to provide learning experiences which are most likely to produce multi-faceted and flexible graduates who can self-monitor and self-direct their learning. By using a curriculum focused on composing, arranging, information technologies, computer music applications, rhythm, and the business aspects of the music industry, the conservatorium was able to emphasize the production of popular music in a broad sense.

The popular music program mentioned above encompasses a wide variety of skills in order to create self-regulating and self-monitoring individuals. Lebler (2007) interviewed students after reading their required reflective journals. Some student comments mentioned on
the various aspects of the program such as: studio access, collaboration, analysis, and reflection/assessment. By combining the above mention activities and reflective practices, musical skill and the ability to independently learn are enhanced. Music development, according to Lebler (2007), is a result of studying popular music styles. He also noted the importance that reflection added to the study. Reflection adds a layer of explicit knowledge to the music-making that students bring to the program (Lebler, 2007).

Abramo (2010), in his case study, employed a similar pedagogy to that of Lebler’s (2007) study using popular music in the curriculum. In the course created by Abramo (2010), students began each curricular unit by listening to, and playing with recordings that share similar chords and keys to the ones studied. Students began by using music of the teacher’s generation and then were encouraged to add music that they like to the list. By allowing students to add music of their choosing, the repertoire changed from year to year. Abramo (2010) noted that by making the music meaningful to the students, students would look for compositions that have similar chords. Those with little interest in playing the music currently in class, were allowed to independently work on more challenging music. Students were also given the option to form groups with three to four friends to rehearse the music they were interested in performing. Abramo (2010) concluded that while the original goal was to create a class in order to reach the “other 84 percent” of the student body, he concluded based on his teaching load, he was able to reach about half of the 84 percent and it gave those students in ensemble another way to engage with music. The guitar class and popular music ensemble created in Abramo’s (2010) school served the institution well by creating spaces where students could experience music in a different way in contrast to the traditional ensemble. Students were able to move beyond the
performance of certain music and with instructor guidance were able to make new musical discoveries (Abramo, 2010).

A similar course is mentioned by Gardner (2009) about one music teacher’s dilemma when filling out a performance application for the 2009 Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) in-service conference. The State High Rock Ensemble is a credit-bearing course which meets during the regular school day at State College High School in State College, Pennsylvania. This ensemble is not part of the traditional music ensembles nor is it extracurricular. Students do not need previous musical experience to participate. Gardner (2009) noted that the first year the course, titled Rock Ensemble, was offered there was one section. During another visit, Gardner (2009) discovered that in the third year of the course’s existence that sixty students had enrolled in the course for the upcoming school year. This then allowed for four sections of the course to run.

In the case of a typical rock band, the life span may be short. Conflicts between members during the creation and learning process causes the band to split. Because of the teacher’s leadership in the Rock Ensemble, this tension and friction is avoided. Routines are established early on in the school year. These routines allow for the course to run smoothly with little problems occurring.

Learning style in Rock Ensemble is different than that of the traditional ensemble. The instructor, as noted by Gardner (2009), believes students are more engaged in the learning process because the music is relevant to their everyday lives. He (the instructor) believes that this contributes to the students being active and lifelong musicians. This ensemble allows for the personal expression to occur, that is intrinsic to many genres of music.
Unlike in the large traditional ensemble where some member’s contributions may not be as noticed, all members of Rock Ensemble play an important role in the overall sound of the group. The Rock Ensemble course culminates with a concert in the spring consisting of a twenty-five tune set list. All students must learn to play each tune on a given instrument (Gardner, 2009). The instructor mentions the challenge of using a similar idea with a concert band or symphony orchestra in order to engage students in further musical activities.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

From the simple instances of the beginner clarinet player playing the “Theme from Jaws” to the current students in band replicating by ear “Baby Shark”, the need for an ensemble that emphasized composition, improvisation, and copying or covering music by ear, was evident to me. Green (2001) notes the high levels of music engagement with popular music in young students. The emphasized skills mentioned above also are enacted when engaging with popular music. Popular music, or even music that students listen to now, contains meaning to the individual. This meaning allows for the student to possess intrinsic motivation for that particular music.

Others before have founded popular music ensembles, similar to the one in this project, in their school settings. Gardner (2009) mentions the credit-bearing State High Rock Ensemble. Abramo (2010) discusses a curricular course that emphasized listening to and playing with recordings that had similar chord progressions to the ones learned in class. Students in both curricular environments developed the skills of composition, improvisation, and listening. Both Gardner (2009) and Abramo (2010) noted the differences in learning styles compared to the traditional ensemble and that student engagement in the learning process increased because the music is relevant to their everyday lives. Both environments provided an outlet for the occurrence of personal expression that is intrinsic to many genres of music. The intrinsic value occurring affected the motivation of the student to participate and engage with the music.

From reading the above studies, the idea for a popular music ensemble arose. In terms of this project, several research questions were identified as important to the study and the ensemble. By using an action research approach, I was able to identify the teacher as a participant observer reflecting upon observed outcomes using an informal learning framework.
with elementary band student in an instrumental popular music ensemble as the central phenomena. The following research questions were developed:

1. What can I observe from using an informal learning framework in an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble?

2. What understanding can I have from teaching students to negotiate and process playing their instrument while they compose, improvise, and copy music by ear?

3. How does composing, improvising, and copying music by ear affect my perception of competence of elementary band students while engaging in such activities?

The present study examines what observations can a teacher make by using an informal learning framework in an elementary popular music ensemble. The study comes from idea discovered during graduate coursework.

Mertler (2017) defines action research as:

systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn (p.4).

An action research framework in this project allows me to study my own pedagogy as a participant observer, using a new pedagogical technique in order to better understand how my students learn and improve the quality of my practice as a music educator. This process began by identifying an area of focus within my practice (elementary band), collecting data (observations of teacher, administrator, exit tickets, personal reflection, and student interviews), analyzing and interpretation of data (coding and triangulation), and developing a plan of action for future cycles of action research and for future pedagogy.
School Information

This study takes place at an elementary school in a regional school district in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The school pulls from 5 neighboring boroughs and has a campus surrounded by the mountains of Northeastern Pennsylvania. At the time of the study, the student population was predominantly Caucasian, although Latino, and African American children represent a small percentage of the 1200 student population.

The music classrooms reside in the basement of the three floored school building and reside side-by-side. A moveable dividing wall separates the two classrooms. This wall moves for large ensemble rehearsals throughout the week. Four music teachers serve the district, two elementary teachers and two secondary teachers. Both elementary music teachers serve as assistants to their respective content area ensemble at the secondary level. This provides continuity and direction in planning instruction for student achievement and success in later years within the music program.

The school resides in Northeastern Pennsylvania and draws students from 5 neighboring boroughs. The majority of students ride the bus to and from school each day. Approximately, 1,200 students attend the elementary school and approximately 1,100 students attend the junior/senior high school for a total district enrollment of approximately 2,300 students. Many students, approximately 47% receive the free and reduced lunch provided by the district. The elementary employs 72 teachers, 25 paraprofessionals, 3 secretaries, and 3 administrators.

Administration in the elementary building consists of a principal, assistant principal, and a dean of students. The administration supports the instrumental music program at the elementary level by providing ample time in the band director’s schedule to teach pull out lessons, full band rehearsals at recess, and to pull students for Pop Music Ensemble (PME) one
time per five-day cycle. Administrators attend district-wide music events in support of the music program and provide backstage support during these events in addition to welcoming the audience to the performance. Grade level regular education teachers support the instrumental music program by providing backstage support during concerts and events, reminding students of lessons and rehearsals, and communicating information quickly when necessary.

My Context

I arrived in June of 2016 from my undergraduate degree. Prior to my interview process, I taught music via a grant program from my undergraduate institution to students in Pre-K through college age musicians in several cities and small towns in the country of Brazil. My current position is the elementary instrumental music teacher and assistant high school band director. At the secondary level, I provide support for the marching bands and aid in recruitment of elementary students for the high school program. In my role in the elementary school, my course load consists of two sections of general music at each grade level except, third grade where I have all of third grade. In addition, I am responsible for instrumental (band) lessons for grades four through sixth grade.

Before discussing my current music curriculum, I feel it is necessary to discuss my own music education both in my undergraduate studies and graduate studies. As an undergraduate, I encountered the traditional music education degree program while studying trumpet as my major performance medium, later adding organ as a secondary major performance medium. In my senior year, my undergraduate institution hired a new director of music education to fill a retirement vacancy. Dr. Sharon Davis not only provided the beginning of what would be a personal journey into popular music and the idea of informal learning, but provided valuable research in her own professional practice which influences my own practice today. During that
short time, I studied with Dr. Davis, I was exposed to the idea of Modern Band and the idea of Music as a Second Language. Within that semester, I, along with my colleagues, engaged in practices that emphasized the skills of composition, improvisation, and copying music by ear. For example, one project was to cover a song completely by ear using the instrumentation available to our group personnel. This experience provided the basis for my personal interest in Modern Band, Music as a Second Language, and the idea of informal learning.

While I felt prepared upon completion of undergraduate studies to begin teaching elementary general music, in addition to my course load as elementary band director, I still felt that something was missing from my practice. I used the materials from Little Kids Rock (LKR) and plan Modern Band type activities in my class, but this would not occur as often as I wanted it to occur. In that first-year teaching, I realized teaching music to students in grades kindergarten through third grade may be different than teaching students in grade four through six. Even in my second year teaching, I noticed that when I would use popular music for activities in class, students seemed to engage more with the music and understand concepts.

My graduate work reassured me that for effective music teaching to occur, one must be willing to adapt and innovate in one’s own classroom. In summer 2018, I enrolled in a course titled Modern Band Methods, which transformed my teaching practice, answered questions, posed new ones, sparking the idea for an elementary Popular Music Ensemble. This course challenged my thinking about the learning process, the informal versus formal dichotomy, and Modern Band in the classroom. From this training, I pursued the idea of the elementary popular music ensemble by gaining permission from my school principal to pull students for this extra ensemble and to gain permission to begin this study (see Appendix A for site approval letter).
The current music curriculum series used at the school dates to the year 1995. Much of the music present there, while valuable, does not interest students. Using these texts with younger students provides a base in foundational music skills, but with older students, the lack of interest in the music causes disengagement and therefore, a lack of interest in music all together. My undergraduate and graduate school coursework prompted me, prior to the current academic year, to change the way I taught music and band to students. Using new pedagogical techniques may be intimidating if the outcome of the changes is unknown. Because of this, the present study’s goal of examining the observed outcomes of my experience as a participant observer from using a different pedagogical technique to improve practice arose.

My intent to examine teacher observations from using a different pedagogical technique to improve my own pedagogy, an action research project seemed appropriate. Mertler (2017) defines action research as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teacher, and how their students learn. Johnson (2008) describes it as a true form of systematic inquiry into one’s own pedagogical practice.

**Ensemble Description**

Pop Music Ensemble (PME) occurred during the regular school day for a period of thirty minutes once every five rotation days. Participants \((n = 15)\) in this ensemble already participated in the band program at the elementary school for at least one year. Students in PME were pulled from instructional time in the regular education classroom for the half hour of PME ensemble. This is in addition to their regularly scheduled band lesson time.
Upon receiving all consent forms from interest students, PME rehearsals began the end of September. Students received a separate folder for PME. In that folder, was a pencil, blank scratch paper, and a scale sheet created by the teacher with the pentatonic scale appropriate for the individual’s instrument (see Appendix D). For the first five weeks, PME ensemble rehearsals remained structured using activities led by instructor. Students initially did not know what to expect with this new ensemble. The pentatonic scale sheet’s importance in the first five weeks provided a safe, low-risk way for students to improvise both with the teacher and with their peers. Students began as a group by playing up and down the scale in whole notes to warm-up. As the weeks progressed the rhythm changed to half notes, then quarter notes, then eighth notes as students gained a sense of comfort and fluidity with the scale pattern. Students then used these sheets as an aid in copying the improvised pentatonic melody created by the teacher. From there, students used the pentatonic scale sheet as a reference in their improvisations within the friend groups.

In the first three weeks of the ensemble, students “warmed-up” by copying an improvised pentatonic melody from the teacher. Having both skills in trumpet and keyboard, the teacher could provide a model on either instrument. For the purposes of this study, models were provided to students using trumpet because it provided the teacher with the ability to circulate around the room near the group of students copying the improvised pentatonic melody. Echoing the teacher melody as a call-and-response warm-up progressed into student prompted models with the remainder of the group following. This was to facilitate student ownership in the group.

By using a drum backing track from YouTube played via the classroom Smart-board sound system, students engaged with the idea of improvisation while using the pentatonic scale as a low-risk way for success. Further explanation from the instructor needed to occur in order
for all students to understand the concept of improvisation in the beginning. Using the pentatonic scale and a simple drum backing track allowed for each student to improvise without the fear of “being wrong”.

Improvisation, or the ability to create music on the spot, may be daunting for many musicians who do not regularly engage in this type of music activity. For the young band student, this can be particularly difficult as many students may fear being “wrong” in what they play. As mentioned above, the pentatonic scale and a backing drum track were used in order to lower this risk of failure for students. To engage students in the process, the teacher demonstrated a simple improvisation over the track in order to provide students a model. From the model, students then engaged in what came to be known by them as “Musical Conversations”. The term “musical conversation”, in terms of this study, refers to the call-and-response nature of the improvisation activities.

Musical conversations occurred between two or more individuals while using the backing track. One individual played an improvised melodic line on their instrument using the pentatonic scale, while another individual echoes with their own improvised melodic line. Following the teacher’s example, a student volunteer willingly engaged in a musical conversation with the teacher to try it out. Student and teacher demonstrated for other students the idea of back and forth and that there is no right or wrong answer. Students were then instructed to arrange themselves into groups with whoever they chose, regardless of instrument, to engaged in the musical conversations activity. Green (2001) and Davis (2005) mention the importance of student music making in peer groups as a key tenet of this informal learning framework.
During week three of the study, students were presented with the task to either compose an original piece of music or arrange an existing piece of music. Those choosing to compose an original piece of music were given a song form (verse-chorus-verse-chorus-verse-chorus-chorus) as a framework for their composition, with a verse and a chorus section. Intros and outros were left up to the discretion of the student group. Those that chose to arrange a piece of music were given the simple instruction that it must be done by ear, at least to decode the melody for their instrument. Students were given freedom to choose either route of musical composition.

Standard notation was not required; however, I asked students to write down what they needed in order to remember any work from prior sessions. This did not need to include standard notation. Requiring standard notation may hinder the creative processes of the individual student and the groups. Bruner (1966) proposed that learning occurs in a sequence that is first action-based (enactive), then image-based (iconic), and finally language-based (symbolic). In a similar idea, Wish (1996) in his Music as a Second Language discusses Krashen’s (1982) five principles of second language acquisition. In these five principles, Krashen (1982) mentions that the first and most effective way in which people acquire a second language is through meaningful usage of the new language and the natural communication. Individuals focus on the communicative aspect and not the “correctness” (Krashen, 1982). I encouraged students to play first and listen before writing down. Many students in their process used some form of iconic notation, relevant to the individual or to the group. These scratch papers were plain lined and unlined paper provided by the teacher and kept in the student’s pop music folders after each session. Both types of paper were provided to students in order to give them a choice to fit the needs of their group.

By allowing students to work independently during this composition activity, it provided me a challenge as a participant observer. As participant observer, I circulated around the room
during sessions and took notes in a field journal. As a teacher, when a student asks a question such as “If I play an A on my instrument what will it be for my friend who plays a different instrument?”, I wanted to answer the question to aid the student; however, my response simply was “Try to figure it out by using your listening skills.” Many times I would move throughout the groups just to listen to the student interactions with each other, noting of worthwhile interactions with other peers and those moments when an individual figured out a musical problem by using their listening skills.

To understand what students were thinking after each session, an exit ticket was provided to students (see Appendix E). Students completed the answer to the 1-2 questions provided and placed them face down in the collection basket. Exit tickets were anonymous and not examined immediately following each session. Each exit ticket provided ample room for students to provide detailed answers to each exit ticket. These exit tickets were crucial my ability to understand the thoughts of the students during these activities. Before looking at the exit ticket responses, the teacher kept a personal observation journal which included session observations, any questions as to why something occurred, thoughts on various events during the session, and moments to celebrate when a student figured out something that was puzzling to them.

In week eight of the study, the principal began observing pop music ensemble. A list of questions was provided in order to guide the thinking of the non-music administrator (see Appendix F). Open-ended questions provided a valuable means as to the administrator’s observations. These questions, derived from the theories of motivation (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, 1983; Bandura, 1982; Weiner, 1986; Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggert, 1985; Nicholls, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985) mentioned in chapter two, structured the observations in order to provide some sense of “What am I looking at?” to the administrator observing. Similar to the exit ticket
procedure, administrator notes were not examined by the researcher prior to the researcher writing their own personal reflection for that week’s session.

After week twelve of the study, those students who consented were scheduled for interviews (see Appendix G). Interviews were semi-structured in order to allow for student’s open ended response and for the interviewer to ask clarifying questions to gain an understanding into the student perspective. Scheduling of interviews was structured over the course of the ten-day rotational schedule for pull out instrumental lessons and the availability of the teacher’s course load. The student interviews lasted for a period of 15-minutes. Students were pulled from class to come to the music room for their interview.

Data Collection

Before beginning this study, I obtained approval from the Internal Review Board of Indiana University of Pennsylvania (see Appendix B) and from my school principal. All students involved in PME and their families were informed of the nature of the study. Consent forms were sent home with those interested students. The consent forms ask both the family and student for permission to participate in the ensemble and to participate in student-teacher interviews (see Appendix C). Students in their second or third year of instrumental music instruction on their instrument were eligible for participation in the study.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Coding refers to the process of developing a system of categorization to reduce the the volume of data collected into important patterns and themes in order to construct a framework for answering one’s research questions (Mertler, 2017). In the coding process, I typed all of the student responses into one document, separated by date of session, in order to clearly see all of the data and begin the data analysis. In addition, my field notes and administrator field notes
were added to the main document in order to code. The administrator observing Pop Music Ensemble also examined the data to note themes and patterns that arose. These themes and patterns were not discussed with the researcher until after the researcher’s coding process occurred. Coding occurred between myself and the administrator observing sessions. The administrator possesses over twenty-five years of teaching experience, thus making her qualified to look at the data as a second coder for validity of emergent themes. Both the administrator and myself examined the same compilation of data. Each of us examined it and coded on our own. Following each individual’s coding process, both the administrator and myself met to discuss what theme(s) arose. The combination of student exit tickets, interviews, administrator observation notes, administrator interview, and personal reflection journal were analyzed to determine what observations could be made from using an informal learning framework in an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble.

The combination of the above forms of data served as a means of triangulation. Triangulation refers to the process of relating multiple sources of data in order to establish a verification of consistency of facts while trying to account for inherent biases (Mertler, 2017). This ultimately allows the researcher to achieve a better understanding as to what is happening in reality and to provide greater confidence in the research findings. By using personal observations and reflections, student exit-tickets, administrator observations, and student interviews, the researcher used these multiple sources of data in the triangulation process.

**Preparations and Qualifications of the Researcher**

I was qualified to conduct this study due to my experience teaching music in the Pennsylvania public school system, my experience with teaching instrumental music ensembles, as well as my experiences using composition, improvisation, and playing by ear in my church
music setting. I perform regularly for my students, both on piano and trumpet, and frequently improvise for them in the forms of original material and accompaniments to music being studied in class. I have a Bachelor of Science degree and a Bachelor of Arts degree from a private accredited college in music education and music performance, respectively. In addition, I am a graduate student in music education at a major American university and conducted this study under the supervision of university faculty with experience in the field of qualitative research and popular music.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study examined my observations and the meanings that could occur from these meanings from using an informal learning framework in an elementary popular music ensemble to improve my own pedagogical practice. As mentioned in chapter one, much of the current music instruction includes whole group instruction and learning where a teacher leads the class in activities. Folkestad (2006) refers to this as formal learning. For the purpose of this study, this is referred to as formal learning framework. This study uses an informal learning framework as its basis. According to Folkestad (2006) informal learning uses little to no sequencing because the participants drive the sequence of activities. Green (2002) noted several activities from her own observations of how rock musicians learn. In this study, participants engaged in composing their own original music or arranging an already known piece of music, improvising or making up their own music spontaneously, and copying a piece of music by ear.

Chapter two used research and theoretical literature to support the framework of this study as well as provide additional background into the topic. By examining various sources, the author was able to understand popular music education’s role in the curriculum, theories of motivation, activities used in the informal learning framework, constructivism, and signature band pedagogies. Theories of motivation (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, 1983; Bandura, 1982; Weiner, 1986; Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggert, 1985; Nicholls, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985) provided a guide for my understanding during observations the what and why things occurred. Abramo (2010) and Gardner (2009) both used popular music in their curricula to create ensembles that to reach the portion of the student population that did not meet the traditional ensemble model of band, chorus, orchestra.
By using the theories of motivation (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, 1983; Bandura, 1982; Weiner, 1986; Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1985; Nicholls, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985) as a guide, I identified several research questions as important to the study and the ensemble. By using an action research approach, I was able to identify the teacher as a participant observer reflecting upon observed outcomes using an informal learning framework with elementary band students in an instrumental popular music ensemble as the central phenomena. The following research questions were developed:

1. What can I observe from using an informal learning framework in an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble?

2. What understanding can I have from teaching students to negotiate and process playing their instrument while they compose, improvise, and copy music by ear?

3. How does composing, improvising, and copying music by ear affect my perception of competence of elementary band students while engaging in such activities?

The present study examines what observations I might make by using an informal learning framework in an elementary popular music ensemble. These possible observations are made through the lens of my personal experience. The study derives from ideas discovered in graduate coursework.

The following themes are a result of student exit ticket data, student interviews, my personal reflection journals, and administrator observations:

- fun
- teaching others
- making own decisions
- collaboration for a common cause
• intrinsic vs. extrinsic

• altered levels of competence and self-worth

Discussions about the six emergent characteristics above noted three global arose from the data: (1) peer learning, (2) autonomy, and (3) higher self-esteem. Together looking at the three global themes, a larger theme arose as the three global themes work together in order for the larger theme of higher levels of engagement to occur. The larger theme of higher levels of student engagement was not black and white on the page. This theme came from discussions with the administrator on how these global themes work together.

**Participants**

Participants in this study included fifth and sixth grade elementary band students. Students needed to have a least one year of study on their instrument to be eligible to participate in the ensemble. Fifteen students \((n=15)\) regularly attended Pop Music Ensemble (PME) sessions. Of the fifteen students, twelve \((n=12)\) had consented and received consent from their family to participate in student interviews. All students completed exit tickets after each session. Figure 2 provides a percentage breakdown of student demographics. Twelve students or approximately 80% of Caucasian/White background. One student or approximately 6.67% is of a mixed background. Two students or approximately 13% are Hispanic/Latino background.
Prior to this study, many of the students had not engaged in improvising, composing, or copying music by ear. They met once every five rotation days engaging in those activities. Students chose their own groups to compose or arrange a piece of their choosing with the guideline that if arranging it must be done by ear. Notated music of the original song could not be used in the arranging process.

Observational data from the administrator, myself, and the student exit tickets provided the immediate look into the ensemble as the project progressed. For each session meeting, approximately five groups of students met to engage in improvising, composing, and copying music by ear. During the compositional process, students analyzed their own playing, asked each other for help, critiqued another’s composition, and provided suggestions for improvement on their composition.

At the beginning of the study, in particular when participating in improvising and copying activities, several students exhibited nervousness to engage. Other students engaged when they noticed their friends trying the activities, and finally, there were several students who

Figure 2. Student demographic breakdown.
engaged in activities from the beginning with excitement. During the process of composing and arranging a piece of music in groups, the various student groups used several approaches. One group decided to start playing and find something they believed sounded “good”. In another group, students took turns playing different melodies while the others listened and offered suggestions as to where in their composition to place the given idea. A third group decided to arrange the popular song *Havana* for their group with one person on melody and the others on separate harmony parts.

Midway through the study, the groups started to look different than at the beginning. In the beginning stages, many students engaged in improvising, composing, and copying music by ear for the first time. Now, midway through, students gained experience from the above activities. By examining three of the groups mentioned above as examples, one would notice some changes in their group dynamic. The first group changed from composing an original piece of music to an arrangement. From observing this group and their playing in the beginning, they were trying to copy a song they already knew but did not realize it at the time. The second group took the original melodies from earlier weeks and transformed them into iconic notation. Now this group started delegating parts to members and adding harmony. The final group discussed technical aspects of playing, such as where to put a spot to breathe in their written out notation.

Several times during the study, both the administrator and I noted in our observations instances of students in their groups aiding a group member in some way. One group had a student showing another student a new fingering to a note in their composition. Another group had a student demonstrate part of the composition for the group to show a musical idea they had discussed. Another observation, several weeks later, noted a percussionist playing their part of
their group’s arrangement for the group, while the other two fingered along to try to figure out their part on their instrument.

While observing the above events, I, as the teacher, wanted to aid my students in this process; however, from staying back and observing, I began to think about the events and how my students were able to navigate these challenges without much guidance from me. The discussions overheard in the student groups related to the tasks at hand. Many times these discussions were about figuring out how different instruments needed to play different notes in order to sound the same, or they concerned matters of who would play when in their composition or arrangement. As a teacher of elementary students, these discussions occurring in the groups during sessions surprised me. I noted in my observation journals about these conversations and the level of detail some of the student groups were going into when working on their compositions or arrangements. These young students discussing advanced musical concepts impressed me.

**Peer Learning**

Peer chosen groups were one of the main ideas from the beginning of the project. Students, at the beginning of the project, received the instruction to create groups for improvising, composing, and copying music by ear. Emerging from this was approximately five groups with students that are friends with each other. More importantly, friend groups provide the foundation for discourse and learning while improvising, composing, and copying music by ear.

Green (2008) refers to this as learning community, meaning that everyone is involved with the collective effort of understanding, which, however, supports the growth of individual knowledge. Each student’s individual knowledge varies. For example, a student playing their
instrument for two years will have less knowledge about their instrument in terms of fingerings and techniques in comparison to the student playing their instrument for three years. After data collection and coding, the data shows students working with their friends had a significant influence on their time in the ensemble. Student 7 in their interview mentioned, “I like teaching others how to do it because I am comfortable with it and I think it is important for people to be able to do music. I really enjoyed helping my friends be able to experience music the way I do”. Another student mentioned, “I liked working with my friends and it was fun. Together we make good music. Friends have similar tastes in music.” A third student in their interview mentioned, “I like playing in pop music ensemble because I can do it with my friends.”

Jaffurs (2004) reflects upon studying garage band musicians by stating “I was impressed by what my students in the garage band could do without anyone in charge” In my own experience in this study I can agree with her. Knowing my own students, I too was impressed with how each peer chosen group ran their group sessions. In each group, one student emerged as the “leader” of the group. While this student was not chosen or elected the leader, based on their actions they became the unelected leader. From interviewing the twelve students who consented, being in a group and making music with friends emerged consistently in interviews. In exit ticket analysis, making music with friends again emerged. Administrator data noted, “students are collaboratively working in peer chosen groups and are highly engaged.”

Using musical explorations or fiddling, students can figure out familiar songs by ear (Davis, 2010). Musical explorations may look and sound like mass chaos in a classroom; however, the students play their instruments and try to figure out parts of the song they are arranging or part of their composition. These experiences allow the creative process of students to come forward without the use of formal notation. Students noted in interviews, in their groups
they learned new things on their instrument. Student number 5 in their interview mentioned, “Since being in pop music ensemble I have learned new notes and PME has provided me resources to learn new notes on my instrument.” Another student noted, “Before I joined pop music ensemble I really didn’t know a lot of notes but now since I have been in it, I have learned more notes and new rhythms on my instrument.” One may begin to ask the question of “How did they learn it when the teacher was not formally instructing?” The students learned new material from each other based on their prior experiences and the environment of their group. For example, personal observation notes a group of two alto saxophones and a trumpet composing and trying to figure out by ear the notes the trumpet would need to play in order to sound like the alto saxophone. The following is a paraphrase of the conversation between group members and the teacher:

ALTO SAXOPHONE STUDENT: If we play low D on our instrument, what would the trumpet need to play to sound the same?

TEACHER: How about one of you play your note and have the trumpet player play a few notes to figure it out?

ALTO SAXOPHONE STUDENT: So if I play low D the trumpet needs to play their low G. What note would they need to play if we played low E?

TEACHER: Use your ear to discover it.

ALTO SAXOPHONE STUDENT: I got it, we just went up a note so the trumpet plays up a note and it should work.

This dialogue demonstrates the learning occurring in one of the groups during a session of pop music ensemble. These individuals are close friends, chose than own group, and now understood transposition from alto saxophone to trumpet with little to no guidance from the
teacher. It is important to understand this learning occurred because of the peer choice and their grouping. These students were able to discover and understand a concept many elementary students do not normally experience. My observational journal notes, “the interaction between these students during their discovery both was exciting and difficult.” The difficulty comes from, as a teacher, holding back providing the answer because the student asked a question. The excitement arises from the students understanding transposition on their own.

In between the dialogue between the student and teacher playing occurred in order to figure out the transposition. As the teacher, it was difficult to step back and not provide the answer; however, seeing and hearing the students deduce the answer on their own and enjoy their musical accomplishment made me feel great as a teacher seeing my students succeed. This above dialogue was noted in my observation journal as eye catching because these students were discussing music theory in depth without realizing they were discussing music theory.

Student groups, as mentioned earlier, would “Fiddle” around to figure out new parts of their original compositions or arrangements. The notion of fiddling allows for a student to figure out familiar songs by ear. Rodriguez (2009) recognizes this most basic process is one’s demonstration of explicit and implicit skills and understandings that are used to communicate musical ideas. Using these ideas one then has a basis for further musical literacy. As musicians grow in experience their ability to predict, remember, and audiate chord changes without playing them grows. This leads to being able to hear a piece of music one time and having the ability to recreate it. The above-mentioned process strengthens the linkage between mental rehearsal and physical execution of the music (Rodriguez, 2009).

Several students noted in their interviews the importance of friend groups and also noted that being in these groups made the above activities easier. One student in their interview
mentioned, “It is fun, I can figure it out with friends and have more ideas. I can show others music and get help from them on how to make it better. Another student mentioned in an exit ticket, “My favorite part was writing our own piece of music with our group of friends. I liked it because only our group knows it.” Notes from the administrator observational data indicate, “Students are all working, rather than watching one student do the majority of the work. Students collaboratively worked together to think through their music and to problem solve when the need arises”.

Why does fun arise with peer learning? Fun arises with this notion because of the ability to have discussions with their friends about how they want their music to sound. I, as the teacher, did not tell students that their composition or arrangement had to have a particular set of pitches or rhythms or key centers. I gave a song form as a guide to help in their composition process. Then students took control and went to work to create interesting pieces of music or unique interpretations of existing pieces of music. I believe because students felt they had a say with their friends in the process, they were more motivated to perform and engage in the above tasks.

In my personal reflection journals, I questioned the peer chosen friend groups in their ability to make a difference in the behaviors and discussions of the students. Now, after analyzing data and revisiting several personal reflections journals I understood why others such as Campbell (1995), Green (2002), Jaffurs, and Davis (2005) noted the importance of the peer chosen groups as a tenet of this informal learning framework. This study brought me closer to noticing the discussions, learning, and discourse occurring within these peer chosen groups. The learning and the discourse amongst students in the groups is beyond what I expected to occur in the study. The students continue to discuss the topics from their groups once a session concludes
Autonomy

As Deci & Ryan (1985, 2008) mentioned, autonomy refers to the need for one’s own preference, to be able to shape their own experiences and behaviors according to their self, goals, and values (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2008). In terms of this study, ownership and autonomy can be synonymously used to describe the same theme. Students in their groups had complete control over the direction of their compositions or arrangements. Each group and each individual contributed their own ideas and had senses of pride when an accomplishment was made. The administrator observations from several sessions noted the following: “Student led groups had high levels of pride and ownership upon completing a task or a section of their music”.

To have ownership of one’s music allows for a heightened level of motivation to complete a task or continue with a task because the individual believes there is a high value on the task. Atkinson (1957) and Eccles (1995) in the expectancy x value theory explains the personal intrinsic interest of an individual influences their motivation. Deci & Ryan (1985, 2008) mention values have an influence on the motivation as well. Both of these ideas explain why the idea of ownership/autonomy arose during this study. Students identified in their interviews and exit tickets making music with the friends is fun and they love being able to make their own decisions with their music such as the group observed deciding where to play breath marks in their arrangement. Because they can make their own decisions, the students now have ownership or autonomy over their music and may decide about the direction of their music.

Student interviews revealed a significant number of students (10 out of the 12 interviewed) felt they enjoyed having ownership of their music and the ability to make their own decision. Student 4 in their interview is quoted as saying, “It was really fun. I want to do more music activities like that where I can make my own decision as to what I think will sound good.”
Another student, student 6 noted, “It is fun because we get to do our own thing. I can express myself through music.” Several exit tickets noted the following: (1) My favorite part of pop music ensemble today was when we got to make our own music with our friends; (2) My favorite part was writing our own music for us to play because only our group knows how to play it; (3) My favorite part was when we played and created our own music; (4) My favorite part was when we got to make our own songs. These show the students having ownership over their music does have some influence in their willingness to participate in the activities.

In an interview with student number 5, they mentioned their feelings before and after pop music in terms of playing their instrument. The student goes on to say “Before pop music I felt limited and didn’t really know as many notes on my instrument. Since doing pop music I have learned additional notes on my instrument because Pop Music ensemble gave me the resources to do so.” This individual’s response intrigued me during interviews. When finished with the interview process the student and I discussed that answer a bit farther. The following is a paraphrase as I recall the conversation. While these are not direct quotes, they are in the spirit of how I and this student spoke about their answer.

TEACHER: Did I teach you additional notes on your instrument or new techniques during pop music?

STUDENT 5: No, you just kinda walked around the room and watched us as we worked in our groups.

TEACHER: So then how did you learn those additional notes if I did not teach them to you?

STUDENT 5: Well, another student did show me a new note that I didn’t know and I did figure some out on my own.
TEACHER: Let me understand this. You are saying that you learned additional notes and new techniques on your instrument on your own then. Then that means you were the teacher in control of your learning. Correct me if I am wrong in saying that.

STUDENT 5: Yeah, I guess so!

This student possessed a puzzled look on their face when I informed them that they had control of their learning. I did not teach this student, or any student in the ensemble, new techniques or additional notes on their instruments nor did I provide the resources mentioned in the interview. I provided a scale sheet, a time during the day, and a classroom in which to work. This realization by the student, that she was in control of her learning, not only provided her with a sense of ownership and autonomy, but a sense of empowerment to be able to continue to control their own learning to keep growing as a musician. My experience from this conversation allowed me to realize my students are capable of much more than I hold them accountable for learning. Providing students an opportunity to take ownership of material enabled me to understand students can construct their own knowledge based on the environment they are placed in and learn concepts based on the experiences in these environments.

**Higher Self-Esteem**

From personal observation notes, several students were noted in the beginning as having little confidence in their ability to improvise, compose, and copy music by ear. By the end of the study, several of these students that were noted in the beginning as having a low confidence and motivation to engage with the above activities, gained confidence and had a change in the motivation to engage with the above activities. During the beginning of the study in an improvisation activity, one student in particular, when it was their turn to engage in the call and response, was not confidence and felt nervous. These feelings changed by the end of the study.
according to interview data and observational data. At one point, this particular student, while working in their group, demonstrated part of the piece the other two group members could not remember what they wanted to do there. In my own personal observation notes, I noted this student had played with the most confidence I had seen in all of their time as an instrumental music student. As a teacher, this student’s ability to play with more confidence than in the past, makes me feel that my job as a teacher is being done correctly. It shows that this student’s experience in this informal learning framework positively impacts the student’s self-esteem and making a difference in the life of this individual. As a teacher, I feel music has the ability to affect people for the positive, and from the experiences in pop music ensemble, the above mentioned student had a positive effect because of the music.

Why did this student and others suddenly have a change in confidence? Many of those noted a change of confidence because they had more experience doing the activities. Deci & Ryan (2008) mention autonomous motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, as a way people identify the value of an activity and integrate into their sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In addition, mentioned competence as the inherent desire to be effective in one’s interaction with the environment (Deci & Ryan, 2008). At the beginning of the study, those students with low amounts of competence also possessed low of motivation. The motivation to participate was extrinsic as it was teacher prompted. By the end of the study, those with increased competence and motivation to engage with the given activities possessed intrinsic motivation.

The student who mentioned having low confidence and low motivation at the beginning experienced a change in confidence, motivation, and a change in their self-worth while playing their instrument. Because this student showed higher levels of autonomous motivation for playing their instrument, this student had a positive feeling of self-worth or subject well-being.
Guay, Ratelle, and Chanal (2008) note that autonomous motivation was positively associated with subjective well-being (self-worth). This same student is identified in my personal reflection notes for an interaction I had with her towards the end of the project. The following is a brief recollection from the reflective journal omitting personal details about the student. One week during a regular meeting of pop music ensemble, this student’s group called me over to hear what this student could now do. The group informed me that this student could now play *Amazing Grace* by ear. She could indeed play *Amazing Grace*, at least up until the middle of the hymn tune. I asked her how she learned it and her response was she learned it by ear. Knowing this student, their confidence level, self-worth level, and motivation level at the beginning of the project, now to this point when this student is achieving this, impressed me to the point that I was speechless. I do not know what her religious background is, but I do know the particular tune is used in general music class early in the year. I also know the tune is pentatonic. From using the notes of the pentatonic scale sheet given at the beginning of the project, this student figured out the opening interval of *Amazing Grace*, and then determined the rest of the tune by what she could hear.

Another student had a similar experience with the “Theme from Jurassic Park”. This individual is mentioned as Gracie in chapter one. Gracie learned some of the Jurassic Park theme by ear, but one section would puzzle her each time she arrived to it. Actually, it was not one section, it was the series of three pitches that open the theme. One session, she mentioned to me she had learned it and played it for me. After playing it for me, she said “Something is not quite right about it yet and I can’t figure it out. Can you help me figure it out?” My thought was to not provide her with the answer right away, but to give her a tool to help her figure it out. I responded to her by saying “Sing the theme out loud then try it again.” She sang the theme and
kept trying. Later in the session while observing another group, I heard that she had figured it out as it now sounded identical to the theme with the opening Do-Ti-Do motion in the theme.

Other students in their interviews expressed a change in their confidence and a change in their feelings when playing their instrument before participating in pop music ensemble and now since participating in pop music ensemble. Student 3 in their interview said, “Before pop music I struggled and was nervous when I played my instrument. Since joining pop music ensemble I am happier playing my instrument because of the successes I have made in pop music and it comes more easily now. I am more motivated to play my instrument.” Student number 4 indicated the following, “Before pop music ensemble I had little confidence playing my instrument. Now that I have been in it I feel my confidence has increased. I enjoy playing my instrument a whole lot more now. I have more motivation to play my instrument now that I have been in pop music ensemble.”. Finally, student number 2 expressed, “before pop music ensemble I was always nervous when I played. I was okay on confidence when I played. I was always worried about being wrong when I played. Since being in pop music ensemble I have gotten more confident. Working together with my friends helped my confidence and motivation to play. I feel more confident in my listening skills now.”

The change in confidence occurred not because I taught the students new material or additional fingerings for their instrument. The change in their self-worth, self-confidence, and motivation occurred because of the informal learning framework in place. This framework allowed for the students to engage at the level that best met their needs as an individual at any given time. Some students in the beginning needed to enter the activities at a tiptoe while others entered at a running pace. Because of this framework, student self-worth, self-confidence, and
motivation in regards to playing their instrument changed in a positive way according to the data collected during this study.

**High Levels of Engagement**

For any teacher, instruction in the given content area is not the only goal, but to engage students in the material. With an ever changing society and a rise in technology, student engagement is more important now than before. As a teacher, one must find innovative ways in order to engage students in the learning process. The above three global themes work together in order to channel to the larger theme from this study; higher level of engagement in music.

Chapter one discussed the needs of the study and the need for popular music in the classroom. Chapter two examined the research and theoretical literature related to the field including: standard pedagogies, theories of motivation, informal learning, constructivism, and improvising, composing, and playing by ear. Chapter three discussed the process in which this project occurred in the elementary instrumental popular music ensemble. This chapter discussed three emergent global themes, with each containing some key elements, which relate to the overall theme of the study. From examining student exit tickets, interviews, observations from the administrator, and personal reflective journals from the teacher, the theme of high level of engagement emerged as a result of this study.

Skinner & Belmont (1993) refers to engagement as the intensity and emotional quality of children’s involvement in initiating and carrying out learning activities. By examining data, this theme of high level of engagement arose. Students, in their peer chosen groups, improvised, composed, and copied music by ear. What would look like a classroom of chaos, actually was one of intense learning, and highly engaged students. Because students worked with their friends, they began to have a higher confidence in their ability and more motivation to engage in
activities. Along with the peer chosen groups, and the higher confidence and motivation, the students felt that they had ownership of the music and could make their own decisions.

Because of the informal learning framework used, many students were noted by the administrator and by my own personal reflection journals as being highly engaged in the given activities. Another observation from the administrator noted, “students had positive and enthusiastic reactions to the assignment and were determined to complete the rigorous learning task.” Improvising, composing, and copying music by ear may not be easy tasks for many people. Improvising involves the creation of a spontaneous melody or musical idea. Composing involved the creation of something, whether it be melody or harmony, from nothing. The ideas needed planning, preparation, and deep thought to occur for the process to be successful. Finally, copying music by ear required the individual to listen to a piece of music and recreate it on their instrument using exactly what it sounded like in the recording or played model. This required the individual to listen closely for a specific part in the music, to match pitch with that part, and then play the accurate rhythm. These three tasks require high levels of engagement from the individual for success while improvising, composing, or playing by ear.

Administrator observations noted students were in a high level of engagement and working consistently throughout the session time. Engagement was noted in the personal reflection journals of the teacher as “Students were engaged in the music making processes throughout the session time. Each student worked within their group to make some form of contribution. Discussions amongst groups were related to the tasks at hand.” With these in mind one can begin to understand how a high level of engagement is the larger theme which arose from this study.
The six characteristics mentioned above (fun, peer learning, making own decisions, collaboration for a common cause, intrinsic vs. extrinsic, and altered levels of self-worth and confidence) enabled me to understand how students experience music. My experience from this informed me that music makes a difference in the life of a young person. Music enjoyed by the individual makes a difference in the life of a young person. I experienced the difference music makes in life personally from my own experiences, now I experienced music’s ability to make a difference in the life of an individual through the lens of a teacher sharing the music with students. The data displayed showed that students all enjoyed this experience. I, as a teacher, was overjoyed now that my students had memorable musical experiences similar to my own experiences growing up.

From those six characteristics, three emergent global themes occurred: (1) peer learning, (2) autonomy, and (3) self-esteem. These mini-themes are mentioned in my reflective journals when I noted students working together in their groups and learning new material. I also noted the student(s) who mentioned they liked making their own decisions and having ownership and those students who possess a higher self-esteem from participation in pop music ensemble. All of these global themes mean to me that as an educator I need to provide environments for students to develop these ideas. As an educator, I may provide experiences, but they may not necessarily fit into the informal learning framework; however, I can provide the environment for these experiences to occur.

The three global themes mentioned earlier focus into one major theme in the project: higher levels of student engagement. As a teacher, I am consistently changing my pedagogy to find new ways to engage students. This theme arose from using the framework of informal learning, not from me formally instructing students on musical concepts or ideas. By using this
framework as a model for future planning in order to engage students, I provide a means for students to enrich their music education by discovering concepts not normally taught at the given age group. Using this framework will allow me to help my students advance in music using music they know and enjoy.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

In Chapter one, I told the story of Gracie, whose learning of the *Theme from Jaws* sparked what would be the beginning ideas for this project. Chapter one also examined the need for popular music in the classroom and the need for this study. From chapter one, I identified several research questions as important to this study and to pop music ensemble. The following are those research questions:

1. What can I observe from using an informal learning framework in an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble?

2. What meanings may I derive from teaching students to negotiate and process playing their instruments while composing, improvising, and copying music by ear?

3. How does composing, improvising, and copying music by ear affect my perception of competence of elementary band students while engaging in such activities?

These questions guided the study and provided a framework for inquiry. From the above I identified the emergent themes of Chapter four and their relationships to each other.

Chapter two examined the research and theoretical literature related to the topics of signature band pedagogies, theories of motivation, informal learning, constructivism, and improvising, composing, and playing by ear. Theories of motivation (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, 1983; Bandura, 1982; Weiner, 1986; Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggert, 1985; Nicholls, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985) provided a guide for me to understand during observations the what and why things occurred. Emerging ensembles using a similar framework, such as the State High Rock
Ensemble proposed by Gardner (2009) and those proposed by Abramo (2010) served as a model for the study along with the Little Kids Rock & Music as a Second Language framework from a graduate course I took in summer 2018. By using an action research approach, I identified the teacher as a participant observer reflecting upon observed outcomes using an informal learning framework with elementary band students in an instrumental popular music ensemble as the central phenomena. This allowed me to situate this study within the current research and theoretical literature of the field.

Chapter three examined the methodology of the project. Students in their second or third year of instrumental music instruction were eligible to participate in Pop Music Ensemble (PME). Activities occurred to engage students in improvising, composing, and copying music by ear. Students chose their own groups to compose an original piece of music or arrange a known piece of music by ear. Groups composed and arranged their pieces of music by using only their listening skills. Students wrote down their music using icons or symbols known to them. Standard notation was not a requirement. Data collection occurred from using my personal observations, reflective journal, student exit-tickets, administrator observations, and student interviews. The administrator and myself coded and analyzed the data to find emergent themes. Discussions occurred post-coding in order to triangulate data and identify the emergent theme(s).

As I carried out this project there were many times I thought “How is this going to influence my practice?” I also wondered how this idea of informal learning framework and an elementary popular music ensemble would yield enough data to create a scholarly document as a master’s level thesis. My pedagogy from this project has changed from this point further. Using my own experience and observations, I will be able to make decisions for all of my classes and
ensembles to provide the highest level of engagement for those students. These high engagement experiences will be based on the knowledge gained in this study.

I believe this experience caused me to evaluate my choices in music for my classroom. In my beginning stages of teaching, I personally did not want to include popular music as much in my classroom because I felt that students needed to know the music of the common practice period. From my own experience using the music of the common practice in my classes students were disengaged, yet now when I include popular music and integrate the common practice music with the popular music students engage with the common practice period music because they now understand where their music originates.

In September 2018, I would plan music lessons for my classes and ensembles using music of the common practice period and popular music that I enjoyed. As I mentioned earlier, this did not engage as many students because they did not enjoy the music. Students did not have a choice in what music I was using in my classroom. From this project, I learned student music preference is important. I also learned that having a sense of autonomy affects a student’s performance in music. Some students who have lower levels of self-worth, confidence, and motivation will not engage in music activities. In response to this project, I began changing things in my pedagogy to create environments where informal learning may occur and produce higher levels of student engagement. For example, students received a choice of music for a bucket drumming composition project and received the option to choose their own friend groups to collaborate with for the project.

In September 2019, my pedagogy will look much different than one year prior. As mentioned earlier, I have begun changing pedagogy in order to have students engage more with music. In terms of the full band ensemble, I am considering allowing students to have a choice in
some of the repertoire programmed. This could be in the form of suggestions of pieces followed by me finding arrangements of the pieces and giving students the option to vote as an ensemble. While I know the ability of the ensemble, I can find arrangements of the pieces suggested at a grade level appropriate for the ensemble. In my general music classes, I will include more music of the student’s choosing. With this comes some difficulty as I will need to pre-screen the music suggested; however, I would like to give students the ability to possess ownership of the music being used in class to teach curricular concepts. I will also include more activities related to the Little Kids Rock and Music as a Second Language framework using the new ukuleles I acquired. Finally, students at all levels may engage in activities that allow for improvising, composing, and copying music by ear using instruments already played by the students or by using classroom instruments, such as Orff percussion and piano. Engagement using this informal learning framework will change my pedagogy and the music education of all of my future students.

**Implications**

Chapter four displayed the results of this study. Chapter four examined the six emergent themes, their relationship to the three global themes, and the global themes’ relationship to the overarching theme of higher levels of engagement as seen in figure 3. By using an action research approach, identified the teacher as a participant observer reflecting upon observed outcomes using an informal learning framework with elementary band student in an instrumental popular music ensemble as the central phenomena with the goal of improving my own practice as a music educator. The following research questions were developed:

1. What can I observe from using an informal learning framework in an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble?
2. What understanding can I have from teaching students to negotiate and process playing their instrument while they compose, improvise, and copy music by ear?

3. How does composing, improvising, and copying music by ear affect my perception of competence of elementary band students while engaging in such activities?

By using the above questions, an action research approach, and the data from this study, I can now answer the above questions. Figure 3 displays the relationship amongst emergent themes in the study.

Figure 3. Relationship amongst emergent ideas.

In Figure 3, the relationships between the six emergent themes, their relationship to the global themes, and the global themes’ relationship to the overarching theme. In the left column, the following emergent themes arose: (1) fun, (2) teaching others, (3) make own decisions, (4) collaboration for common cause, (5) intrinsic vs. extrinsic, and (6) altered levels of competence.
and self-worth. These six emergent themes interact to funnel into the three global themes as seen in the middle of figure 3.

By examining each characteristic, I determined three global themes arose from these characteristics: Peer Learning, Autonomy, and Higher Self-Esteem. Above, I asked the question about what I can observe from using an informal learning framework in an elementary popular music ensemble. From using this framework, I observed students having fun while making music. Fun, in terms of this study, relates to the student enjoyment during participation in an activity. Many students noted in their exit tickets and in their interviews, “Pop Music Ensemble is fun” or “I like composing music with my friends during pop music ensemble because it is fun”. My personal observations noted, “Student groups were working and enjoying the activity.” Discussions overheard from one group while practicing part of their composition included, “That part is really fun to play! I really like that part”. My administrator during her observation noted similar instances of student enjoyment in activities.

In addition to the aspect of fun, another observation included students teaching each other and the change in the self-esteem of the individuals in each group. Teaching others occurred often. I noted in a reflection of one student teaching another student a new part of their composition. The administrator noted a similar instance of students teaching others when one student was teaching another student an additional fingering for their instrument. My observations from the beginning of the study noted several individuals, when participating in improvising activities, seemed hesitant to engage with the activities. One comment from my administrator noted “Two students were nervous and unwilling to engage in activities.” By the end of the study my observations of students, in particular the two students mentioned earlier, noted students were willing to engage in activities. One particular student is noted in my personal
reflection to have “the most confidence I have seen her play with in the two years she has played her instrument.” This same student mentioned earlier as the one who figured out *Amazing Grace* by ear and played it for me and the peers in her group. Administrator observations noted at the end of the study, “all students were engaged in activities with confidence in abilities.”

Fun and teaching others influenced the peer learning amongst chosen groups. The data indicated students had fun because they were with their friends and were playing music. To apply the ideas in this study to the regular education classroom, a teacher would need to make the activity fun, or by increasing student enjoyment during participation, for students to engage with the activity. This needs to be within the student’s idea of fun, not the teacher’s. If I were to suggest an activity, I would suggest something that is related to the student, such as popular music the student enjoys, to engage students in the activity. For example, when learning definitions of music terms, students could make a crossword puzzle for their friends to solve. Depending on the age of the students, they could make an escape room using material from class for another group of students to figure out. An escape room is when individuals are “locked” in a room and there are a series of clues hidden around the room. Participants must find the first one and decipher it to find subsequent clues. Participants receive limited amount of time to figure the clues out.

Teaching others would come into play with the above activities as some students may not have a complete understanding of some of the information used in making an escape room, or what an escape room is. Students would need to teach one another to create an effective escape room. They would then need to teach one another while deciphering the clues to escape the escape room.
In looking at the data, I can begin to change my pedagogy to help students negotiate and process playing their instrument while composing, improvising, and copying music by ear. Using music that students enjoy gave students ownership of the activity. In my personal journal, I noted about student reactions when I presented them with the option to choose their own song to copy and re-create by ear. One student is noted as “having large amounts of excitement and asked if she could re-create Hedwig’s Theme on her clarinet.” That particular student was noticed by the administrator in her observations for her enthusiasm to learn a piece of music she wanted. This same student also mentioned in her interview she “really liked that she could make decisions and learn music she enjoyed”. This idea of making own one’s choices is important in this framework and study as it allowed students to possess ownership of the material and their learning.

Collaboration for a common cause occurred throughout the projects as students worked to compose or arrange a piece of music of their choosing. Many students mentioned in their interviews and exit tickets that they liked to work with their friends. The administrator noted students worked together collaborative to achieve a common goal. My own observation notes mentioned students working together to solve musical problems which occurred during the composition and arranging process, such as transposition between instruments.

This idea of collaboration for a common cause may easily be adapted for the regular education classroom by providing options for students to make their own decisions on a project or assignment and allowing them to work with another student(s) to achieve the common goal of learning new material or practicing material for mastery. When students achieve this ownership and autonomy, they may engage with material and construct their own knowledge.

Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation may influence the behaviors of an individual (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Most of the motivation occurring in the classrooms, resembles extrinsic
motivation in the form of the teacher asking for the completion of an assignment or the fear of a poor grade on an assignment. In this study, the motivation to engage with the activities of improvising, composing, and copying music by ear start as extrinsic motivation. By the end of the study, the students exhibited motivation to participate in the above mentioned activities without the teacher’s prompting to participate. This motivation then became intrinsic as it came from within the individual, not from an external source.

I asked in my research question “How does composing, improvising, and copying music by ear affect my perception of competence of elementary band students while engaging in such activities?” At the beginning of the study, as mentioned in chapter four, I indicated several students felt unconfident in their abilities and possessed little motivation to participate in the activities. Several students also mentioned in their interviews that they did not know much at the beginning. By the end of the study, I noticed those same individuals noted a change in confidence, self-esteem, ability in playing their instrument, and in their willingness to engage in the activities. These students not only experienced a shift in motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic, but a shift in the level of self-esteem from using this informal learning framework.

Students understood and engaged with musical concepts not normally experienced in the elementary classroom. For example, in chapter four, I mention the alto saxophone / trumpet group dialogue in their efforts to “figure out” the transposition from alto saxophone to trumpet. Transposition can be a difficult concept for some to understand and these elementary students in the above mentioned group now posses a basic understanding of it from their group experience. I noticed their discovery of this new knowledge and their ability to construct the knowledge that when the trumpet plays an “A”, the alto saxophone needs to play an “E” and applied this to the rest of their composition.
By using the above two ideas in the regular education classroom one can transform their own pedagogy. Some students may not possess the confidence or self-worth needed for success in their academics. By providing activities, such as the escape room activity, students may be able to increase their level of self-esteem.

In summary, I observed during this study while students were using this informal learning framework, student engaged, collaborated together, discussed musical concepts, and taught each other. From these observations, I understand an informal learning framework positively effects the learning of musical concepts of young students in band and by using music students know and enjoy I, as the teacher, may provide a learning environment which allows for students to take ownership of their learning and construct new knowledge. My perceptions of student’s competence while using this framework changed from the beginning to the end of the study. In the beginning, I noted several students were nervous or hesitant to engage with the activities. By the end of the study, I and my administrator noticed, these several students who were nervous or hesitant in early sessions, now participated, engaged, and surprised us with their abilities as a result of participation in pop music ensemble and their experience with an informal learning framework.

**National & Statewide Policy Change**

In 1965, Congress passed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This federal legislation authorized support for K-12 education programs. Since Lyndon Johnson signed it into law in 1965, Congress re-authorized it several times under various names, with the most recent name change in December 2015 to Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). According to the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), this re-authorization includes the first specific and separate mentioning of music as an important component of a well-rounded
education. This bill allows for support of music program at the local level by using federal funds, including those schools with Title I funding.

ESSA provides clear language indicating students need a “well-rounded education” that includes music. Unlike its predecessor, No Child Left Behind, ESSA focuses on a broader curriculum not just performances in reading and math. ESSA also provides clarification of money allocation from Title II (teacher professional development) and Title IV (wraparound and supplemental school programs).

While ESSA provides these resources, many schools may not allocate money from these grants in support of their music program. Schools need to support teachers in attending trainings in order to provide music instruction that engages students at a higher level. Music teachers need to seek new and innovative pedagogies to implement in their classroom. Many music teachers use the same lesson plans year in and year out without any change or innovation. These recycled plans do not cater to the current student population nor does it provide the teacher anything to be excited for when teaching. It is just a repeat of what was done in prior years. No new music is being learned or discovered. This can be best described as a car placed in neutral gear. The car does not go forward or backward, it stays in the same place. By using innovative pedagogies, such as the ones applied in this study, the teacher is now control. The car will go places, just like students will go to new places with new innovative pedagogical practices.

**Conclusion**

At the beginning of this study, I wanted to examine using an informal learning framework in the elementary instrumental music setting. I wanted to see what observations occurred using an informal learning framework in an elementary instrumental popular music ensemble. I also wanted to understand stand what meanings could derive from teaching students
to negotiate and process playing their instruments while improvising, composing, and copying music by ear. Finally, I examined my perceived competence of elementary band students while engaging in improvising, composing, and copying music by ear.

I did not know how students would react to engaging in improvising, composing, and copying music by ear. Many of my students have not engaged in this type of activity using their band instrument prior to this study. I believe this study changed my students for the better. Their overall musicianship skills, confidence, and their approach to music is different now since they engaged in the above-mentioned activities. These students, from informal conversations with them throughout the day, love coming to pop music ensemble and do not want to leave when the time for each session is over. They have experienced music on a deeper level than their peers, thus strengthening their love of music and playing their instruments.

The data from chapter four exhibited six characteristics that emerged from the data: (1) fun, (2) teaching others, (3) making own decisions, (4) collaborating for a common cause, (5) intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation, (6) altered levels of self-competence & worth. These characteristics filtered into mini themes of peer learning, autonomy, and higher self-esteem, which then filtered into the main theme that emerged during the project, higher student engagement.

Fun, as defined earlier as the enjoyment a student experiences from participating in activity, occurred often during the study. During student interviews, several students mentioned they had fun composing or re-creating their own piece. In my own personal reflections and observations, I noticed students enjoyed the activities because when time arrived for clean-up students did not want to leave but wanted to stay and continue working. Other instances occurred from informal conversations with students in the hall, such as “I really enjoy pop music it’s a lot
of fun and I cannot wait till we have it again.” The administrator noted students enjoyed working on their compositions and arrangements. She also noticed students did not want to return to class but wanted to remain at pop music to continue working.

Teaching others emerged as an important characteristic during the study. One student strongly mentioned in her interview, “I love teaching others music because I feel that others should experience music the way I do.” From my own observations, several instances occurred where one student taught another student in a group a section of their piece or they provided suggestions on how to improve the piece of music. Administrator observations indicated “students show each other how to do parts of their piece of music and demonstrate how part of their song should go.” An exit ticket from a student mentioned, “I love being able to teach my friends about my music and share with them my enjoyment of my piece of music.”

Often in education the teacher decides on curricular materials and pacing of the class. Not often do students receive the ability to make their own decisions in the classroom. Students ownership allowed for their compositions and arrangements to develop on their own accord. One student responded, “I like pop music ensemble because I can make my own choices about what music to learn.” Another student in an interview mentions, “I like that we can make our own decisions about what we want our piece to sound like.” My own observations indicated students chose their own groups, their own pieces to work on, and while working, made decisions about who would play when in their original compositions or re-creations of an existing piece of music. The administrator observation notes indicated students were working with peers and making their own decisions in regards to their pieces of music.

When working in a group, success of the group relies on collaboration. The groups in pop music ensemble collaborated for a common cause. The administrator noted in multiple
observation notes, “Students are working together collaboratively.” I mention in my observations and reflections students collaborated together for a common cause or goal. I mentioned the group of alto saxophones working on an arrangement of *Havana*. Each one of them worked to arrange a different part of their three-part arrangement. Then, they collaborated to find what part works the best with the melody. Several students mentioned in interviews that they enjoyed working together to write their pieces and to make music with their friends.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the use of an external idea or force for an individual to participate or engage with an activity. Intrinsic motivation refers to the use of an internal idea or force for an individual to participate in an activity. I mentioned earlier the student who at the beginning was hesitant to participate in activities, but then towards the end of the study had copied the tune *Amazing Grace* and had played with the most confidence I had seen her play with in her two years of playing her instrument. The observations of the administrator from earlier in the study noted several students who appeared hesitant in engaging in activities while others seemed ready to engage. At the end of the study, the notes of the administrator changed to note those students who seemed hesitant earlier were now engaging and had a change in motivation to participate. Students in their interviewed when asked about their feelings about playing their instrument indicated that they feel more motivated to play their instrument now since being in pop music.

In speaking with the students during interviews, observing them during pop music ensemble sessions, and from the notes of the administrator’s observations, I can say this framework of informal learning has allowed, in my students, for the altering of levels of self-competence and worth of the individuals, thus leading to a change in the individual’s self-esteem while playing their instrument. A student during her interview mentions “I feel better about
playing my instrument now. I feel more confident in my playing now that I have been in pop music ensemble.” An observational note from the administrator indicated that several students were noticed from prior weeks as not participating or seeming confident but in the current week (several weeks later) changed and their levels of confidence and self-esteem while playing have improved and are engaging with the music more.

Because of using an informal learning framework in the elementary popular music ensemble, students engaged with music on a higher level than the normal student. By using an informal learning framework, I transformed my classroom into one where it was student run and I was simply the facilitator by providing a common session time, a space, and supervision of the students. I, as the teacher, had personal growth and change throughout the project. From using an informal learning framework in an elementary popular music ensemble I learned the importance of providing opportunities for students to explore their creativity with music they enjoy based on the interactions I observed during pop music sessions. From this project, I developed an understanding of using composition and improvisation activities with band students as a way to further their musical development on their instrument.

During the beginning of the project, I wanted to help those groups that struggled with copying music by ear or the composition process. The group mentioned in chapter four discovered the transposition from alto saxophone to trumpet challenged me to step back and let the students discover it. I learned from this experience that the students knew more than I gave them credit. By observing these students, I watched and listened as they navigated through the process of transposition. They applied all of their knowledge to discover transposition from alto saxophone to trumpet. The ability of these students to discover advanced musical concepts and have the ability to understand them impressed me throughout the project. When thinking about
when I learned about transposition and how it confused me, yet an elementary student figured it out and understands it.

From this study not only did I learn that my students know more than I hold them accountable for, but that I could learn more about the student from using an informal learning framework. Being as though the framework is open in nature, allowed for the individual to express themselves and allowed me, as the teacher, to understand the needs and personality of the individual student. While the theme of higher levels of student engagement emerged from this study, I believe that knowledge of students is important to the ability to have high engagement in the classroom. The knowledge of students did not play a direct role in the themes that emerged; however, I feel that my own knowledge of my students increased from observing my students work and overhearing their conversations about the music they created. Hearing different students attempt to work out their favorite song then later asking them what song they were recreating by ear provided interesting insights into the music that my students enjoy.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

In the future, several items arose as changes for further cycles of action research. First, I would like to re-create this study, but with a set time on the same day per week, instead of relying solely on the rotation schedule or have it multiple days per week. Unfortunately, in my current district, I realize that this will not be possible unless a major schedule overhaul occurs in the elementary school. I would be interested to see if this project occurred at the secondary level, what the results would be. Elementary students may be more eager to engage in music activities and many still want to “please” the teacher. Secondary students may not be as eager to participate or to create music as freely as an elementary student. At the secondary level, students start developing more of a sense of personal identity and autonomy with things in their lives. I
would be interested in examining how the motivation to participate in such activities changes from the elementary level to the secondary level because at the secondary level most students not only know the artist of their favorite song but might also idolize them or have a stronger influence to learn more of their music.

Second, I would like to try using this ensemble with my beginning band students. I would not use this at the beginning of their instrumental music instruction because I would want the students to acquire some knowledge of playing their instrument. I would consider using this ensemble midway through their first year of playing. From the results of this study, I would be interested to see the effects of what this type of ensemble would have on the retention rate of band students from their first to their second year of instruction because from this study, many students seemed to have developed a greater interest and enjoyment while playing their instrument. Third, I would also like more time in sessions. While thirty minutes seemed like a large amount of time, in retrospect, it was not large amount of time. Students, by the end of the session time, would be deeply engaged in their music. They would not want to leave.

**Final Thoughts**

This project allowed me to examine my own teaching while using an informal learning framework in my classroom. The observations and meanings from this study will influence my practice as a music educator. My current and future students will benefit from innovation arising from this project. I believe that this project will allow for further engagement of students in my music classroom and will advocate the use of popular music in the classroom as curricular material.
References


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https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1954.tb01136.x


https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.91.3.328


https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.92.3.544


https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051702000256


Appendix A

Site Approval Letter

North Schuylkill Elementary School

Janice M. Whitaker, Principal
Janel N. Hansbury, Assistant Principal

38 Lin Street | Ashland, PA 17921
(570) 874-3661 | Fax (570) 874-2857
www.northschuylkill.net

To Whom It May Concern:

Mr. Cody Kelly has the permission of the North Schuylkill School District, to utilize his music classroom as the primary research area for completion of his master’s thesis. The purpose of Mr. Kelly’s study is to explore the musical worlds of elementary band students; using informal learning strategies in a formal setting; using self-determination theory as a framework for inquiry, in order to see any possible implications for the formal band setting.

I look forward to observing Mr. Kelly throughout various points of this project.

Sincerely,

Ms. Janice M. Whitaker, M.Ed
Principal
North Schuylkill Elementary School
jwhitaker@northschuylkill.net
570-874-3661 x3009
August 20, 2018

Dear Cody Kelly:

Your proposed research project, “From Chaos to Music: The Journey of an Elementary Popular Music Ensemble,” (Log No. 18-192) has been reviewed by the IRB and is approved. In accordance with 45CFR46.101 and IUP Policy, your project is exempt from continuing review. This approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.
2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented.
3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.
4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.

Although your human subjects review process is complete, the School of Graduate Studies and Research requires submission and approval of a Research Topic Approval Form (RTAF) before you can begin your research. If you have not yet submitted your RTAF, the form can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=91683.
While not under the purview of the IRB, researchers are responsible for adhering to US copyright law when using existing scales, survey items, or other works in the conduct of research. Information regarding copyright law and compliance at IUP, including links to sample permission request letters, can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=165526.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Roberts, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Criminology

JLR:bkj

Cc: Dr. Craig Denison, Faculty Advisor
Appendix C

Permission to Participate

Pop Music Ensemble

As a second or third year member of the NSE Symphonic Band, you are invited to join the newly formed Pop Music Ensemble. This ensemble will meet on days 5/10 of the rotation cycle from 9:00-9:30. The purpose of this ensemble formation is to gather information as part of my master’s project at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I will be investigating the use of informal learning strategies that arose from popular music to identify any implications for the formal band setting. Students in pop music ensemble will have the option to be interviewed at various points in the study to understand their perceived competence while in the ensemble. Ensemble activities include but are not limited to: composition, improvisation, and playing by ear. A points in the study students will be interviewed for 20 minute interviews using a series of open ended questions to obtain an understanding into their experience in Pop Music Ensemble. Interviews will **NOT** be recorded via audio or video.

Your participation in this ensemble study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigators or IUP. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying Mr. Kelly at **ckelly@northschuylkill.net**, or my thesis advisor Dr. Craig Denison at **cdenison@iup.edu**. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence and will have no bearing on your academic standing or services you receive from NSE. Your performance will be considered only in combination with those from other participants. The information obtained in the study may be published in music education journals or presented at music education meetings, but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

Please fill out the attached page indicating your willingness to participate in the study. Please note there is a spot for both Parent/Guardian approval and student approval. Please place consent forms in the drop box next to Mr. Kelly’s classroom door.

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730)
Name: ______________________________________________________________

Instrument: ________________________________________________________

Homeroom __________________________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Contact _______________________________________________

**Parent/Guardian**: Please check the appropriate boxes.

☐ I give permission for my child to participate in Pop Music Ensemble. I understand the nature of the study and the risks involved.

☐ I give permission for my child to be interviewed by Mr. Kelly.

**Student**: Please check the appropriate boxes.

☐ I **would like to** participate in Pop Music Ensemble. I understand the nature of the study and the risks involved.

☐ I **would like to** participate in interviews with Mr. Kelly in regards to the study.

Parent Signature ______________________________________ Date _____________________

Student Signature ______________________________________ Date _____________________

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724/357-7730)
Appendix D

Pentatonic Scale Sheet Score

Pop Music Penta Scale

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Appendix E

Exit Ticket Sample

12/13/18 Pop Music Ensemble

How do you feel when you are composing your piece of music? Do you think you would be more comfortable doing it individually or in a group of friends? Why?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

What was your favorite part of pop music ensemble today? Why?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix F

Administrator Observation Questions

Observer Form – Admin

Date: _______________________

Please answer the following to the best of your ability using what you see and hear during the ensemble rehearsal time.

1. Describe any observations you see occurring during the activities of Pop Music Ensemble.

2. How might you explain the behaviors that occurred?

3. Describe the behaviors that could indicate a high self-perceived competence.
4. Describe the behaviors could indicate a low self-perceived competence.

5. Describe the reaction of students from creating the melody for their group composition in ABABB form. Note those behaviors that indicate high or low self-perceived competence.

Please print and sign below

Administrator signature _________________________
Appendix G

Student Interview Questions

STUDENT ID #_____________

(Read to student) The following questions should be answered to the best of your ability. Be specific as possible in your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. These questions are to help Mr. Kelly’s understanding your thoughts and feelings while playing your instrument while making up your own music, making up your own music and writing it down, and trying to recreate a piece of music by ear.

1. Describe your feelings about making up music on your own before joining pop music.

2. Describe your feelings about making up your own music and writing it down before joining pop music ensemble.

3. Describe your feelings about listening to a piece of music and then trying to play it on your instrument before joining pop music ensemble?

4. Describe your feelings about making up music on your own now that you have been in pop music ensemble.

5. Describe your feelings about making up your own music and writing it now that you have been in pop music ensemble.

6. Describe your feelings about listening to a piece of music and then trying to play it on your instrument now that you have been in pop music ensemble?

7. Describe your feelings about playing your instrument now, compared to before joining pop music ensemble. Did these feelings about playing your instrument change? Why do you think so?

8. Describe your confidence level in playing your instrument, both before joining pop music ensemble and now after participating in pop music ensemble.